

ED 032 565

CG 004 364

By-Russeil, Norman K.

Academic Counseling--A Counseling Center Function.

American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington, D.C.

Pub Date Mar 69

Note-11p.; Paper presented at American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada, March 30--April 3, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.65

Descriptors-*Academic Achievement, Colleges, *College Students, *Counseling Centers, Counseling Services, *Counselor Functions, *Student Personnel Services, Student Welfare

Many colleges and universities are concerned about the academic advising (counseling) that their students receive and recognize the need for a better system. Presently, students can look for help to: (1) a fellow student, (2) a student advisor, (3) a faculty member, or (4) a counselor. The first two listed are used most often. These two, however, due to a lack of training, turnover, and student attitudes are not usually as effective as a counselor. Five reasons for using counselors for academic counseling are given, including the statement that counselors are people oriented--not subject oriented. Students cannot be compartmentalized in academic, emotional, personal, or vocational divisions. If the Counseling Center is to be the single office for all types of student help and information concerning academic and personal problems, then the doors must stand open to receive all students regardless of their needs. Thus, the Counseling Center will truly become the place to go for help. (Author)

ED0 32565

ACADEMIC COUNSELING--A COUNSELING CENTER FUNCTION

**Prepared for Presentation at
1969 American Personnel & Guidance Association
Convention**

Las Vegas, Nevada

March 30 - April 3

**By Norman K. Russell
Professor of Counseling
Assistant to the Vice President for Student Services**

**Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49001**

CG 004364

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

**THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE
PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION
POSITION OR POLICY.**

ACADEMIC COUNSELING--A COUNSELING CENTER FUNCTION

If one were to look for supporting material published in journals or books on the central idea of this paper "that academic counseling should be done in the Counseling Center," he would find little to help him. But let him look for material defending the faculty's position in academic counseling or even that of upperclassmen and he would find so much written that he could scarcely examine it all. Certainly the idea that trained counselors should help students with their academic problems is not new. What seems to be new is a paper exploiting the concept.

In 1829, Yale College was able to list all the courses it offered on a single page in its "catalog." In 1967, Michigan State University listed approximately 4,000 courses in its catalog. My own school, Western Michigan University, has in excess of 1,300 separate courses listed in its current catalog and 54 different curricula.

In addition to these separate courses and curricula, the concomitant requirements for graduation compound the problem of choice to a point where the old cliché--"If a student can read and understand the college catalog--he doesn't need college," begins to make sense. Speaking of college catalogs, let us dispose of them quickly as a real source for comfort and aid for the bewildered student in making intelligent academic decisions for his future. Certainly the catalog lists rules and regulations, curricula and course descriptions, the administration and faculty, scholarships and grants, but

these publications are notorious for the rules, regulations and directions that they do not print! I trust that, for the sake of this paper, you will allow me to rule out the catalog (official university bulletin) as a primary source of help for the student in need of academic counseling.

Where, then, does the harried student look for help in (a) choosing a curriculum and its courses, (b) in direction toward a vocation, (c) the daily problems of budgeting his time, and (d) his study habits? And he may also have some personal problem that he is or is not able to recognize. He can look for assistance to a fellow student, a faculty member or a counselor. So let us examine each of these and their potential for help.

A. J. Aschenbrenner, writing in the March 1963 Journal of College Student Personnel, makes the following statement--

"Students 'give advice' to other students, and they seek and take advice from other students."

It would seem sensible then to use this source of manpower to relieve the pressures brought on faculty and counselors by students seeking academic advice. And no doubt there are many upperclassmen who could and would do a capable job with appropriate training. I'll have more to say on this point later.

One asset of using students to help students is the rapport that can be easily generated between them. There is no "generation gap" here. But, Aschenbrenner also mentions that,

"Upperclassmen are not expected to counsel freshmen in depth. Rather, they are expected to recognize certain signposts and danger signals which indicate adjustment problems."

Who benefits most from students advising students? After several years of observing this type of operation, it is my opinion that the student doing the advising gains most. To be able to help others it is necessary that he

arm himself with many facts and sources of local information which can be used with quick recall. Thus equipped, he serves for one or two semesters. Then he graduates . . . leaving the job of replacing and training his successor to the university.

How are student advisors trained? The usual program is to have a series of meetings in the spring after they have been selected. Sometimes the student advisors work with the summer orientation program to gain additional knowledge. Some institutions publish "advisors manuals" to aid both students and faculty which contain much of the information needed to help place programs and arrange schedules compatible with curriculum requirements. There is often a short "on the job" training period before they are ready.

Many of us my age envy the one to one relationship established between the student advisor and the advisee. However good that may be, the inability to recognize basic or serious problems which often cripple a student in his academic achievement is a serious threat to any extensive use of upperclassmen even in a modified counseling capacity. From my personal observation, the expense in time and money of a perpetual training program and the limited real use of student advisors rules them doubtful in a serious academic counseling program.

Without question, the faculty dominate the academic advising programs at almost all colleges and universities. This, of course, is not only the easy way for the administration but also the traditional. At the outset of this paper I mentioned that much had been written supporting the role of the "faculty advisor." Indeed, much has and will be published supporting this method of getting academic information to the student. While I will not knock this traditional procedure, I shall attempt to offer a better one in its place.

The basic argument for the faculty doing the academic advising is that they are in the field, i.e., engineering, history, music, etc., and know the field thoroughly. While they may know the "field," not too many of them know much about the student. And what is more important, they are neither really interested in getting involved with the student nor his problems. Recently, our vice president for academic affairs told me that when he interviews prospective faculty members, they invariably ask two questions: "What do I have to do besides meet my classes?" and, "Are there any grants available for research in my field?"

A few years back I contacted several colleges and universities and asked how they accomplished their academic advising. As you might expect, most of them used faculty, a few students, and still fewer had specialists in this field. Northwestern University replied,

" . . . since we depend heavily on faculty for advisement, and since faculty are not always particularly adept in such procedures even if they are willing, there is surely grounds for some student complaint."

From Bowling Green University,

" Several years ago here at Bowling Green it was determined by the faculty that they would assume the responsibility for academic counseling: a score of students would be assigned to a faculty member and they would be expected to search (him) them out to discuss their academic problems. This number has gradually increased until now the academic counselor has more counselees than he can possibly help "

Illinois State University wrote:

"Formal academic advisement and program building is the responsibility of the department head, who in most cases has delegated this function to faculty members in the department.

It is my impression that our system works quite well for the small department I regret to say that it does not work well in those large departments where we have, for example, as many as 1200 students in one department. . . . It is pretty apparent, of course, that you cannot

dichotomize the academic problems with other problems present in individual students and so we find many of those not directly responsible for academic counseling are indeed doing academic counseling . . . "

The writer of the above then points out that the psychological counseling service, the directors and counselors in residence halls, and the counselors in the Dean of Men and Women's office all do academic advising.

Pennsylvania State University has a slightly different plan,

"The system at Penn State for advising and counseling involves both an academic advisor, usually in the department of the college in which the student is majoring, and supplements this with the services of a professionally trained counselor It was anticipated that all freshmen students would have both kinds of professional help "

Many other institutions responded with similar remarks. Each was concerned about the academic advising (counseling) that their students were receiving and each recognized the need for a better system.

Just a few years ago (1966) Josiah Dilley studied the availability and use of faculty advisors at the University of Wisconsin.* He discovered that only 50 percent of the faculty advisors were available at posted office hours and that when the faculty advisors were available, the students did not respond to the invitations to visit them. Dilley reports that his study showed the freshman student "generally views the faculty favorably and perceive them as being accessible but 50 percent had never had an out of class contact with a faculty member and the reason most students gave for not contacting the faculty member was that they had nothing to talk about (to the faculty member)." Continuing his research, Dilley discovered that they did indeed have something to talk about given the right person to talk to and that "Faculty members are not usually perceived as the 'right person'."

*Dilley, Josiah, Student-faculty noncommunication. The Journal of College Student Personnel, September 1967, 282-285.

Dilley also noted in Meyer's* study that when students were asked to whom they would turn for help, they responded as follows: Half said other students; a third, a quiz or lab instructor, fewer than one-sixth, a faculty advisor; and still fewer, a professor who teaches their class. Thus, another indication of the reluctance of the student to approach a faculty member.

No one can advocate the retiring of all teaching faculty from advising students. It is too widespread and ingrained in our system of higher education to recommend any wholesale change at this time. Earlier we mentioned one reason for using members of the teaching faculty for academic counseling. Others are: Their frequent and regular contact with the student, and the large number from which to choose. But even though there are good reasons for using teaching faculty for advising students, the fact that so many do not want the job and make it evident makes one wonder about the future of this system.

There surely must be better ways of advising students and I would like to offer one. I am advocating a plan to put academic advising or counseling in the Counseling Center. We have discussed briefly students doing academic counseling with students and faculty counseling students, so let us consider counselors doing academic counseling with students.

Why should we use trained counselors for academic counseling: May I suggest the following reasons:

1. They are people oriented--not subject matter oriented.
2. They have no vested interest except the mental health and academic progress of the student.
3. They are hired to devote their entire work day to counseling.

*Meyer, E. E., A study of student-instructor relationship at the college level. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1965.

4. They can be "total practitioners."

5. They can detect the "ruse" used to make the appointment.

Consider for a moment, if you will, the training of a counselor. Most of them have had some teaching experience. They have moved to counseling to be more help to students than they could have been as their teacher. Their desire to help has led them to this area of advanced training from a beginning with "Introduction to Guidance Services" to advance practicum sessions. The whole thrust has been aimed at learning how to listen, to react, to interact and to guide. This training has not been designed to prepare them for psychological and emotional problems only but it has been designed to help them help the client in any problem area. The counselors' education is "people" centered, or in our special case here "student" centered.

The counselor has no vested interest in the history department, the music department or the industrial arts department. He can speak to the student in an unbiased manner in any subject area. He would expect each academic department to be interested in promoting itself and most of us know full well that they do. But the faculty advisor's enthusiasm for the subject that he teaches often gets in his way when he is attempting to advise students concerning a "major in mathematics" when his discipline is sociology. The counselor is freed from this tie because his allegiance is to the student and not to the academic department.

Full-time counselors are just that. Part-time faculty advisors are trapped between their teaching and advising. Many of those who have this assignment devote as little time to it as possible. Posted office hours are often meaningless as we noted in Dilley's study. Those faculty who do a

sincere job of advising are actually working many more hours than a colleague with no advisees. Consider, for example, a teacher whose assignment is half-time teaching (six hours) and half-time advising (15-20 hours per week). He sees his fellow instructor responsible only to his classes, 12 to 14 hours per week. If our teacher-advisor is sincere and honest in his half-time advising, he will be busy indeed! And he looks with some misgivings at his fellow instructors who have no advising to do.

The counselor has no teaching assignment. He is full time on the one job. His appointments are known ahead of time and he has at his disposal all needed records. The counselor is capable of discussing intelligently the meanings of aptitude, achievement, and intelligence tests. He can explain, when needed, the vocational interest inventories. Many counselors know that academic and vocational decisions are often made on psychological and emotional reasons. He is able to give each counselee the time needed without having to schedule around a teaching assignment.

Because of his background and education, the counselor is equipped to work intelligently with almost any problem presented to him by the student. It is much easier to educate a counselor in the academic procedures of the university than to educate a teacher to the counseling profession. Not all problems of an academic nature are that. When a student cannot study it might be his lack of interest in his chosen curriculum or it might be a home problem, a girlfriend, a loss of self confidence or any number of other problems. The faculty advisor who suddenly finds himself confronted with a student who has a serious personal problem must make an immediate decision--to whom do I send this student for help on this problem? There is no need for a counselor, who is able to work in both the academic area and personal

area of student problems, to be placed in a position of referring his client to another person for help.

Having worked in this type of a Counseling Center for a number of years we have come to learn that the expressed reason for a meeting with a counselor may be a course or curriculum concern, but sometimes it borders on a personal or emotional crisis. The avenue is wide that allows the student to enter the Counseling Center with a surface reason of academic help but desperately needing psychological counseling.

Let me support my above statements with some data from our Counseling Center. During the 1967-68 academic year, two 15-week semesters and two 7 1/2-week sessions:

Number of Counseling Interviews
(Booked 30 minute and 60 minute)

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Academic	4,756 (44.7%)	5,886 (55.3%)	10,642 (70%)
Personal	1,838 (41.6%)	2,593 (58.4%)	<u>4,431 (30%)</u>
Grand Total			15,073 (100%)

Our Counseling Center is staffed by 14 full-time counselors. This includes the director. In addition, there are four half-time counselors, four graduate assistants and eleven graduate and undergraduate volunteers.

The total number of interviews is slightly higher than the year before. Once again, the increase was achieved without significantly expanding the professional staff. The value of our graduate assistants is demonstrated in this increase, especially in the area of academic counseling, where they provide outstanding assistance during periods of peak activity.

May I also add that during this past year we received several letters from other institutions inquiring about the exact details of our method of combining academic and personal counseling.

The counselor who truly wants to help students must accept them as he finds them at the university. Students cannot be compartmentalized in academic, emotional, personal or vocational divisions. Each is a whole person with concerns that overlap in all these areas. If the Counseling Center can be the single office for all types of student help and information concerning academic and personal problems, then the doors stand open to receive these students regardless of their need. They will encounter here counselors skilled to work in both academic and personal areas. Thus, the Counseling Center becomes the place to go for help.