

ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS AND ACADEMIC ADVISING PROGRAMS

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THE CASE FOR ATTENTION TO ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC ADVISMENT

The contemporary relevance and cross-institutional significance of advisor and advising program evaluation is highlighted by the most recent of five national surveys of academic advising, which reveals that only 29% of postsecondary institutions evaluate advisor effectiveness (Habley & Morales, 1998). Upcraft, Srebnik, & Stevenson (1995) state categorically that, “The most ignored aspect of academic advising in general, and first-year student academic advising in particular, is assessment” (p. 141).

Evaluating the effectiveness of academic advisors and advisement programs sends a strong and explicit message to all members of the college community that advising is an important professional responsibility; conversely, failure to do so tacitly communicates the message that this student service is not highly valued by the institution. As Linda Darling-Hammond, higher education research specialist for the Rand Corporation, once said: “If there’s one thing social science research has found consistently and unambiguously. . .it’s that people will do more of whatever they are evaluated on doing. What is measured will increase, and what is not measured will decrease. That’s why assessment is such a powerful activity. It cannot only measure, but change reality” (quoted in Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). In addition, the particular items that comprise an evaluation instrument illustrate the specific practices and concrete behaviors that define “good advising” at the institution, i.e., what the college hopes those being evaluated will strive for, or aspire to; thus, the instrument can function not only as a measure of reality (what is), but also as a prompt or stimulus that promotes professional behavior that more closely approximates the ideal (what should be).

Advisor evaluation is also inextricably related to other important advising issues, such as advisor (a) clarification of the meaning and purpose of academic advising, (b) recruitment and selection, (c) orientation, training, and development, and (d) recognition and reward. As Elizabeth Creamer concludes, “The failure of the majority of institutions to evaluate and reward academic advising systematically has been an ongoing concern. This failure has been attributed to two interrelated factors: the failure of institutions to define what constitutes good advising and the failure to identify ways to measure it” (p. 119).

Consider the following findings, based on national advising surveys conducted regularly by American College Testing (ACT) since the late 1970s, which repeatedly point to the following elements as essential, but often missing pieces of an effective academic advisement program.

1. Clarification of the *meaning and purpose* of academic advising.

In 1992, only 60% of postsecondary institutions had a written policy statement on advising, and many of these published statements did not include well defined program goals, objectives, or methods of evaluation (Habley, 1993). At best, this suggests a lack of clarity about program mission and goals; at worst, it suggests that advising is not considered to be a bona fide program with an educational mission.

2. Provision of *incentives, recognition, and reward* for effective academic advising.

Approximately one-half of faculty contracts and collective bargaining agreements make absolutely no mention of advising as a faculty responsibility (Teague & Grites, 1980). Less than one-third of campuses recognize and reward faculty for advising and, among those that do, advising is typically rewarded by giving it only minor consideration in promotion and tenure decisions (Habley & Habley, 1988).

In a recent review of national survey findings on reward and recognition for academic advising, Creamer & Scott (2000) reached the following conclusion: “The failure of most institutions to conduct systematic evaluations of advisors is explained by a number of factors. The most potent reason, however, is probably that the traditional reward structure often blocks the ability to reward faculty who are genuinely committed to advising” (p. 39).

3. *Recruitment and selection* of academic advisors.

Over two-thirds (68%) of postsecondary institutions surveyed have no criteria for selecting advisors (Crockett, Habley, & Cowart, 1987), suggesting an absence of attention to professional preparedness, and failure to identify advisors who would be most qualified to work with high-risk students or students with special needs, such as first-generation college students, academically under-prepared students, undecided students, transfer students, commuter students, and re-entry students. (Also, how often do you see academic advising mentioned as one of the selection criteria listed in job advertisements or position announcements from postsecondary institutions seeking to recruit and hire new faculty?)

4. *Orientation, training, and development* of academic advisors.

Only about one-third of college campuses *provide* training for faculty advisors; less than one-quarter *require* faculty training; and the vast majority of institutions offering training programs focus solely on dissemination of factual information, without paying any attention to identifying the goals or objectives of advising, and the development of effective advising strategies or relationship skills (Habley, 1988).

The upshot of all these disturbing findings is encapsulated in the following conclusion reached by Habley (2000), based on his review of findings from five national surveys of academic advising, dating back to 1979: “A recurrent theme, found in all five ACT surveys, is that training, evaluation, and recognition and reward have been, and continue to be, the weakest links in academic advising throughout the nation. These important institutional practices in support of quality advising are at best unsystematic and at worst nonexistent” (p. 40).

Furthermore, advisor evaluation has major implications for student *satisfaction* with, and *retention* at, the college they have chosen to attend.

RATIONALE FOR THE CONTENT OF AN ADVISOR EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

The specific items that comprise the content of an advisor evaluation instrument should be grounded in research on common characteristics or qualities of advisors that students seek and value. Research repeatedly points to the conclusion that students value most highly academic advisors who are seen as: (1) available/accessible, (2) knowledgeable/helpful, (3) personable/approachable, and (4) counselors/mentors (Winston, Ender, & Miller, 1982; Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, & Associates, 1984; Frost, 1991; Gordon, Habley, & Associates, 2000).

Each one of these general “core” qualities of effective advisors may be defined in terms

of more specific advisor roles and responsibilities, as follows:

- 1) **Available/Accessible:** An advisor is someone who effectively communicates and interacts with students outside the classroom, and does so more informally, more frequently, and on a more long-term basis than course instructors. A student's instructors will vary from term to term, but an academic advisor is the one institutional representative with whom the student can have continuous contact and an ongoing relationship that may endure throughout the college experience.
- 2) **Knowledgeable/Helpful:** An advisor is an effective consultant—a role that may be said to embrace the following functions: (a) *Resource Agent*—one who provides accurate and timely information about the curriculum, co-curriculum, college policies, and administrative procedures. (b) *Interpreter*—one who helps students make sense of, and develop appreciation for the college mission, curricular requirements (e.g., the meaning, value, and purpose of general education), and co-curricular experiences (e.g., the importance of out-of-class experiences for student learning and development). (c) *Liaison/Referral Agent*—one who connects students with key academic support and student development services. (d) *Teacher/Educator*—one who helps students gain self-insight into their interests, aptitudes, and values; who enables students to see the “connection” between their academic experience and their future life plans; and who promotes students' cognitive skills in problem-solving, decision-making, and critical thinking with respect to present and future educational choices.
- 3) **Personable/Approachable:** An advisor is a humanizing or personalizing agent with whom students feel comfortable seeking out, who knows students by name, and who takes a personal interest in individual students' experiences, progress, and development.
- 4) **Counselor/Mentor:** An advisor is an advocate who students can turn to for advice, counsel, guidance, or direction; who listens actively and empathically; and who responds to students in a non-judgmental manner—treating them as clients to be mentored—rather than as subordinates to be evaluated (or graded).

These four advisor roles can be used to generate related clusters of advisor characteristics or behaviors that represent the content (rating items) of an advisor evaluation instrument. An example of such an instrument is provided in Appendix A (pp. 15-17). While the foregoing synthesis of advisor roles may be useful for guiding construction of specific items on the advisor evaluation instrument, the scholarly literature on academic advising strongly suggests that advisor evaluation should originate with, and be driven by, a clear *mission statement* that reflects consensual or communal understanding of the overarching meaning and purpose of the academic advisement program (White, 2000). This statement of program purpose should be consistent with, and connected to the college mission statement, thus underscoring the centrality of the advisement program and its pivotal role in the realization of broader institutional goals. Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) report from campus visits that connection between program purpose and institutional mission characterizes educational program delivery at “involving” colleges, i.e., colleges with a strong track record of actively engaging students in the college experience. As they put it, “Policies and practices at Involving Colleges are effective because they are mission-driven and are constantly evaluated to assess their contributions to educational purposes” (p. 156).

The purpose statement for an academic advisement program should also serve as a springboard or launching pad that drives and directs the development of an effective evaluation plan. If the college does not take time to develop a carefully constructed statement that explicitly captures the essential purpose and priorities of its advising

program, then individual advisors may develop different conceptions and philosophies about what advising should be, and their individual advising practices may vary in nature (and quality), depending on what particular advising philosophy or viewpoint they hold. In fact, research indicates that there is fairly high consistency between advisors' stated philosophy of advising and their actual advising behaviors or practices (Daller, Creamer, & Creamer, cited in Creamer & Scott, 2000). As Virginia Gordon (1995) points out, "Most faculty advisors, consciously or unconsciously, approach their advisees with a basic philosophical stance. Some believe students are totally responsible for their own actions; thus, advising contacts should always be initiated by the student. Others view themselves as resources and take initiative when students make contact and personally express a need or concern" (p. 95).

The following statements, culled from the scholarly literature on academic advising, have the potential to serve as models or heuristics that can help guide and shape the construction of an effective mission statement for advising programs.

(a) "Developmental academic advising is . . . a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources. It both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life" (Winston, Miller, Ender, & Grites, & Associates, 1984, p. 538)

(b) "The formation of relationships that assure that at least one educator has close enough contact with each student to assess and influence the quality of that student's educational experience is realistic only through a systematic process, such as an academic advising program. It is unrealistic to expect each instructor, even with small classes, to form personal relationships of sufficient duration and depth with each student in his or her class to accomplish this" (Winston, Miller, Ender, & Grites, & Associates, 1984, p. 538).

(c) "Developmental academic advising is *not* primarily an administrative function, *not* obtaining a signature to schedule classes, *not* a conference held once a term, not a paper relationship, *not* supplementary to the educational process, [and] *not* synonymous with faculty member" (Ender, 1983, p. 10).

(d) "Academic advising can be understood best and more easily reconceptualized if the process of academic advising and the scheduling of classes and registration are separated. Class scheduling should no be confused with educational planning. Developmental academic advising becomes a more realistic goal when separated from class scheduling because advising can then go on all during the academic year, not just during the few weeks prior to registration each new term. Advising programs, however, that emphasize registration and record keeping, while neglecting attention to students' educational and personal experiences in the institution, are missing an excellent opportunity to influence directly and immediately the quality of students' education and are also highly inefficient, since they are most likely employing highly educated (expensive) personnel who are performing essentially clerical tasks" (Winston, Miller, Ender, & Grites, & Associates, 1984, p. 542).

**STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS:
CONSTRUCTION & ADMINISTRATION OF AN EVALUATION INSTRUMENT**

1. Decide on whether you want to develop an *internal* (“home grown”) instrument, or import an external (“store bought”) standardized instrument from an assessment service or evaluation center.

There are commercially developed instruments available that specifically target evaluation of academic advising—for example: (a) The ACT Survey of Academic Advising (American College Testing), (b) The Academic Advising Inventory (Winston & Sander), and (c) The Developmental Advising Inventory (Dickson & Thayer). For a review of standardized instruments designed to evaluate academic advising, see: Srebnik (1988). *NACADA Journal*, 8(1), 52-62. Also, for an annotated bibliography on advising evaluation and assessment, see the following website sponsored by the National Clearinghouse for Academic Advising, Ohio State University, and the National Academic Advising Association: www.uvc-ohio-state.edu/chouse.html

Standardized instruments do come with the advantage of having already-established reliability and validity, as well as the availability of norms that allow for cross-institutional comparisons. However, if you feel that your college has unique, campus-specific concerns and objectives that would be best assessed via locally developed questions, or if you want an instrument that will elicit more qualitative data (written responses) than the typical quantitative data generated by standardized inventories, then it might be best to develop your own campus-specific instrument.

2. Consider including more than the four rating options (strongly agree – agree – disagree – strongly disagree) that comprise the typical Likert-scale.

The wider range of numerical options may result in mean (average) ratings for individual items that display a wider spread in absolute size or value. For instance, a 6-point scale may be superior to 4-point rating scales because the latter may yield mean ratings for separate items which vary so little in absolute size that advisors may tend to discount the small mean differences between items as being insignificant and inconsequential. For example, with a 4-option rating scale, an advisor might receive mean ratings for different items on the instrument that range from a low of 2.8 to a high of 3.3. Such a narrow range of differences in mean ratings can lead advisors to attribute these minuscule differences simply as random “error variance” or students’ failure to respond in a discerning or discriminating manner.

An expanded 6-point scale has the potential to produce larger mean differences across individual items, thus providing more discriminating data. In fact, research on student evaluations of course instructors does suggest that a rating scale with fewer than five choices tends to reduce the instrument’s ability to discriminate between satisfied and dissatisfied respondents, while a rating scale with more than seven choices does not add to the instrument’s discriminability (Cashin, 1990).

In addition to providing advisors with mean scores per item, they may also be provided with the percentage of respondents who selected each response option. This statistic will reveal how student responses were distributed across all response options, thus providing advisors with potentially useful feedback about the degree of consistency (consensus) or variation (disagreement) among their advisees’ ratings for each item on the instrument.

3. Instructions for the advisor-evaluation instrument should strongly emphasize the need for, and importance of, students’ *written* comments.

Research on student evaluations of course instructors indicates that this type of feedback provides the most useful information for performance improvement (Seldin, 1992). (Indeed, the findings of many years of research on students' course evaluations may be directly applicable to the construction and administration of advisor-evaluation instruments. For a review of research and practice with respect to instructor evaluations, much of which can be applied to advisor evaluations, go to the following site: <http://www.Brevard.edu/fyc/listserv/index/htm>, scroll down to “Listserv Remarks” and click “Joe Cuseo, 10-20-00,” *Student Evaluations of College Courses*.)

4. Beneath each item (statement) to be rated, it is recommended that some empty space be provided, preceded by the prompt, “Reason/explanation for rating: . . .”

Inclusion of such item-specific prompts has been found to increase the quantity of written comments student provide—and their quality, i.e., comments are more focused and concrete because they are anchored to a specific item (characteristic or behavior)—as opposed to the traditional practice of soliciting written comments solely at the end of the instrument—in response to a generic or global prompt, such as: “Final Comments?” (Cuseo, 2001).

Furthermore, the opportunity to provide a written response to each item allows students to *justify* their ratings, and enables us to gain some insight into *why* the rating was given.

5. It is recommend that the instrument be kept *short*, containing no more than 12 advisor-evaluation items.

For example, four 3-item clusters could be included that relate to each of the four aforementioned qualities of highly valued advisors. It has been the author’s experience that the longer an instrument is (i.e., the more reading time it requires), the less time students devote to writing and, consequently, fewer useful comments are provided.

6. Toward the end of the instrument, *students* should be asked to *self-assess* their own effort and effectiveness as advisees.

This portion of the instrument should serve to (a) raise students’ consciousness that they also need to take some personal responsibility in the advisement process for it to be effective, and (b) assure advisors that any evaluation of their effectiveness depends, at least in part, on the conscientiousness and cooperation of their advisees. (This, in turn, may serve to defuse the amount of threat or defensiveness experienced by advisors about being evaluated—a feeling that almost invariably accompanies any type of professional performance evaluation.)

7. Decide on *when* to administer advisor/advising evaluations to students.

One popular strategy is to ask instructors of all classes that meet at popular time slots (e.g., 11 AM and 1 PM) to “sacrifice” 15 minutes of class time to administer the advisor-evaluation instrument. This procedure may not be effective for a couple of reasons: (1) It can result in certain advisors obtaining only a small number of their advisees evaluations, because many of their advisees may not be taking classes at these times. (2) Some instructors are resentful about giving up any class time—particularly toward the end of the semester—to conduct an administrative task.

An alternative procedure for gathering a sufficient sample of student evaluations is to provide advisors with evaluation forms at about the midpoint of the spring term, and ask them to give each one of their advisees the form to complete as part of their *pre-*

registration process for the following term. In other words, when students meet with their advisor to plan their course schedule for the upcoming semester, the advisor asks them to complete the advisor evaluation form and submit it, along with their proposed schedule of classes, to the Registrar's Office. Thus, completing the advisor evaluation becomes a pre- or co-requisite for course registration. This should provide a strong incentive for students to complete the evaluation, which in turn, should ensure a very high return rate. Also, students would be completing their advisor evaluations at a time during the semester when they are not completing multiple instructor (course) evaluations—which typically are administered either during the last week of class or during final-exam week. There is no compelling reason for students to complete advisor evaluations at the very end of the term like they do course/instructor evaluations—which must be administered at the end of the term, because students need to experience the entire course before they can evaluate it. In contrast, student interaction with advisors is a process that traverses academic terms and does not have the same start and stop points as student interaction with course instructors.

For *graduating* students who will not be pre-registering for an upcoming term, they could be asked to complete their advisor evaluation as part of their *graduation-application* or *senior-audit* process. As for non-graduating students who do not pre-register for classes because they intend to *withdraw* from the college, they may be asked to complete an advisor evaluation as part of their *exit-interview* process. (Differences in perceptions of advising quality reported by returning versus non-returning students may provide revealing information on the relationship between advising and retention.)

8. Before formally adopting an evaluation instrument, have *students* review it, either individually or in focus groups, to gather feedback about its clarity and comprehensiveness (e.g., if critical questions about advisors or the advising process have been overlooked).

Also, consider adding an open-ended question at the end of the instrument that would ask students to assess the assessment instrument. (This could be referred to it as “meta-assessment”—the process of assessing the assessment by the assessor).

Ideally, an evaluation instrument should allow students not only rate items in terms of perceived satisfaction or effectiveness, but also in terms of perceived *need* or *importance*. In other words, students would give two ratings for each item on the instrument: (a) a rating of how satisfied they are with that item, and (b) a rating of how important that item is to them. The instrument could be structured to efficiently obtain both sets of ratings by centering the item statements (questions) in the middle of the page, with a “satisfaction” rating scale to the left of the item and an “importance” scale to the right of the same item.

Lee Noel and Randi Levitz, student retention researchers and consultants, have used this double-rating practice to identify institutional areas with large “performance gaps”—items for which students give low satisfaction ratings but high importance ratings, i.e., a large negative score is obtained when the satisfaction rating for an item is subtracted from its importance rating (Noel & Levitz, 1996). If this strategy were applied to advisor evaluation, those items that reveal high student ratings on importance but low ratings on satisfaction would provide particularly useful information. These items reflect high-priority student needs that they feel are not presently being met. As such, these items represent key target zones for improving academic advising—which, of course, is the ultimate purpose of assessment.

Applying this satisfaction-vs.-importance rating scheme to the advisor evaluation instrument would, in effect, enable it to co-function as a student *satisfaction* survey and a

student *needs assessment* survey. This would be especially advantageous because it would allow for the systematic collection of data on student needs. Historically, institutional research in higher education has made extensive use of satisfaction surveys, which are designed to assess how students feel about what *we* are doing; in contrast, comparatively short shrift has been given to assessing what *they* (our students) need and want from us. It could be argued that satisfaction surveys represent an *institution*-centered (or egocentric) form of assessment, while student needs assessment is a *learner*-centered form of assessment that resonates well with the new “learning paradigm” (Barr & Tagg, 1995) and the “student learning imperative” (American College Personnel Association, 1994).

9. Before formally adopting a proposed instrument, feedback should be solicited from academic advisors with respect to its content and structure.

Broad-based feedback should help to fine-tune the instrument and redress its shortcomings and oversights. More importantly, perhaps, this solicitation of feedback from advisors gives them an opportunity to provide input and provides them with a sense of personal ownership or control of the evaluation process. Advisors should feel that evaluation is something that is being done *with* or *for* them, rather than *to* them. In fact, “evaluation” may not be the best term to use for this process because it tends to immediately raise a red flag in the minds of advisors. Although the terms “evaluation” and “assessment” tend to be used interchangeably by some scholars and differentially by others, it has been the author’s experience that assessment is a less threatening term which more accurately captures the primary purpose of the process: to gather feedback that can be used for professional and programmatic improvement. It is noteworthy that, etymologically, the term “assessment” derives from a root word meaning to “sit beside” and “assist,” whereas “evaluation” derives from the same root as “value”—which connotes appraisal and judgment of worth. (An added bonus for using the term assessment, in lieu of evaluation, is that the former can be combined with “academic advisement” to form the phrase, “assessment of academic advisement”—a triple alliteration with a rhythm-and-rhyming ring to it that should appeal to faculty with literary leanings and poetic sensibilities.)

10. In addition to, or in lieu of, calculating the average (mean) student rating for individual items on the evaluation instrument, also calculate and report *the percentages of students choosing each rating option.*

This statistic will reveal how student responses were distributed across all response options, thus providing potentially useful information about the degree of consistency (consensus) or variation (disagreement) among student ratings for each item on the instrument.

11. Report assessment data generated by the advisor-evaluation instrument in a manner that *minimizes defensiveness and promotes improvement.*

One procedure that may effectively reduce personal defensiveness and increase attention to advising improvement would be to collapse data across all advisors, and use the aggregated results or composite as a focal point to steer group discussion toward the issue of how we could improve *our* advisement *program* (rather than focusing on evaluations of individual advisor). The focus on the program, rather than on the individual, serves to depersonalize the process and reduce the defensiveness that often accompanies performance evaluation. When reviewing the results with all advisors, “we” messages should be used to keep the focus on us (the total program/team) rather than “you” messages

(the individual advisor). For instance, special attention could be paid to those particular items that advisors—on average or as a whole—received the least favorable evaluations, and the question may be asked, “What could *we* do to improve student perceptions (satisfaction) with respect to this aspect of *our* advising program?” Thus. The focus is on “our” *collective* strengths and weakness, rather than “your” *individual* strengths and weaknesses.

Advisors should still receive assessment summaries of their own advising, so they are in a position to see how it compares with the norm (average) for all advisors—on each item comprising the instrument. Thus, if an advisor deviates from the norm, it would be obvious to them and, hopefully, these discrepancies will create the cognitive dissonance or “disequilibrium” needed to motivate positive change. To this end, a panel could be organized consisting of advisors who received particularly high ratings and positive comments for specific items (dimensions) of advising assessed by the instrument. These exceptional advisors could share advising strategies that they think may have contributed to the exceptional evaluations they received on that particular dimension of advising. This strategy would enable the college to recognize a variety of advisors for advising excellence in a variety of advising dimensions, and serve to raise consciousness that advising is a multidimensional process, in which excellence may not be global but dimension-specific in nature.

Lastly, the *time and place* where our data debriefing occurs can make a real difference in how people respond to assessment results, and how responsive they are to exploring improvement strategies. For example, assessment data could be shared in the early evening following dinner, which creates the time and the ambience for participants to review data and discuss improvement strategies in a relaxed and reflective manner. Also, if a high-level administrator funds and attends the dinner, a strong message is sent to the college community that advising assessment and improvement are valued endeavors. Top-level administrative support seems is important for any type of professional and program development, and high-ranking administrators should be encouraged to supply support fiscally and visibly (by their physical presence).

ACADEMIC ADVISORS’ ASSESSMENT OF THE ADVISING PROGRAM

Consistent with a focus on assessment for improvement rather than evaluation for judgment, it is recommended that *advisors* be given the opportunity to assess the advising program from their perspective. For example, academic advisors could assess (a) the quality of administrative support they receive for advising, (b) the effectiveness of advisor orientation, training, and development they have received, (c) the usefulness of support materials or technological tools provided for them, (d) viability of the advisee-advisor ratio, and (e) the effectiveness of administrative policies and procedures. (Note: See Appendix B, pp. 18-19, for an instrument that has been designed to assess advisors’ perceptions of the quality of an advisement program and the effectiveness of administrative support for advising.)

Wes Habley, Director of Assessment Programs at American College Testing, notes that, “In many cases, advisors do not (are not encouraged to) share with decision-makers the information which would lead to program, personnel, or policy modifications. This is particularly important in the case of the increasing diversity of entering students, because academic advisors may be the first to recognize how this diversity may influence programs, personnel, and policies” (1995, p 12). Allowing advisors to assess administrative support for advising has the dual advantage of (a) providing feedback to the advising program

director/coordinator that may be used for program improvement (e.g., what advisors feel could be done to better support their quest for quality), and (b) actively involving advisors in the assessment process—sending them the explicit message that their input is valued, and reducing their defensiveness about being evaluated—because they become more than passive recipients or “objects” of evaluation, but also active “agents” in the assessment process.

ADVISOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

Advisors can also become more actively involved in the assessment process if they engage in self-assessment. This could be done in narrative form, perhaps as part of an advising portfolio that would include a personal statement of advising philosophy, advising strategies employed, advisor-development activities, etc. One potentially useful form of self-assessment would be for advisors to respond to their student evaluations. For instance, advisors might give their interpretations or explanations for ratings and comments received from their advisees, their thoughts about why they received high evaluations with respect to certain advising functions, and how they might address or redress areas in which they were perceived least favorably.

One interesting idea suggested in the scholarly literature on instructor evaluations that may be adopted as a form of advisor self-assessment is to have advisors complete the same evaluation instrument as their advisees, responding to it as they think their advisees respond. Consistencies and discrepancies that emerge between how the advisor and students respond to the evaluation instrument could provide advisors with valuable feedback for self-assessment. In particular, mismatches between advisor-advisee perceptions may create cognitive “dissonance” or “disequilibrium” in the minds of advisors that could stimulate productive changes in advising attitudes and behavior.

PEER ASSESSMENT OF ADVISING

Research in the area of faculty development strongly supports the effectiveness of peer feedback and collegial dialogue for promoting change in instructional behavior (Eble & McKeachie, 1985). Thus, it may be reasonable to expect that peer assessment and collegial feedback would work equally well with faculty advisors. Disappointingly, however, national survey research indicates that peer evaluation is the least frequently used method of advisor evaluation (Habley, 1993).

An advisor-evaluation instrument that is designed primarily for student evaluation and advisor self-assessment may also be utilized for *peer* assessment. For instance, teams of advisors could agree to review each other’s evaluations in a collegial fashion—for the mutually supportive purpose of improving their professional performance. Peer assessment could also be conducted in an anonymous or confidential manner, whereby each advisor receives the student evaluations of an anonymous colleague and provides that colleague with constructive feedback; at the same time, the advisor who reviews student evaluations from an anonymous colleague also receives feedback from a colleague. Thus, each advisor receives peer feedback from, and provides feedback to, an advising colleague.

The effectiveness of peer assessment stems in part from the fact that feedback from colleagues is perceived to be less threatening and more credible than feedback delivered by a superior or outside consultant—because it is feedback coming from someone “in the trenches”—someone performing the same duties, facing the same challenges, and working under the same constraints as the person being evaluated. However, despite the documented effectiveness of peer assessment and collegial dialogue for instructional development of faculty, national survey research indicates that peer assessment is the *least*

frequently used method of advisor evaluation (Habley, 1988).

ASSESSMENT OF ADVISING BY THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

In addition to student, peer, and self-assessment, the *program director* also has a role to play in the assessment process. Frost (1991) notes that comprehensive evaluation of an advisement program includes feedback from advising administrators, as well as students and individual advisors. It is the program director who is uniquely positioned to review all individual advisor evaluations and see the “big picture,” i.e., advisement as a total program. By detecting recurrent themes across individual advisors or academic department and noting trends that emerge when evaluations are aggregated and viewed as a composite, the director can obtain a panoramic perspective of the program’s overall effectiveness, moving advisor evaluations beyond the narrow scope of *personnel* evaluation and viewing them through the wider lens of *program* evaluation. For instance, the director could identify those items that tend to receive the lowest overall student ratings (aggregated across all advisors) and use these items to prioritize and focus discussion of program-improvement strategies with advisors. As Glennen and Faye (1995) that a college should, “Evaluate its program of advising in addition to evaluating individual advisors. Student evaluations are one source which can be used to do this. Taken together [student evaluations] give an overview of student opinion and of reaction to the advising they receive” (p. 73). This evaluation could be conducted in a collegial, non-threatening fashion by framing advising-improvement questions in terms of what “we” can do collectively, as a team, to improve the effectiveness of “our” program in areas where students perceive it least favorably.

The program director is also well positioned to identify “critical incidents” that could serve as qualitative data for diagnosing weaknesses or problems in the advising program (e.g., common sources or causes of student complaints and grievances, and recurrent reasons given by students for seeking a change of advisors.) Patterns emerging from such incidents may provide critical diagnostic data that can be used to target and focus advising-improvement efforts.

Furthermore, program directors are able of conducting *needs assessment*. To assess the needs of academic advisors, the following question, suggested by White, Goetz, Hunter, & Barefoot (1995), may efficiently and effectively serve this purpose: “What do advisors want to know about students, and how can this information be beneficial in an advising exchange?” (p. 27). Similarly, program directors can students’ advising needs. Upcraft, Srebniak, & Stevenson (1995) argue that, “The first component of a comprehensive academic advising assessment program is the assessment of first-year student advising needs. This type of assessment is important because inadequate academic advising is often a result of offering advising services which do not match student needs” (p. 142).

Lastly, program directors may play an important role in collecting data on how *frequently* and how *many* students use advising services. Such assessment “tracking” may reveal different patterns of program use by different student subpopulations (e.g., underrepresented versus majority students) and by students at different stages of the college experience (e.g., first-year versus second-year students). Such patterns may prove useful for identifying students who are being under-served and who might profit from more “intrusive” advisors or advising practices.

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Appendix A

**ADVISOR ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT
(STUDENT SURVEY)**

Please help us to improve the quality of academic advising at our college by completing this survey thoughtfully and honestly. We especially need and value your *written comments* below each item because these comments enable you to justify or explain your rating, and enable us to understand *why* you chose to rate the item as you did. Your written comments also provide advisors with the type of specific feedback they need to make improvements.

Your handwritten comments will be converted to typewritten form and presented to your advisor along with other students' comments, so your comments will remain confidential. Also, the questions about your age, gender, and class standing at the beginning of the survey are not meant to identify you personally; instead, they will be aggregated (combined) across different students and presented to your advisor in summary form—for the purpose of providing your advisor with feedback on how different student subgroups perceive the quality of advising they are receiving.

Thanks in advance for your help. We will read your comments carefully, consider them seriously, and make an earnest attempt to improve the quality of academic advising for all present and future students at our college.

Sincerely,
(signature of program director)
Director of Academic Advisement

STUDENT INFORMATION

Age: (1) < 25 (2) 25 or older
Gender: (1) male (2) female
Major: (1) decided (2) undecided
Class: (1) freshman (2) sophomore (3) junior (4) senior

Please use the following scale to rate items: (1) Disagree Strongly (D-ST)
 (2) Disagree Moderately (D-M)
 (3) Disagree Slightly (D-SL)
 (4) Agree Slightly (A-SL)
 (5) Agree Moderately (A-M)
 (6) Agree Strongly (A-ST)

(D-ST)	(D-M)	(D-SL)	(A-SL)	(A-M)	(A-ST)
1	2	3	4	5	6

My advisor:

1. **is hard to get in touch with.**
reason/explanation for rating:

2. **gives me as much time as I need when we meet.**
reason/explanation for rating:

3. **encourages me to come by for help.**
reason/explanation for rating:

4. **takes a personal interest in me.**
reason/explanation for rating:

5. encourages me to express my thoughts and feelings.

reason/explanation for rating:

6. is a good listener.

reason/explanation for rating:

7. gives me accurate information about course requirements.

reason/explanation for rating:

8. helps me understand why required courses are important for my professional development and future plans.

reason/explanation for rating:

9. considers my personal abilities, talents, and interests when advising me about courses or programs of study.

reason/explanation for rating:

10. has assisted me in developing a long-term education plan.

reason/explanation for rating:

11. helps me to connect with campus resources (learning center, counseling services, etc.)

reason/explanation for rating:

12. helps me make important educational decisions (selecting elective courses, exploring academic majors/minors, etc.)

reason/explanation for rating:

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

As an **advisee**, I :

13. made appointments to see my advisor.

reason/explanation for rating:

14. kept appointments I made with my advisor.

reason/explanation for rating:

15. was well prepared for my appointments.

reason/explanation for rating:

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

1. What are your advisor's **major strengths** or **best features**?

2. What could your advisor do to **improve** the quality of his/her advising?

3. Would you **recommend** your advisor to other students?

Appendix B

**ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT PROGRAM EVALUATION
(ADVISOR SURVEY)**

The Advisement Center is seeking your input on the academic advising process at our college, with the intent of strengthening and improving the program. Individual responses to this survey will be treated confidentially, and only general trends will be shared with the college community.

Please return this survey through campus mail *within three weeks* to the Advisement Center. Thanks for your time and effort; we hope to put the information to good use.

Number of Years You Have Been Advising at Marymount: _____

Number of Students You Presently Advise: _____

1. Which one of the following best characterizes *your attitude* toward advising?

- _____ I find advising pleasant and rewarding.
 _____ I have neither very positive nor very negative feelings toward advising.
 _____ I find advising unpleasant.

Reason/rationale for this response:

2. Which one of the following best captures your perception of *student attitudes* toward the advising process?

- _____ Students find the advising process pleasant and rewarding.
 _____ Students have neither very positive nor very negative feelings about the advising process.
 _____ Students find the advising process unpleasant and frustrating.

Reason/rationale for this response:

3. My academic advising experience is *best characterized* by the following (check as many as apply):

- _____ Students often do not keep appointments.
 _____ Students often do not come with any pre-planned schedule.
 _____ I give accurate advice and answers on curricular requirements.
 _____ I give accurate advice and answers to student questions relating to their options after graduation.

- ___ I serve as a resource person to my advisees on matters relating to choice of a college major.
- ___ I serve as a resource person to my advisees on matters relating to career choice.
- ___ I help my advisees to resolve their personal problems.
- ___ I refer my advisees to campus support services for assistance on matters that are beyond my expertise.
- ___ I encourage my advisees to become involved in campus life and off-campus community service.

4. Overall, how would you rate the academic advisement system at our college?

- ___ highly effective ___ moderately effective ___ slightly effective
- ___ highly ineffective ___ moderately ineffective ___ highly ineffective

Reason/rationale for this rating:

5. What do you find to be the most **rewarding** aspect of academic advising?

6. What do you find to be the most **frustrating** or **dissatisfying** aspect of academic advising?

7. In what ways might our academic advisement system be **improved**?

8. What type(s) of additional personal or institutional **support** do you think would make the advising process more *effective* and/or *satisfying* for advisors?

Final Comments/Suggestions/Recommendations: