

USC UNION
ACADEMIC ADVISING
MAY, 2001

Definition:

Academic advising is a long-term relationship between student and advisor that provides students with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities for completion of their degrees, programs, and/or career preparation and that helps students reach their educational goals. It consists of regular discussions of those goals, consideration of alternatives available to the student, the planning of appropriate course work, the monitoring of student progress, and referral to other campus and University resources. At USC, all full-time faculty and our Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs act as academic advisors. Students who declare an intention to pursue a particular baccalaureate major are assigned an appropriate advisor based on that major; undecided students are assigned an available advisor.

Given this system of advisement, it is important that all advisors be knowledgeable of all USC academic programs. With the help of the Vice Provost for Regional Campuses, the Associate Dean regularly distributes advisement materials from the colleges of USC Columbia and from the schools of USC Spartanburg. The Associate Dean also produces a local advisor's manual and leads periodic meetings devoted to advisement issues.

Indicators:

- Accuracy of advisement
 - a. Use of placement test results
 - b. Recognition of prerequisites
 - c. Progress toward academic goals
- Student satisfaction
- Alumni satisfaction
- Advisor satisfaction

Assessment Methods:

- Analysis of student academic records
- Student surveys
- Alumni surveys
- Advisor surveys
- Performance Indicators of Act 359

One of the outcomes of academic advisement is the selection of courses taken each semester. In a **transcript analysis**, we examine the transcript of each graduate and tabulate the courses taken in each of the four basic skills areas of writing, speech, mathematics, and computer science and in the liberal arts areas of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional areas such as business or nursing.

Various **surveys** are used to assess the quality of our academic advisement. Each spring, a sample of currently enrolled students are asked if they know who their advisors are and if they are satisfied with their availability. Every two years, as mandated by Act 255, we survey recent graduates in an effort to measure their satisfaction with their academic experiences at USCU. At three to five year intervals, a more comprehensive survey is distributed to students and alumni. We ask about the goals that students had and the problems that they encountered. We measure student satisfaction with many features of the educational program, academic support services, and administrative support services at USCU. We measure the degree to which USCU helped students reach various academic and personal development goals. We measure the availability of advisors, their attitude toward students, their knowledge and helpfulness, and how assertive advisors are in organizing meetings with advisees. We ask about the value of placement testing and the availability of appropriate courses. Faculty advisors are surveyed on the same topics.

Among the **Performance Indicators** of Act 359, Indicator 2.E is related to effective advisement. Here, we assess the availability of advisors outside the classroom using the first survey mentioned above.

Assessment Results:

TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS

An arbitrary sample of 25 students, tested and enrolled fall 2000, was examined to compare placement recommendations with actual courses enrolled.

Our English Placement Exam places entering students into ENGL 101I (“intensive” additional contact or lab time), 101, or 102. In this sample, 96% enrolled in the course indicated by the placement test. One student was placed into ENGL 101I but enrolled in ENGL 101. That student earned a grade of B in ENGL 101. Our Mathematics Placement Exam places students into MATH 111I, 111, 122, 115, or 141. In this sample, 84% enrolled in the course indicated by the placement test. Four students took courses other than those recommended, and all four received satisfactory grades. We do not formally place students into UNIV 101, although the Placement Policy in our Campus Handbook (<http://www.sc.edu/union/handbook.htm>) does state that incoming freshmen should take the course. In this sample, 36% enrolled in UNIV 101.

Focusing on the accuracy of our advising, we can see that five of these students (equals 20%) registered for courses other than those into which they were placed by testing, but all performed well in those courses.

In a second study, we asked, are we advising our students into well-rounded liberal arts programs of study? We tabulated a transcript analysis of our 1997 and our 2000 graduates (n=26 each year). First, we recorded the highest course taken in each of the four areas of writing, oral communication, mathematics, and computer literacy. The courses we offer include ENGL 101 and 102, THSP 140, and various courses in MATH,

STAT, and CSCE. Second, for the same students, we tabulated the number of courses taken, other than those listed above, in the major fields of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional areas, such as business or nursing.

TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS
Degree Recipients, spring and summer 1997 and spring 2000

Year	1997 n=26	2000 n=26
Percent with at least one course in writing	100%	100%
Percent with at least one course in speech	88%	92%
Percent with at least one course in mathematics	92%	92%
Percent with at least one course in computer science	100%	88%
Number of additional courses in humanities (mean)	6.6	6.5
Number of additional courses in social sciences (mean)	4.9	5.7
Number of additional courses in natural sciences (mean)	2.3	3.1
Number of additional courses in professional areas (mean)	3.8	2.1
Total hours at graduation	78	78

Both transcript analyses show that most of our students take speech, math, and computer science, even though all are not required for our associate degrees. Advisors are encouraging students to take courses in these basic, SACS-recognized areas. Secondly, we have good balance in other liberal-arts areas. Only one or two natural science courses are required for the associate degree, but the average taken is over three. About six each are taken in the humanities and the social sciences. Looking at the total hours earned, we might conclude that we should advise students to apply for their degree earlier, but many of these graduates were earning a second associate degree and so had accumulated a larger number of hours for legitimate reasons.

SPRING ADVISOR EVALUATION

Each spring, a representative sample of the student body is polled and asked three questions about their academic advisement. First, they are asked if they know who their advisors are. From 1998 through 2001, 95% reported that they did. In 2001, the figure was 92%. Second, they are asked if they are satisfied with the availability of their advisors. From 1998 through 2001, 87% reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied. In 2001, the figure was 89%. Finally, they are asked, if you are dissatisfied, what has been the problem? These comments suggested that advisors are sometimes hard

to contact, that advisors are not always familiar with other degree programs at other colleges, and that advisors are sometimes passive and do not assertively contact students.

STUDENT/ALUMNI SURVEY RESULTS

The same student/alumni survey has been used periodically over the last ten years. Baseline data were collected through 1997 (n = 114), and current data were collected in 1999 and 2000 (n = 105). In March 2001, the Faculty Advisory Committee discussed the above data, and at the same time, made use of our own experience as academic advisors.

In the recent student/alumni survey (n=105), when asked in a general way and in an open ended question about weaknesses at USCU and improvements that could be made, only one student (<1%) offered any criticism of our advisement. He or she said that scheduling a meeting was difficult. Most students and alumni reported in 1999/00 that both faculty and staff are supportive and helpful.

In the closed-ended questions that force the respondent to report a degree of satisfaction or of agreement with a statement, students are mostly satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of both faculty and of advisors. The average response in 1999/2000 was 3.3 for both, where 4 = very satisfied.

Students and alumni agree with various statements on the knowledge of their advisors and on the helpfulness of advisors, advisement, and even placement testing. For instance, "The attitude of the faculty toward students was friendly and supportive." received a score of 1.4 where 1=strongly agree and 2=somewhat agree. The usefulness of placement tests scored 1.8. Awareness of who the student's advisor was scored 1.4, advisor assertiveness scored 1.9, advisor knowledge scored 1.6, and helpfulness in discussing long-range plans scored 1.7.

Comparing survey results from 1997 and before to results from 1999/00, we see improvement in almost all areas. Students are more aware of their advisors (1.4 in 2000 vs. 1.6 in 1997), advisors are more effective in meeting with advisees (1.9 vs. 2.1), and advisors are more knowledgeable in their dealings with students (1.6 vs. 1.8). Students are even happier with the variety of evening and upper-level courses offered, although the item most criticized was the availability of upper-level courses (score of 2.2 where 2 = somewhat agree and 3 = somewhat disagree; score was 2.5 in 1997).

In 2000, USCU faculty and staff were asked the same questions as those asked of students and alumni. Faculty and staff were more critical of our advisement program than students are but the responses generally ran parallel to those by students and alumni.

The Faculty Advisory Committee discussed some additional difficulties or problems that they had encountered as advisors. Sometimes, students find it difficult to change advisors when they change majors, or they are not immediately aware of the procedure for doing so. Sometimes, students are unable to find their assigned advisor, and they would like to take care of a small piece of business with another advisor who is available

at that moment. Students should be encouraged to prepare better for advisement, by researching their chosen fields of study and institutions of transfer. Finally, sometimes when a student sees an advisor and is released to take certain courses, the student in fact registers for other courses than those that were approved.

Finally, during spring 2001, a separate alumni survey was distributed to 35 1997-98 graduates as a part of the statewide Effectiveness Program. Nine alumni responded for a response rate of 26%. The survey itself did not deal with academic advisement, but it did conclude with some open-ended questions that allowed these graduates to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of USCU. Eight of the respondents (89%) commented, without prompting, on the caring attitude of the faculty, their availability to students, and on their involvement and willingness to give time to students. These faculty are our academic advisors. Even the ninth respondent had nothing negative to say and concluded that USCU is a great school.

Use of Assessment Results:

In the transcript analysis described above, we see that five of the student sample (20%) registered for courses other than those into which they were placed by testing. However, all of these students did well in the courses they did take. These cases do not constitute advisement errors. We seem to be making good use of our placement test results, but we are able to use other sources of information to preregister students for the courses that will be most useful to them.

In all surveys (see above), students and alumni generally agree that advisors are knowledgeable, but there is always room for improvement. In the last few years, we have taken several steps to increase the amount of information available to advisor and advisee.

Our Academic Dean has expanded her reporting of information on new students to include not only placement test scores, but also high school exit test scores, SAT scores, high school math background, and other high school information. These data provide a firmer foundation for academic advisement during that first semester.

Often, at risk students will be admitted to USCU with the understanding that they will enroll in specific courses designed to foster success. Intensive sections of ENGL 101 and MATH 111 incorporate additional class time and increased contact with the instructors. THSP 140 teaches public communication, a basic skill for college success, and UNIV 101 teaches study skills, time management, goal setting, and many other success skills. The Student Affairs Committee has the authority to specify the courses in which an at-risk student may enroll, and any such limitations will be included in the letter of acceptance.

The Academic Dean regularly encourages advisors to obtain catalogs for area colleges, to call colleges to obtain necessary information, and to be aware of Internet versions of college catalogs. Appropriate Internet addresses have been publicized. We have also

developed a flyer, to be distributed to students, that clearly lists the steps of advisement and preregistration and gives these same Internet addresses for area colleges.

The Academic Dean has developed an Advisors' Notebook and USCS Change of Campus Guide that lists the specific USCU courses that should be taken in preparation for each USCS baccalaureate degree. This guide specifically shows how any student can earn an associate degree at USCU before changing to USCS.

We have developed a detailed, two-year schedule of classes for both our Union and Laurens sites. Many of our students have demanding family and job responsibilities, and these extended schedules allow them to plan ahead. Semester schedules are posted to the Web as soon as they are developed, and faculty are developing Web pages that present detailed information on specific courses. All of these efforts are designed to provide students and advisors with enough information to make sound advisement decisions.

One suggestion arising from the transcript analysis that might increase the usefulness of our UNIV 101 class is the addition of one line to our Placement Test Summary Sheet on which the Associate Dean could formally and specifically place a student into UNIV 101. Then, if the student fails a placement test, if SAT or high school exit scores suggest it, or if our Student Affairs recommend it upon admission, UNIV 101 placement could go on the sheet. It would remind advisors and give them a little more authority when they make recommendations to their advisees. This action is being considered at the present time.

Our assessment surveys tell us that our advisors are available and helpful to students. To maintain and even improve on this aspect of advisement, we have urged advisors to post and keep all office hours, and to encourage students in all classes to see their advisors for preregistration and to follow the published preregistration procedure. Part of the issue of advisor availability is that of student responsibility. Students must seek out their advisors during office hours. They must prepare for advisement with some research and goal setting of their own. The advisement/preregistration flyer mentioned above clarifies these steps and responsibilities.

The Academic Dean has begun to visit ENGL and UNIV classes at the beginning of each semester to discuss the advisement and preregistration procedure, to reinforce the ideas presented above, and to emphasize student responsibility in the process.

We have increased the availability of advisors during registration week by having all advisors present during the whole week, rather than having selected advisors on duty in rotation. In this way, specialists in specific areas, such as nursing or psychology, are always available.

One final observation in the area of academic advisement comes from an assessment of our assessment procedures. We note that we have a number of methods that assess campus advisement and measure overall effectiveness, but no method that assesses individual advisors. Occasionally, students will comment on a specific advisor and either praise or criticize him or her. The Academic Dean will discuss such feedback with the

individual faculty member, encouraging good performance and resolving specific problems, but this mechanism is unstructured. Just as we evaluate the teaching methods of specific instructors in various course evaluation procedures, we are beginning to discuss methods to evaluate the advisement of those same individual faculty members.