

# Identifying Components of a Successful Faculty-Advisor Program

*Cynthia S. Wiseman, Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York*

*Holly Messitt, Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York*

*While research models show that faculty advisors play an important role in academic advising, the data are limited regarding faculty conceptualization of their roles and responsibilities as advisors. In this study, we gather faculty perspectives about the components that have made the model effective in a large, urban, community college. Faculty members describe their strategies for developing student accountability, goal-setting abilities, and decision-making skills. They also discuss strategies for building student academic success and encouraging student self-regulation and self-determination. The described program has helped increase buy-in from faculty members undertaking advising via systematized delivery. The faculty feedback will help others design and implement advising programs proven to increase persistence and reduce attrition.*

**KEY WORDS:** academic support services, administration, advising approaches, advising role on campus, evaluation and assessment, survey

Community colleges across the country face increased enrollment and continued attrition. Students enroll in college only to drop out during the first 3 semesters. Bradburn (2002) indicated that approximately one third of entering students leave postsecondary institutions without a credential; these numbers are even higher for minority (Hodge & Pickron, 2004) and community college (American College Testing, 2008) students. Increasing retention rates requires a multipronged attack, and academic advising can play a key role in keeping students in college (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004) by providing a “road map to completion” that enables students to clarify expectations and achieve personal goals (Tinto, 2006, p. 2). A strong advising program can provide the academic support needed to empower students and contribute to their academic success.

## **Academic Advising in the Community College**

Community college students tend to be older than students enrolled in 4-year colleges and universities, and many are returning students who

attend part-time. They tend to come from minority ethnic backgrounds and are more likely to be first-generation college students. They generally need more developmental course work than their traditional counterparts. Part-time status, age, ethnicity, and the need for developmental education, among other factors, make academic persistence for these students difficult (Fike & Fike, 2008). Defining clear expectations and developing a clear path for academic success is particularly critical in advising these nontraditional students.

Fike and Fike (2008) found student interaction with support services, including regular meetings with an advisor and completion of a long-term plan of study, among the factors positively correlating with student persistence. Effective academic advising involves engaging students in thinking critically about their academic decisions and helping them plan effectively for their academic and professional careers. The academic advisor should thus be skilled in “student development, communication theory, academic disciplines, and much more” (Schulenberg & Linhorst, 2008, p. 43). Advisors spend time in face-to-face interactions with students talking about long- and short-term educational and professional goals, degree requirements, class schedules, and even personal problems. According to O’Banion (1972/2009), this process of academic advising includes the following dimensions: “(1) exploration of life goals; (2) exploration of vocational goals; (3) program choice; (4) course choice; and (5) scheduling courses” (p. 83). To this end, Kramer (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005/2009, p. 126) outlined nine principles of effective advising:

- 1) engage the student;
- 2) provide personal meaning to students’ academic goals;
- 3) collaborate with others or use the full range of institutional resources;
- 4) share, give, and take responsibility;
- 5) connect academic interests with personal interests;
- 6) stimulate and support student academic and career planning;
- 7) promote intellectual and personal growth and success;
- 8) assess, evaluate, or track student progress; and
- 9) establish rapport with students.

### The Value of Faculty as Academic Advisors

O'Banion (1972/2009) explored several models of academic advising as means to meet advising goal-setting objectives. Not surprisingly, he proposed that the faculty member who knows the programs and courses and has direct contact with students is in an ideal position to serve as an academic advisor. Research has subsequently shown that establishing a personal relationship with the faculty is one factor in promoting retention (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Tinto, 2006). Students who establish a personal connection with a faculty member or advisor are more likely to persevere. Indeed, Selke and Wong (1993) maintained that faculty members make ideal advisors because "no person has greater potential to affect a student's . . . [academic] experience [than the professor]" (p. 22). O'Banion (1972/2009) also stressed the idea that faculty advisors who willingly participate in student advising become "better instructors" because they are "forced to learn more about the institution and hopefully to see the student in different ways" (p. 87).

Faculty members also make good advisors because they are adept at creating an environment that facilitates both learning and student development in ways consistent with the goals of developmental advising as it is typically understood. Kramer (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005/2009, p. 126), for example, aligned the successful attributes for advising above with those for teaching because the qualities of successful advising "are also at the heart of the successful classroom experience."

Lowenstein (2005/2009) took the *advising as teaching* model one step further, asking about the specific learning that students gain from advising sessions. Calling his model a "learning-centered philosophy of advising," he concluded that the outcomes of the advising session include synthesis among the highest forms of thought included in Bloom's taxonomy (Forehand, 2005): Students learn

how to find/create the logic of [their] education; how to view the seemingly disconnected pieces of [the] curriculum as parts of a whole that makes sense to the learner, so that she or he learns more from them; how to base educational choices on a developing sense of the overall edifice being self-built; and how to continually enhance learning experiences by relating them to knowledge that has been previously learned. (Lowenstein, 2005/2009, p. 130)

One can conclude that any successful academic-advising program must be based on student

learning models and advisor communication. As Lowenstein (2005/2009) pointed out, key components to successful advising should incorporate strategies for getting students to reach the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy: integrating and organizing knowledge as well as planning, assessing, choosing, evaluating, prioritizing, and predicting (Forehand, 2005). Translated into an advising session, the key advising-as-teaching components for advisors include mentoring students to help them in goal setting (the exploration of life and vocational goals), decision making (decisions regarding program and course choice as well as scheduling of courses), accountability (student and advisor-student), building strategies for academic success, building relationship (faculty member-advisee), and encouraging self-regulation and self-determination. The Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) worked to establish these elements in setting up an academic advising program at the college.

### Academic Advising at the Borough of Manhattan Community College

Like other community colleges, BMCC, a large, urban, community college with an annual enrollment of approximately 22,000 students and a diverse student-body population that is 34% African American, 26% Latino, 11% Asian, and 18% other (non-White) ethnicities (Miller & Messitt, 2007), faces the challenges of keeping students in school and providing the support they need for academic success and graduation (as evidenced by retention rates). For example, the freshman-to-sophomore retention rate for students in defined degree programs, such as nursing, was 60% in 2003. For liberal arts students, it was 51% (Miller & Messitt, 2007). A student in a degree program such as nursing typically received more individualized advising, whereas a liberal arts student was arbitrarily assigned to a liberal arts department with no guarantee that he or she would see the same professor year to year, resulting in a lack of continuity in the student's advising. At that time, no one individual kept track of a student's progress, special needs, or interests.

To help liberal arts students achieve both short- and long-term goals, an academic advising program, funded by a U.S. Department of Education Title V grant, was created under the auspices of the Office of Academic Affairs. Under this grant, BMCC stakeholders sought to set up an advising program focused on achieving the goals outlined by O'Banion (1972/2009), Kramer (as cited in Low-

enstein, 2005/2009), and Lowenstein (2005/2009); that is, by training faculty members, the BMCC staff set up an advising program such that advisors helped students to make wise choices regarding their personal lives, vocational goals, program goals, and course decisions throughout their academic career to achieve success, either by graduating or transferring to another college.

Therefore, the plan for the Title V grant included goals to establish an advising community that provided consistency for liberal arts majors by including faculty members, advising professionals, and administrators. Thus, BMCC academic advising community was formed around a common sense plan to provide the academic advising needed to help liberal arts students take control of their academic careers. In this effort, BMCC enlisted the participation of faculty advisors as well as staff from the Academic Advisement and Transfer Center (AATC), liberal arts departments, and other college and student services, such as counseling. The college also hired educational planners (EPs) to work within the AATC. The EPs liaised with the faculty advisors and students, thereby giving the faculty support during the advising process with students.

The faculty, who were compensated for participation, received training in advising and mentoring strategies as well as learned about programs, courses, and graduation requirements. Faculty advisors were then assigned a cohort of students who they advised each semester using developmental advising practices. The faculty advisors also served as liaisons with other college resources on behalf of advisees (see Figure 1).

#### Faculty Advisor Training

To learn about the advising process, the college, and the students, newly recruited faculty advisors

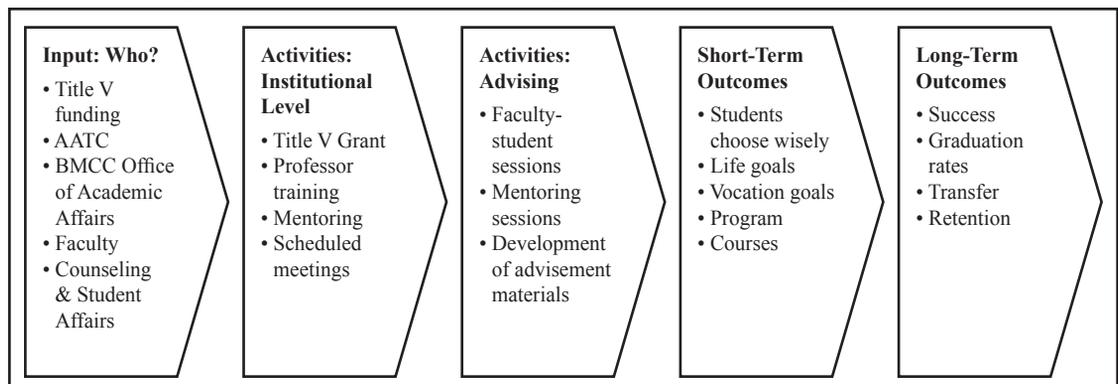
were required to complete a 3-day workshop designed to recognize, support, and train advisors. The training stressed NACADA's Core Values (2005) and provided information about different programs in the college, academic requirements, policies and procedures regarding transfer and graduation, different offices on campus and the services they provided for students, and training in DegreeWorks (the computer software used to track advising sessions). Faculty members also participated in follow-up workshops throughout the semester to hone their advising skills and to confer with other faculty members. By the end of the grant period, 107 faculty members, representing 39.2% of 273 full-time liberal arts faculty members and coming from all 10 liberal arts disciplines at BMCC, had been trained with the developmental advising model.

#### Faculty Mentor Program

Many of the faculty members who received training continued asking questions once they moved from the theoretical aspects to practice with students. To address this need, a new component, the Title V Faculty Mentor Program, was implemented to supplement faculty development and training and to provide a forum for sharing experience and knowledge. This initiative recruited 32 of the participating faculty advisors to become faculty mentors. The BMCC Faculty Mentor Program proved to be one of the lynchpins in creating a "culture of mentors" (Omatsu, 2002); that is, it became a community more focused on and aware of advising best practices. It emphasized the focus of advising at BMCC as a shared experience of a community invested in student advising.

The Title V faculty mentors undertook the important task of developing discipline guides for each liberal arts department. These disci-

**Figure 1.** Borough of Manhattan Community College Title V Advisement Program activities and goals



pline guides explained special considerations and requirements within each department. For example, the discipline guides for English, mathematics, and developmental skills all explained the different levels of remediation in each of the departments and explained the skills that students at each level should possess. Advisors learned about the course requirements across disciplines and were able to use this information to help students choose their course of study based on their level of experience in any particular discipline. The discipline guides also addressed department expectations for students within their courses.

### Perceptions of Advising and Mentoring Programs

While faculty advisors clearly play an important role in academic advising, the data regarding faculty conceptualization of their roles and responsibilities as advisors are limited. Johnson and Zlotnik (2005) found that only 7.5% of 636 ads for professorial positions in the *Monitor on Psychology* mentioned advising. Even fewer cited mentoring (3.9%) and only one referred to both advising and mentoring. Harrison (2009) concluded,

Among the responsibilities associated with faculty positions in academe, student advising is likely to be given short shrift compared to teaching, research, and service. . . . While an accurate evaluation of the changes in academic advising over time is a difficult task, it is likely that the process of academic advising remains largely bureaucratic. (p. 229)

As O'Banion (1972/2009) noted, if faculty advisors are to be successfully utilized in an academic advising model, they must be considerably committed to advising or else the program runs the chance of being a "perfunctory activity" for most faculty advisors and thereby become "grossly ineffective" (pp. 87–88). If faculty advisors are to be successfully utilized in an academic advising model, their experience and input must be recognized and integrated in the design and articulation of it. Soliciting faculty feedback and implementing faculty recommendations and suggestions in the design of the advising program model can translate into considerable faculty commitment.

To begin to assess the effectiveness of the BMCC Academic Advisement Program, we solicited feedback from participating faculty members regarding the advising program and how they conceptualized their roles as advisors and mentors. The faculty responses gathered in this study provide

much-needed insight into how faculty members view the academic advising process, their roles as academic advisors, and their relationships with their advisees.

### Research Questions

The model for the BMCC Academic Advisement Program involved a team approach with the participation of many staff and faculty members. Because of the key role of faculty advisors in establishing a supportive, one-on-one, personal, and long-term relationships with advisees, we wanted faculty feedback regarding the components of the academic advising program. Specifically we wanted to know whether the program as designed supported the advising relationship, promoted effectiveness of advisor training, and offered support in equipping faculty members to assume the role of advisor. We were also interested in the perceived effectiveness of advising practices in this program. To this end, we developed a survey to help us answer the following questions:

1. Did BMCC develop an advising program that supported advisors' guidance of students?
2. Did BMCC develop an advising training program that provided knowledge and guidance to faculty advisors?
3. Did BMCC's advising program develop materials that supported effective advising?
4. Did BMCC's advising program develop a community that supported faculty advising and faculty development?

### Method

To gather data on the BMCC Academic Advisement and Faculty Mentor Programs, we solicited feedback from all 107 participating faculty advisors across the 10 departments in liberal arts. Using [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), we developed an online survey and distributed it among the faculty advisors. The survey included 20 items that elicited faculty feedback on the components of the newly established advising program and the guidance provided advisees, the knowledge and guidance provided in the training of faculty advisors, the usefulness of the advising materials developed, and the extent to which the established advising community supported the advising relationship. Items included both selected response items using Likert scales and open-ended responses in which faculty advisors were encouraged to elaborate on certain aspects of the program (see Appendix).

Self-identification was optional to ensure anonymity and encourage honest responses from participants, but faculty members were asked to identify their department. Responses were confidential; individual responses were not shared with the administration but used only for the purposes of this study.

We totaled the faculty responses to the questionnaire and calculated percentages. We then related the faculty comments to the questions regarding the delivery of advising services to students, the provision of knowledge and training to faculty advisors, the development of materials to support advising, and the establishment of an advising community that supported faculty development and participation in advising.

We computed descriptive statistics for the results of this questionnaire using the PASW Statistics GradPack 18 (2010). We determined percentages using the analysis provided by [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). The open-ended responses to the item targeting faculty endorsement of overall program effectiveness were coded on the following scale: 1 (*limited effectiveness*), 2 (*somewhat effective*) or 3 (*very effective*), with 0 used for no response.

## Results

Faculty advisor responses to the survey regarding the BMCC Academic Advisement Program provided a rich detailed description of advising at the college. Table 1 summarizes the number of questionnaire respondents by academic department. Out of the 107 faculty advisors for liberal arts majors, a total of 53 logged onto the online survey and initiated a response. Faculty ( $n = 53$ ) from every department ( $n = 10$ ) responded to the survey, with the greatest number of respondents (10) from the English department and only 1 each from the Health Education and Music & Art departments. A total of 45 (84.9%) completed the survey, and not every respondent answered every item on the survey. A total of 7 survey responses were submitted with no answers.

### *Program Support of Advisors' Guidance of Students*

We asked faculty advisors to comment about the overall effects of the Title V BMCC Advisement Program. Of the 41 faculty members who responded to this item, 5 concluded that the program was limited in its effectiveness, 18 felt that the program was somewhat effective, and 18 felt it was very effective. Only 2 out of 43 faculty members did not respond to this item.

**Table 1.** Faculty academic advisor respondents

Faculty Department	No. of Respondents
Health Education	1
Speech	3
Developmental Skills	8
Social Science	7
English	10
Math	6
Modern Language Department	4
Music & Art	1
Science	3
Business Management	2
Unknown	1
Unrecorded responses	7
Total ( $N$ )	53

Because relationships are built over time through interpersonal contacts, we included the amount of time that advisors spent with students and the activities they shared with students during their meetings as one determinant of effective advising. Of the 43 faculty members who responded to the item regarding time spent with each advisee during a face-to-face advising session, the majority of faculty (27 of 43) reported spending 30 to 40 minutes or longer with advisees; 14 faculty members reported spending 5 to 10 minutes with advisees. While most faculty advisors (31 and 44) averaged one meeting per semester per advisee, almost one fourth of them (11 of 44) reported meeting with students twice each semester. Two advisors did not respond to the question.

A commitment to the advisee forms the necessary foundation for any advisor wanting to establish a personal relationship. Therefore, we inquired about the ways faculty advisors attempted to reach their students as an indicator of their commitment to seeing their students. As summarized in Table 2, faculty advisors reported that on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*), they contacted advisees in various ways, primarily by e-mail ( $m = 3.84$ ) and phone ( $m = 3.02$ ). On average, advisors reported meeting with their advisees face-to-face during the semester ( $m = 2.88$ ) and also establishing contact with advisees through the EP ( $m = 2.46$ ). Advisors reported that they did not routinely send letters by posted mail; in fact, 27 of 33 advisors reported that they never sent mail through the postal service. Advisors did not contact advisees through Facebook/MySpace, and only 1 respondent reported texting advisees sometimes.

In their comments, many faculty advisors elabo-

**Table 2.** Advisors' modes of contacting advisees

Mode of Contact	Number of Contacts					Mean
	<i>n</i>	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Always	
Phone	43	2	3	30	8	3.02
E-mail	43	0	0	7	36	3.84
Letter	33	27	3	2	1	1.30
Through Educational Planner	37	9	4	22	2	2.46
Face-to-face	41	5	2	27	7	2.88
Texting	33	32	0	1	0	1.06
Facebook/MySpace	32	32	0	0	0	1.00
Other	18	17	0	1	0	1.11

rated on the use of e-mail in communicating with advisees. In general, faculty e-mailed students their contact information, availability for meeting times, and information regarding advising and registration. Many faculty members (73.8%) reported that they had composed a letter that they sent to the advisees via e-mail. Several faculty members reported that they used the template provided by the Title V team, which included information about the BMCC Advisement Program, an introduction of the faculty member, and an explanation of the importance of advising. Other information communicated in the letter was registration dates, availability, and contact information including an e-mail address, phone number, and office location. At least one faculty member asked students to review the college requirements before the scheduled advising meeting.

Several faculty members reported that they e-mailed students "to remind [them] about registration, indicate availability, and request that the students make appointments." Most reported using e-mail first and then calling. E-mail seems the key in dialoging with students and many faculty members used an e-mail template provided by the Title V team. Curiously, however, no faculty member reported using Facebook, MySpace, or texting, which are media platforms that support a more dynamic exchange than provided by e-mail.

Training students to initiate contact with their advisors proved discouraging for the faculty. One advisor reported, "I find that some students, usually the new ones on my list, will go to my educational planner first. She will then send them to me. That appears to be how the first round will go." Another faculty member explained, "On occasion, I have asked the EP to contact students who did not visit me for advisement." Advisors trying to set up sessions with advisees were frustrated that the students were first contacting the EP.

We looked at the nature of advising as the third

indicator used to measure the quality of advising. We asked faculty advisors to describe the typical advising session with advisees (see Table 3). The data suggest that the BMCC Advisement Program provided knowledge and guidance to advisees that would help them make the types of decisions suggested in the theoretical models by O'Banion (1972/2009), Kramer (as cited in Lowenstein, 2005/2009), and Lowenstein (2005/2009). On a scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*), faculty members reported establishing short- ( $m = 3.80$ ) and long-term ( $m = 3.67$ ) goals, allowing students to articulate problems or issues ( $m = 3.80$ ), identify options or alternatives ( $m = 3.66$ ), and make choices ( $m = 3.89$ ). Data also suggest that collaborating with students in problem solving ( $m = 3.73$ ) is the most common characteristics of the advising session. Faculty advisors reported that they attempted to assess the advisee's educational and personal status by clarifying the student's educational goals ( $m = 3.29$ ), asking about the student's personal life ( $m = 3.11$ ), and assessing the advisee's educational background ( $m = 3.38$ ) and educational potential ( $m = 3.24$ ).

Evidently, advising contracts did not play a big role in the advising sessions. Per the program, at the first advising session advisees were to sign a contract, which was intended to secure their commitment to the program and the advising relationship. The faculty members said that they typically neither reviewed ( $m = 2.43$ ) nor referred to ( $m = 2.12$ ) the contract during the advising process.

In response to another open-ended question about the impact of training on advisor effectiveness, several faculty members observed a positive impact on the quality of advising rendered to students. One faculty advisor noted, "Everything has changed, mainly from the prescriptive to the developmental model (to sum it up). I spend more time with the students and guide them, making sure they take responsibility for decisions."

**Table 3.** Typical advising session

Practice	n	Faculty Advisor Participation				Rating Mean
		Never (%)	Hardly Ever (%)	Sometimes (%)	Always (%)	
Allow students to make choices	45	0	0	5 (11.1)	40 (88.9)	3.89
Allow students to articulate problems or issues	45	0	0	9 (20.0)	36 (80.0)	3.80
Establish short-term goals	45	0	0	9 (20.0)	36 (80.0)	3.80
Collaborate w/student in problem solving & decision making	45	0	0	12 (26.7)	33 (73.3)	3.73
Establish long-term goals	45	0	0	15 (33.3)	30 (66.7)	3.67
Allow students to identify options or alternatives	44	0	2 ( 4.5)	11 (25.0)	31 (70.5)	3.66
Reintroduce yourself	44	0	0 ( 2.2)	21 (46.7)	23 (51.1)	3.49
Remind student of BMCC resources	44	0	2 ( 4.5)	23 (52.3)	19 (43.2)	3.39
Assess educational background	45	1 ( 2.2)	3 ( 6.7)	19 (42.2)	22 (48.9)	3.38
Engage in small talk	45	1 ( 2.2)	6 (13.3)	17 (37.8)	21 (46.7)	3.29
Clarify student's educational goals	45	0	0	4 ( 8.9)	41 (91.1)	3.29
Assess educational potential	45	1 ( 2.2)	5 (11.1)	21 (46.7)	18 (40.0)	3.24
Describe program & advisement relationship	42	1 ( 2.4)	6 (14.3)	22 (52.4)	13 (31.0)	3.12
Ask about personal life (family, job, etc.)	45	2 ( 4.4)	5 (11.1)	24 (53.3)	14 (31.1)	3.11
Act as liaison for student w/other department or staff	45	3 ( 6.7)	8 (17.8)	29 (64.4)	5 (11.1)	2.80
Review advisement contract	42	6 (14.3)	19 (45.2)	10 (23.8)	7 (16.7)	2.43
Refer to student contract	41	9 (22.0)	21 (51.2)	8 (19.5)	3 ( 7.3)	2.12

### *Program Provision of Knowledge and Guidance*

To get feedback on whether the faculty training program and the faculty mentoring component provided knowledge and guidance, we asked about faculty advising methods subsequent to training. Fifteen out of the 29 (51.7%) answered this open-ended question, and many indicated that they felt that they had more knowledge since participating in advising training and suggested that their practice offered more in-depth advising than in the past. One faculty member reported:

My advisement is more in-depth. I've learned through workshops and practice what the course sequences are for liberal arts majors and can thus offer more helpful advice to students about requirements. [I] can spot problem areas more easily and discuss them prepared with a greater range of solutions.

Another advisor highlighted key advantages gained as a result of the training:

I was ill equipped to advise before the Title V training—it was crucial for my develop-

ment into a competent advisor. I can now do it myself, whereas I used to have to consult with a more senior colleague every time I tried to advise a student. The Title V workshops . . . and repeated training sessions made a huge difference in honing my advising abilities.

Several faculty members commented on the advantages that knowledge of different tools and resources provided in the advising process: "The program evolved useful tools (like the discipline guides) that are crucial in the field, especially for new faculty who are thrown into it with little-to-no training." Others (3 of 29) felt more comfortable using DegreeWorks, the computer program instituted to guide and track advising sessions. The value of working with the EP was mentioned as well: "In the beginning, I wasn't sure of the role of the EP. Over time, I came to rely on my EP a little more and use her when I was not available or when I had trouble reaching a student."

For the most part, the faculty response to training and to the program was positive. Only four faculty advisors indicated that nothing had changed

since the Title V training. One participant summed up the faculty advisor experience of the majority:

The main thing that changed is that I gained a lot more knowledge about BMCC requirements, courses, resources, etc. I have a lot more useful information that's made me more effective; my methods have also changed because I now see the same students more than once and can track their progress and follow-up on issues.

*Program Materials that Support Effective Advising*

Several resources were developed to support the advising of liberal arts students. First, the BMCC Title V team provided an e-mail template for faculty members to use in their first communications with students. Many faculty members indicated using this template.

The faculty also received discipline guides for 7 of 10 liberal arts departments. The BMCC faculty mentors developed these guides, which were approved first by the Title V Executive Committee and then by the chairs of each department. The faculty mentors also designed a Wiki for easy access to the guides and that link was distributed to all faculty advisors beginning in the fourth year of the grant. This link facilitated access to the discipline guides during the advising process.

Table 4 summarizes faculty endorsement of the discipline guides in advising students. Thirty-eight out of 44 respondents (86.3%) said that they were familiar with the discipline guides. Of the 42 respondents who responded to the question about discipline guides, 11 (26.2%) reported using them sometimes and 14 (33.3%) reported always employing them. However, a number of faculty members reported that the guides for a number of disciplines were not applicable to advising.

These results suggest that the letter template and the discipline guides have proven useful for those advisors who know about and refer to them. However, more widespread distribution of the guides is required.

*The Advising Community*

We wanted to determine whether BMCC faculty advisors felt they were part of a community that supported academic advising and faculty development. Therefore, we asked faculty members about their expectations of participation in the Title V advising program, their familiarity with resources, their reliance on other team players in the advising community, and their perception of the program goals.

As summarized in Table 5, many faculty members reported that they expected the advising program to offer them the opportunity to become part of a larger community of students and colleagues at the college. In fact, the expectation that they would form relationships with students was somewhat (13 of 44; 29.5%) or very (30 of 44; 68.2%) important in their rationale for becoming a faculty advisor. The expectation that they would form relationships with colleagues was somewhat (14 of 44; 31.8%) and very (23 of 44; 52.3%) important. Faculty advisors also expected to gain knowledge of the college: This item was somewhat important (16 of 44; 36.4%) to (26 of 44; 59.1%) very important in their decision to take on an advising role.

To investigate faculty knowledge of other departments involved in the advising process subsequent to training, faculty advisors were asked to report on their familiarity with and use of several BMCC resources. Table 6 summarizes the results. On a scale from 1 (*not at all familiar*) to 3 (*very familiar*), the faculty reported being very familiar with the AATC ( $m = 2.69$ ) as well as with their EP ( $m = 2.78$ ). Faculty members reported that they were least familiar with financial aid ( $m = 1.89$ ).

**Table 4.** Usefulness of discipline guides in advising

Discipline Guide	n	Usefulness of Discipline Guides				Rating Mean
		Not at All Helpful	Somewhat Helpful (%)	Very Helpful (%)	Not Applicable (%)	
Ethnic Studies	36	0	2 ( 5.6)	14 (38.9)	20 (55.6)	2.88
Speech	36	0	2 ( 5.6)	15 (41.7)	19 (52.8)	2.88
English	35	0	3 ( 8.6)	16 (45.7)	16 (45.7)	2.84
Modern Languages	35	0	4 (11.4)	17 (48.6)	14 (40.0)	2.81
Science	37	0	5 (13.5)	18 (48.6)	14 (37.8)	2.78
Math	36	0	7 (19.4)	17 (47.2)	12 (33.3)	2.71
Social Science	36	0	6 (16.7)	13 (36.1)	17 (47.2)	2.68

**Table 5.** The role of faculty advisors,  $N = 44$

Faculty Role	Expectation for Community				Rating Average
	Not Important	Somewhat Unimportant (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Very Important (%)	
You will form relationships with students	0	1 ( 2.3)	13 (29.5)	30 (68.2)	3.66
You will gain knowledge of the college	1 (2.3)	1 ( 2.3)	16 (36.4)	26 (59.1)	3.52
You will form relationships with colleagues	2 (4.5)	5 (11.4)	14 (31.8)	23 (52.3)	3.32

**Table 6.** Faculty advisor familiarity with BMCC resources

Resource	n	Familiarity with Resource			Rating Average
		Not at All (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very (%)	
Educational Planner	45	1 (2.22)	8 (17.8)	36 (80.0)	2.78
Academic Advisement and Transfer Center	45	0 (0.00)	14 (31.1)	31 (68.9)	2.69
Counseling	45	1 (2.22)	22 (48.9)	22 (48.9)	2.47
Learning Resource Center	45	2 (4.44)	21 (46.7)	22 (48.9)	2.44
Financial Aid	44	8 (18.2)	33 (75.0)	3 ( 6.8)	1.89

Table 7 summarizes the extent to which faculty members used available resources in the advising process. Faculty seemed to rely on the AATC and the EPs ( $m = 3.30$ ) to a greater extent than the Counseling Center ( $m = 2.64$ ), Learning Resource Center ( $m = 2.67$ ), or Financial Aid department ( $m = 2.86$ ). Based on responses to this survey, faculty advisors used many of the resources available to them on campus at times, but the primary resource that they utilized most to assist in advising was the AATC, and in particular, the EPs.

To investigate whether the BMCC Advisement program was successful at developing a shared

sense of purpose among the faculty advisors, we asked participants to explain, in their own words, the goals of the program. For the most part, responses were not only congruent with the stated goals of the Title V program, but also reflected a shared sense of purpose to establish a long-term advising relationship with students based on “strong and consistent mentoring.” The following statements illustrate the prevailing views:

- to provide students with consistent and reliable advising that helps give them a sense of connection to the college and a stronger

**Table 7.** Resources used in advising process

Resource	n	Resource Use				Rating Mean (%)
		Never (%)	Hardly Ever (%)	Sometimes (%)	Always (%)	
Academic Advisement & Transfer Center	43	0 ( 0.0)	1 ( 2.3)	28 (65.1)	14 (32.6)	3.30
Educational Planner	44	1 ( 2.3)	2 ( 4.5)	24 (54.5)	17 (38.6)	3.30
Financial Aid Department	43	2 ( 4.7)	6 (14.0)	31 (72.1)	4 ( 9.3)	2.86
Learning Resource Center	45	6 (13.3)	4 ( 8.9)	34 (75.6)	1 ( 2.2)	2.67
Counseling Center	45	2 ( 4.4)	13 (28.9)	29 (64.4)	1 ( 2.2)	2.64

sense of their own goals and the ways they can meet them.

- to assist faculty in becoming better advisors and to assist students in their academic and career choices through effective advisement.
- to provide better advisement for students by giving them continuity in advisement; to make students feel more attached to BMCC, give them better information and better guidance, and increase retention rates.
- [to aid] student retention, the development of deeper, more meaningful interactions between students and faculty, fostering a sense of continuity for both parties in the advisee/advisor relationship. . . . It also built camaraderie among the faculty, allowing us to learn about various advisement styles from one another.

When faculty advisors were asked about the overall effect of this program on the BMCC community, the responses were generally positive. Faculty advisors explicitly commented on feeling a strong sense of community and commitment to advising. One advisor observed:

[It] makes the community smaller. Among faculty, [it] increases familiarity with different departments and resources at the college and also gives greater feeling of satisfaction in working with one student over the course of their college career rather than just once and at random during the registration period.

Another commented, "It created a mini-community of both Title V students and advisors." A third stated, "It has been the first step in putting 'community' in the community college. It not only brings students and professors together but also professors together."

Underscoring the positive impact of the advising community on students, a faculty advisor concluded:

It has been very positive and the word is getting around, at least in my experience, talking to students and those who are participating. I have spoken to various students, who are not in my cohort, and they are happy . . . to have someone to talk to and call that [they] have some kind of relationship with.

Finally, one comment summarized a prevailing attitude: "I don't have a global view, but it seems to me that we now have a model for more meaning-

ful advisement, which is especially important at a commuter school."

There were, however, criticisms of the program that seemed to focus around sustainability and institutional commitment to the program. One primary concern focused on encouraging student participation, "The major hurdle is to increase the participation and responsiveness of students."

Another concern reflected the faculty's perception of the college's commitment to the advising program: "As with everything, it depends on the commitment of the college as a whole. If more faculty and liberal arts students were involved, the program would have been more successful." Faculty members voiced displeasure about workload and compensation for their participation in the program and the ramifications of a possible perceived lack of institutional commitment. One advisor focused on the issue of increased workload, suggesting that for the BMCC Advisement Program to be effective, "[Faculty should be] compensated and recognized as academic advisors in addition to being faculty members. By compensation, I mean at least 1-2 hours of release time to devote just to Title V . . . and I think allocating time is the answer."

#### *Retention Rates for Title V Advisees*

We examined retention rates for students enrolled in the BMCC Title V Academic Advisement Program. Title V students, with the exception of some groups in the fall 2005 cohort, achieved an overall higher retention rate among the various cohorts than other students in liberal arts, academic, and nonselect-career programs (see Table 8). From fall 2005 through spring 2008, freshman-to-sophomore retention rates for liberal arts students participating in the Title V program were higher than retention rates for liberal arts students not covered by the Title V grant as well as students in other academic programs. While increases in retention rates cannot be directly attributed to any one factor of the Title V program, they provided positive feedback to the faculty and staff.

#### **Discussion**

Feedback from faculty advisors regarding their experience in the BMCC Advisement Program provided a rich description of a number of vital components of academic advising at the college. The results of the survey suggested that this initiative contributed to the development of a faculty training program that generated the development of materials and support services to sustain effective advis-

**Table 8.** BMCC retention percentages among Title V participants and comparable liberal arts and other career program students by cohort

Cohort	Retention Rates by Group (%)			
	Title V Recruits	Other Liberal Arts Students	Students in Other Academic Program	Students in Career Programs
Fall 2005	57.7	51.9	57.9	58.0
Spring 2006	62.3	50.9	56.2	57.5
Fall 2006	66.7	50.1	53.8	57.8
Spring 2007	58.0	51.5	55.0	54.9
Fall 2007	63.5	58.8	54.9	60.9
Spring 2008	67.7	51.7	56.7	57.1

ing and fostered a sense of community and shared purpose in advising. Faculty feedback further suggested that the advising program fulfilled the planners' goal of providing knowledge and guidance to both students and faculty members alike.

Advisors reported in detail regarding the academic advising of students. They stated that they contacted advisees, initially through e-mail and subsequently face-to-face. Faculty indicated some frustration trying to set up sessions with advisees when students met with EPs, who were to serve as liaisons. While the EPs may have impacted the advisor and advisee contacts, students were consulting with EP as well as faculty advisors, suggesting that a team approach to advising was working.

When advisors contacted students, they met on an average of one to two times a semester for 30 to 40 minutes per appointment. The typical advising sessions focused not only on providing knowledge and guidance to advisees, but on establishing a collaborative relationship in which students identified and articulated problems and solutions regarding academic and personal issues. Faculty participants also reported assessing students' educational background and potential as part of the process, suggesting that faculty advisors actively seek to establish a personal connection with their advisees. Responses suggested that faculty members initiated the advising relationship and invested time and energy in establishing a personal connection with their advisees.

One component of the BMCC Advisement Program established under this grant, advisee contracts, was perceived as ineffective. Few advisors reviewed or referred to the contract during the advising process.

Faculty advisor responses to the surveys provided evidence that the BMCC Advisement Program and Faculty Mentor Program provided knowledge and guidance to faculty advisors. A majority of faculty members responded that they

felt that their expertise and knowledge regarding advising had improved greatly due to the program. Several noted advantages gained as a result of the training program, including the computerized advising-database DegreeWorks, the templates for letters to contact advisees, the liaison with the EP, and the departmental discipline guides developed by the faculty to support advising. Faculty members strongly endorsed the usefulness of the discipline guides in the advising process. The results of the survey provide evidence of their usefulness for advisors who knew about and used them. However, the faculty indicated a need for better distribution and access to the discipline guides.

Participation in the BMCC Advisement Program met faculty expectations for building relationships with students and colleagues as well as for knowledge gained about the college. Faculty members reported that they had become familiar with different departments offering resources to students and that they collaborated with and referred advisees to these student services in the advising process. Faculty members seemed to be familiar with and to use the services of the AATC and the EPs on staff in that department. Working as liaisons, EPs and the rest of the AATC staff support the development of a strong advising community at the college.

Based on the survey responses, we found that faculty advisors shared a common sense of purpose that reflected the stated goals and objectives of the BMCC Advisement Program. Faculty assessment of the program was, for the most part, positive, but some expressed reservations about the sustainability and future institutional support of the advising program.

### Recommendations and Conclusions

Faculty advisors in the BMCC Advisement Program were successful, in part, because of the institutional support provided by the Title V grant

that enabled their professional development training. College commitment to advising encourages investment on the part of the students, advising team members in general, and faculty members in particular. Stakeholders at any college using faculty as advisors should make a clear commitment to the program in terms of the availability of support resources and services and monetary or academic support for faculty advisors.

Also, the data show that faculty training resulted in advisors feeling that they understood methods for using their teaching skills within their advising sessions. They believed that they helped students to set goals, make decisions, become accountable, and build strategies for academic success. They also felt that they had built relationships with students and encouraged their self-determination. However, to be successful in these endeavors they needed communication among all stakeholders in the advising process, including a strong relationship with their EP and the staff of the AATC. The BMCC advisors and related personnel continue to strengthen communication by establishing a well-defined protocol for initiating contact with students or communicating information to them.

Communication in the form of materials essential in the advising process, such as the contact letter and the discipline guides, proved important in guaranteeing a smooth and effective advising experience. Based on the feedback that some faculty members were unfamiliar with the guidelines or had never used them, we believe a clear mode of delivery should be developed so that faculty advisors have easy, consistent, and quick access to the materials. For example, if the discipline guides are housed on the Wiki, faculty members and students should be able to access a simple and quick link to them. The Wiki address must also be prominently advertised and displayed.

This study was limited to a rich descriptive investigation of the advising relationship of students and faculty advisors, the role of the faculty advisor, and the effectiveness of training in providing materials and support. This information can be used in the next stage of the program to design components and define goals that will predict academic success.

Because of the generalized nature of the findings, further research could be conducted on the effectiveness of individual faculty advisors by tracking the retention and graduation rates associated with each advisor. Further qualitative studies might also yield greater insight into the effects of individual variations of developmental advising

practices among advisors.

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#### Authors' Notes

Cynthia S. Wiseman, EdD, is an assistant professor of developmental skills at the Borough of Manhat-

tan Community College/City University of New York. Professor Wiseman served as a BMCC Title V faculty advisor and faculty mentor and has been a presenter at the NAFSA annual conference. She received her doctorate in applied linguistics with a concentration in second language writing assessment from Teacher's College, Columbia University.

Holly Messitt, PhD, is an assistant professor of English at the Borough of Manhattan Community College/City University of New York. Professor Messitt was the part of the BMCC Title V steering committee from 2004-2005 and then joined the BMCC Title V executive committee in 2006 as the Faculty Mentor Coordinator. She co-wrote, with Glenn Miller, "Changing Culture: A New Program for Liberal Arts Advisement at an Urban Community College," which appeared in *Academic Advising Today* in March 2007. She has been a presenter at the NACADA annual conference twice. For more information about this article contact [hmessitt@bmcc.cuny.edu](mailto:hmessitt@bmcc.cuny.edu).

**Appendix.** Faculty feedback on BMCC Title V Advisement Program

1. Questionnaire ID: Please code your questionnaire in the following way: Initials (first and last name): for example, John Doe (JD).

- Code
- Department
- Email (optional)
- Phone number (optional)

2. How do you contact your students throughout the semester?

Mode	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Always
Phone				
Email				
Letter				
Through the Educational Planner				
Face-to-face				
Texting				
Facebook/MySpace				
Other				

3. Do you have a protocol for setting up appointments? (Please answer yes or no.) If yes, what's the typical procedure?

4. Do you have a letter that you send to advisees?

5. What information do you include in your letter?

6. On average, how long do you spend with students for advisement?

- 5-10 minutes
- 15-20 minutes
- 30-40 minutes
- Longer than 45 minutes (please indicate amount of time below)

7. On average, how many times do you and your students meet/confer each semester?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

8. What happens in the typical advisement session with your advisees?

Component	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Always
(Re)introduce yourself				
Describe the Title V program/ advisement relationship				
Engage in small talk				
Clarify student's educational goals				
Ask about personal life (family, job, etc.)				
Assess educational background				
Assess educational potential				
Establish short-term goals				
Establish long-term goals				
Remind student of BMCC resources (DegreeWorks, AATC, LRC, counselors, etc.)				

**Appendix.** Faculty feedback on BMCC Title V Advisement Program (continued)

8. What happens in the typical advisement session with your advisees? (continued)					
Component	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Always	
Act as liaison for student with other departments or staff					
Allow students to articulate problems or issues					
Allow students to identify options or alternatives					
Allow student to make choices					
Collaborate with student in problem-solving and decision-making					
Review advisee contract					
Refer to student contract					
9. Which of the following resources at BMCC are you familiar with?					
Resource	Not at all familiar with	Somewhat familiar with	Very familiar with		
Academic Advisement & Transfer Center (AATC)					
Educational Planners					
Discipline Guides					
Counseling					
Learning Resource Center (LRC)					
Financial aid					
10. Which of the following resources at BMCC do you and/or your advisee use?					
Resource	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Always	
Academic Advisement & Transfer Center (AATC)					
Educational Planners					
Discipline Guides					
Counseling					
Learning Resource Center (LRC)					
Financial Aid					
11. Which of the following strategies do you use and how effective are they for you? Rate all that apply.					
Resource	Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	N/A
Mentor on the run					
Act as an example					
Model strategies for success					
Demonstrate professionalism					

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**Appendix.** Faculty feedback on BMCC Title V Advisement Program (continued)

11. Which of the following strategies do you use and how effective are they for you?  
Rate all that apply. (continued)

Resource	Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	N/A
Hold students accountable					
Ask questions to get a sense of the student's situation/problems/questions					
List goals					
Check student progress in achieving goals					
Show passion for education/work/student's achievement					
Support articulation of goals					
Maintain high expectations for students					
Listen without interrupting					
Provide opportunities for success					
Network					
Expand horizons					
Provide a sense of purpose					
Create a space of belonging					
Refer to the contract during the session					

12. What do you expect from the student in the advisement relationship? How important are these expectations in the advisement relationship?

Expectations	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important
Student will come on time				
Student will make an appointment				
Student will show up				
Student will come to advisement session prepared				
Support will continue throughout the initial stages of advising				

**Appendix.** Faculty feedback on BMCC Title V Advisement Program (continued)

12. What do you expect from the student in the advisement relationship? How important are these expectations in the advisement relationship? (continued)					
Expectations	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	
Students will leave your office with a workable schedule that meets academic and personal goals					
13. What do you expect of yourself as advisor in the advisement relationship? How important are these expectations in the advisement relationship?					
Expectations	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	
I will gain knowledge of the college.					
I will form relationships with students.					
I will form relationships with colleagues.					
I will receive recognition for service to college and students.					
I will receive compensation for my participation as advisor (e.g., release time).					
I will receive professional opportunities (e.g., workshops, conferences, ideas for publication).					
14. Do you know how to access the Discipline Guides?					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Never tried</li> </ul>					
15. How would you rate the Discipline Guides?					
Discipline Guide	Not at all helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful	N/A	
Math					
English					
Social Science					
Modern Language					
Ethnic Studies					
Science					
Speech					
16. How effective were each of the following components in meeting the goals of the Title V program?					
Component	Ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	N/A
Lobby advisement for Title V					

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**Appendix.** Faculty feedback on BMCC Title V Advisement Program (continued)

16. How effective were each of the following components in meeting the goals of the Title V program? (continued)					
Component	Ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	N/A
Workshops for Title V					
Workshops for Title V mentoring					
DegreeWorks training					
Mentoring on the run workshops					
Development of the discipline guides					
Using the discipline guides in advising					
Talking about Title V with colleagues					
Helping colleagues in advising					
Consulting Counseling or Learning Resource Center (LRC)					
Referring a student to Academic Advisement & Transfer Center (AATC)					
17. Has anything changed in your advisement methods since you were trained as a Title V advisor? If so, what changed? Was there anything specific that prompted you to change your method/ approach?					
18. Which of the following did you expect from the Title V training?					
Expectation	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	
Training would include information about individual courses					
Training would include information about majors					
Training would include information about transfer requirements					
Training would include strategies for mentoring					
Training would include role plays					
19. In your own words, state what you understand the goals of the Title V program to be.					
20. Were those goals of the Title V program incorporated in your training and development as a Title V Advisor? Please explain.					
21. What do you think have been the overall effects of the Title V Advisement Program on the BMCC community? Please explain.					