

Students' beliefs and attitudes about a business school's academic advising process

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ABSTRACT

In Study One, 14 business majors in the School of Business were interviewed about their academic advising experiences. Using the data obtained, a paper-and-pencil questionnaire was constructed for Study Two and administered to 406 senior business students. The questionnaire elicited students' attitudes toward and beliefs about a number of procedures relevant to the academic advising process. The procedures included the number of advising sessions a semester, the time spent during each advising session, the quality of advice provided, the students' comfort level and their personal relationships with the advisor, the advisors' helpfulness, the availability of the advisor for meetings, the degree to which the advisors were organized, and whether advisors answered their questions. The questionnaire also elicited responses about students' desire for specific categories of information and whether advisors provided it. The categories included liberal studies, transfer classes, majors and minors, graduation requirements, electives, internships, careers, and personal issues.

Keywords: Advising business students, business students' attitudes, business students beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Student retention rates may depend upon quality academic advising, especially during the freshman and sophomore years (Beal & Noel, 1980; Crockett, 1985; Gordon, Habley & Assoc., 2000; Tinto, 1987). But what do students want from their advisors? What do they receive? And how do they evaluate what they receive compared to what they want? The two studies described here examine School of Business students' beliefs about and attitudes toward the academic advising process.

METHOD: STUDY ONE

One member of the research team with training and experience in interviewing conducted ninety-minute interviews with seven men and seven women students randomly selected from the senior level business policy courses in a midwestern university's School of Business. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and the data examined for themes and patterns.

The respondents possessed a mean age of 23.8 and mode of 22. Their majors included accounting, business administration, finance, marketing, management, and international business. Of the volunteers, eight entered the university as freshmen and six transferred in from another school.

Only two respondents reported one advisor each during their time at the university while four had two, three, and four advisors each. Note that students are not assigned a School of Business faculty advisor until admitted to the business program, usually during the junior year. Freshmen and sophomores who declared a business major are provided a staff advisor in the Dean's office. The business administration majors remain with the staff advisor after admission to the School of Business while management, marketing, finance, international business and accounting majors are assigned faculty advisors. The results of the study have been reported in Kukowski, Dexter, & Alexander (2002, 2003), Dexter, Kukowski, & Alexander (2002), and Alexander, Kukowski, & Dexter (2003a, 2003b).

FINDINGS: STUDY ONE

How much time did students spend with their advisors? The responses ranged from a few seconds to a half-hour with little consistency among respondents. How much time did students want with their advisors? The responses varied from a few minutes to a half-hour.

How did respondents feel about the amount of time spent with their advisors? They did not like waiting 15 minutes or more for their advisors to finish with a previous appointment, especially when the previous student was not prepared for the appointment. But they liked the personal attention received from advisors.

How many times a semester do students want to meet with advisors? Some students found that meeting once a semester was sufficient. Others met once a semester but preferred more frequent meetings. They felt they couldn't get to know their advisors in just one meeting a semester and they needed more guidance than one meeting would provide.

What did respondents believe about meeting three or more times a semester? Some students preferred multiple meetings each semester. On the other hand, some believed that multiple meetings were a waste of time.

What do advisors need to know? Respondents wanted their advisors to know and understand both the liberal studies requirements and those classes necessary to complete the major. They didn't want to come up short on required liberal arts or major courses and therefore unable to graduate.

What did the advisors know? Most students believed their advisors possessed knowledge of the liberal arts and major requirements. However, one person noted that an advisor lacked adequate knowledge of the major requirements. .

Do students prepare for advising sessions? Many students prepared trial schedules prior to their advising sessions. They set up preliminary schedules and backup schedules in the event of closed classes or recommendations from advisors. They believed that preparation made the sessions go smoothly.

Though students prepared their own schedules, some wanted their advisors to check them over. They wanted their advisors to reinforce the fact that they were on the right track.

Do respondents need advising assistance? Some respondents needed no advising assistance. They knew the classes they needed to take, the classes offered that semester, and did not need help with schedules

Why did students seek new advisors? First, students obtained new advisors when they switched majors. Some entered as undeclared or listed a major they later wanted to change. When they switched majors, they changed to advisors teaching in that major. They believed the new advisors would possess more knowledge about the course requirements and they wanted to make sure they had all the classes needed to graduate

Respondents also changed advisors when their previous advisors quit the university, took leaves, went on sabbaticals, or retired. In these instances the department reassigned advisors and informed students of their new advisors.

The respondents offered suggestions to improve advising. First, they believed advisors should spend more, rather than the same or less, time with their advisees. They thought 10 minutes was not enough time but 30 minutes would be sufficient. They suggested that advisors should set up 15 to 30 minute blocks of advising time but permit students to sign up for the amount of time they wanted.

Advisors should be better prepared and trained. Professors who advise students should attend workshops to learn about the resources available to students, what they need to know, and the answers to frequently asked questions.

Students prefer to interact with their advisors on a personal level. Advisors should know their advisees' names and their hometowns. They should make small talk with their advisees and put them at ease during advising sessions.

Students prefer one, rather than several, advisors. But they knew that some faculty members do not like advising. They did not want advisors who disliked advising students.

Most students prefer private advising sessions. That is, they prefer one-to-one advising sessions rather than group sessions.

METHOD: STUDY TWO

Using the themes and patterns from the first study, the investigators constructed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire designed to elicit beliefs about and attitudes toward the advising process. First, it asked for responses to 48 belief statements on a five-point scale with "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" at the endpoints. It then listed 22 attitude statements on a five-

point scale from “very good” to “very bad.” Last was a set of demographic questions. Because of small cell sizes, “strongly agree” and “agree” were collapsed into one category termed, “agree” during data analysis. And “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were collapsed into “disagree.” In like manner, “very good” and “good” became “good,” and “very bad” and “bad” became “bad.”

Before completing a questionnaire, each subject who agreed to participate read and signed a disclaimer explaining the purpose of the study and directing the individual to turn in a blank questionnaire if he/she did not wish to participate. The subjects did not identify themselves on the questionnaire.

All seniors enrolled in the School of Business must successfully complete business policy as a prerequisite for graduation. Questionnaires were therefore administered to all students taking the business policy course. Over a three-year period, a total of 406 questionnaires were completed and analyzed.

Most respondents (87%) fell between the ages of 21 and 25 inclusive with the remaining a year younger or a year or more older. New students can enter the university either fall or spring semesters. Most (81%) first enrolled at the university for the fall semester while only 12% first enrolled for winter semester; the remaining did not answer. The majority (55%) enrolled as freshmen while 15% first enrolled as sophomores, 25% as juniors and 5% as seniors.

Reflecting the university population, 52% of the subjects were female and 47% male with 1% no answer. The subjects’ majors included business administration (31%), accounting (19%), finance (18%), marketing (13%), management (11%), international business (3%), and other (5%).

How many advisors did the respondents see over their college/university career? Only 10% kept one advisor throughout their college careers. Most (39%) had two, 32% three, and 13% four. When asked to indicate the number of business faculty advisors they had, 38% listed one, 46% had two, and 11% were assigned three over their last two years of university work.

FINDINGS: STUDY TWO

How many advising sessions a semester are sufficient? As seen in Table 1 ($p < .001$, $df=4$), more than half of the respondents (56%) agreed that one advising session a semester was sufficient. And 57% rated one advising session good. As for two advising sessions a semester, the responses were split almost evenly between agree and disagree (38% vs. 37%). But only one-fifth (22%) rated two sessions negatively. For three advising sessions, very few students believed three were needed (8%) and few rated three sessions positively (14%). It seems that students prefer one advising session a semester. And many would likely agree with a respondent from Study One who thought three sessions a waste of time.

[Insert Table 1 here]

How much time did the students want during each advising session? From Table 2 ($p < .001$, $df=4$) we see that almost three-fourths (71%) spent 10 to 15 minutes with an advisor. And a slight majority (55%) liked 15 minute advising sessions.

Less than a third of the subjects (29%) spent 30 minutes with their advisors but half (50%) had positive feelings about 30 minute sessions. Almost two-thirds (61%) agreed that their

advisors gave them all the advising time they needed and a full 66% liked receiving all the time they needed.

Did the respondents want more time with their advisors? About a third agreed (34%), another third disagreed (33%), and another third (33%) indicated neither.

Apparently, 10 to 15 minutes with an advisor is acceptable to the majority of the respondents. On the other hand, even though half liked 30 minute advising sessions, not many spent 30 minutes with their advisors. And a good many not only took all the time they needed, but they also liked taking all the time they needed whatever that time might be. Thus the data tend not to support the qualitative study results that found students generally want more time with an advisor.

[Insert Table 2 here]

What was the quality of the advice received? From Table 3 ($p < .001$, $df = 4$), about three-fourths (72%) of the subjects agreed that advisors provide good advice. And 81% disagreed that advisors provide bad advice. Also, almost none held negative attitudes toward the advice received while (73%) possessed positive attitudes. That is, respondents believed they received good advice from their advisors and they liked the advice received.

[Insert Table 3 here]

What is the nature of the relationship between faculty advisors and advisees? As seen in Table 4 ($p < .001$, $df = 4$), an advisee's relationship with his/her advisor was examined on five levels. More than three-fourths of the respondents (77%) felt comfortable with their advisors. And 86% believed their advisors were friendly while 81% said advisors made them feel welcome during advising sessions. But slightly less than half (48%) believed their advisors knew them well. When the question was phrased in the negative, about half disagreed (51%) that their advisors didn't know them well while 30% agreed.

Study One found that students want to interact with advisors on a personal level. Study Two generally supported this finding. Subjects felt comfortable talking with their advisors, they found their advisors friendly, and they felt welcome in their advisors' offices. Note, though, that some believe their advisors do not know them well.

[Insert Table 4 here]

Were advisors helpful and were they available to their advisees? Exactly three-fourths of the respondents (75%) said their advisors were helpful during their meetings while almost that many (70%) held positive attitudes toward the help received (see Table 5, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). Also, 73% believed their advisors were available to meet with them and they liked having advisors available to meet with them (70%). When phrased in the negative, 84% disagreed that their advisors were not available. In sum, students believed advisors were helpful and available and they held positive attitudes toward both situations.

[Insert Table 5 here]

Were the advisors organized when students met with them? From Table 6 ($p < .001$, $df = 4$), almost two-thirds (63%) believed their advisors were organized and only one-fifth (21%) believed their advisors were unorganized. However, when asked if their advisors should be better prepared for the advisees' visits, the responses were split with slightly more than a third (38%) agreeing. The results here appear contradictory. Most students believe their advisors are organized, yet many also want their advisors to be even more organized and prepared. The latter finding coincides with respondents' recommendations from Study One.

[Insert Table 6 here]

Did advisees want advice on the liberal studies classes to take? Less than half (44%) wanted advice from their advisors on liberal studies classes to take (Table 7, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). When asked if their advisors went over the liberal studies requirements, slightly more than half (53%) answered in the affirmative. These findings tend to support the qualitative data. Students need to know the liberal arts requirements. If they don't possess this information prior to an advising session, they need the information from their advisors. Many, however, undoubtedly possess the information prior to the advising session and therefore do not want it.

[Insert Table 7 here]

Did advisees want advice on the course of study to major in and did they receive it? Less than one-third (27%) wanted advice on the major to take though about one-third (31%) received such advice (Table 8, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). For advice on minors, about one-fourth (27%) wanted advice though almost one-half (46%) did not receive advice on a minor. Majors and minors appear not high on the list of things to discuss with advisors.

[Insert Table 8 here]

Did advisees want advice on the requirements needed to graduate? Most of the respondents (85%) wanted such advice and most (77%) received it (Table 9, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). Almost three-fourths of the respondents (74%) wanted advice on their progress toward graduation. And half received help with their graduation applications. Students appear goal oriented; they want to know the courses to take for graduation and seek the information out. They also want information on their progress and solicit that as well.

[Insert Table 9 here]

Are internships important to the students? Many (59%) wanted advice on internships, but less than one-fourth (23%) of the respondents received internship information from their advisors (Table 10, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). A staff member, rather than faculty, performs the internship function for the School of Business and that may account for the number who did not receive internship advice. That is, students will visit their advisors to obtain registration authorization. However, they must make a special effort to see the internship coordinator and many do not make that effort. In general, then, more students want internship information than receive it.

[Insert Table 10 here]

Do students want career advice from their advisors? As seen in Table 11 ($p < .001$, $df = 4$), more than half (59%) of the respondents wanted career advice from their advisors but slightly more than one-fourth (27%) received it. About half (51%) did not receive any career advice. Students want career information from their advisors, but are not receiving it.

[Insert Table 11 here]

Do advisees want or need advice of a personal nature? Almost two-thirds of the advisees (65%) needed no advice on personal issues while less than 10% needed such advice (Table 12, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). But one-quarter of the advisees (25%) received advice on personal issues. And 22% liked the advice with 72% checking neither. Students believe they do not need personal advice from an advisor, though some receive it.

[Insert Table 12 here]

In general, did the advisees like or dislike their advisors? Almost three-fourths (73%) rated their advisors good (Table 13, $p < .001$, $df = 4$). Less than 10% held negative attitudes toward their advisors.

[Insert Table 13 here]

CONCLUSIONS

How many advising sessions a semester are sufficient? Advisees prefer one, though some need two. A School of Business faculty member who performs academic advising might want to allocate several days before registration for advising and make subsequent appointments with those advisees who indicate a need for another session.

How much time should a faculty advisor allocate to each advisee? Most students spend about 15 minutes although many want more time. Rather than allocate advising sessions in 15 minute increments, the advisor might vary the times; those advisees who want more time can sign up for longer periods.

Students rate highly the advice given by faculty advisors. All faculty members have access to advisor training sessions and the university especially encourages new hires to take advantage of them. The training undoubtedly improves the quality of the advice provided.

What is the nature of the relationship between advisors and advisees? The data indicate a positive relationship. As long as faculty advisors act friendly and make their advisees feel comfortable and welcome, students will want to come in for advising sessions. Whether knowing an advisee well is a necessary component of the relationship is not well understood; in most cases it might not be possible.

Were advisees helpful and available to their advisors? Those students surveyed provided affirmative answers. These two characteristics seem key components of the advisor's role. Unless advisors make themselves available, students can't find them. And unless helpful, advisees are not motivated to seek them out. Also, the number of sessions most likely becomes irrelevant and relationships undoubtedly decline.

Were the advisors organized? The advisees believed their advisors were organized. Organization is another key component because it renders the advising sessions more productive and makes more than one session unnecessary.

Did advisees want advice on those liberal studies classes needed for graduation? Many do not though more than half receive it anyway. Because a student cannot graduate with liberal studies requirements unfulfilled, wise advisors review the information during advising sessions.

Did advisees want guidance on majors? In the present study, many did not. Because we surveyed only individuals admitted to the School of Business, they had chosen their majors. Therefore, most students' faculty advisors need not discuss majors or minors.

Did advisees want advice on the requirements needed to graduate? They wanted advice on graduation requirements and on their progress toward graduation, and they received it. Of all the advice possible, progress toward graduation seems most salient to students. Effective advisors will review each advisee's progress during each advising session.

Are internships important to students? Many students want advice on internships but few received it from faculty advisors. Because a member of the dean's office staff handled internships, faculty members were rarely involved. However, faculty advisors need close contact with the internship advisor. Many employers value internships and like to see them on their applicants' resumes. Advisors, then, might make some effort to inform students of internships and encourage them to visit the internship advisor.

Do students want career advice? Many do but few receive it from advisors. Faculty advisors can provide career advice in two ways. First, they can access occupational data from the U.S. government and pass it along to students. Second, they can urge advisees to utilize the career services staff and recruiting activities provided on campus.

Do advisees want personal advice? They neither want such advice nor do they receive it. Business faculty members usually do not possess the training required to adequately provide counseling on personal matters. Instead, when advice on problematical personal issues is needed, they can direct advisees to the campus counseling center.

Do advisees like their advisors? They do. Almost three-quarters held positive attitudes toward their advisors while only a few possessed negative feelings.

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Table 1
Number of Advising Sessions Wanted a Semester (%)

	One	Two	Three
Agree	56	38	8
Neither agree nor disagree	18	25	23
Disagree	26	37	69
Good	57	45	14
Neither good nor bad	23	33	35
Bad	20	22	51

Table 2
Time Spent During Each Advising Session (%)

	10-15 minutes	30 minutes	All the time I need	Want more time
Agree	71	29	61	34
Neither agree nor disagree	7	1	21	33
Disagree	22	70	18	33
Good	55	50	66	
Neither good Nor bad	26	35	24	
Bad	19	15	10	

Table 3
Quality of Advising Received (%)

	Gave good advice	Gave bad advice	Attitude toward advice
Agree	72	2	
Neither agree nor disagree	18	17	
Disagree	10	81	
Good			73
Neither good nor bad			24
Bad			3

Table 4
Relationship with Advisor (%)

	Comfortable with advisor	Friendly advisor	Makes me feel welcome	Knows me well	Doesn't know me well
Agree	77	86	81	48	30
Neither agree nor disagree	10	7	11	14	19
Disagree	13	7	8	38	51

Table 5
Advisor Helpful and Available (%)

	Helpful	Available	Not Available
Agree	75	73	04
Neither agree nor disagree	16	10	12
Disagree	9	17	84
Good	70	70	
Neither good nor bad	22	20	
Bad	8	10	

Table 6
Advisor Organized or Unorganized (%)

	Advisor organized	Advisor unorganized	Be better prepared
Agree	63	21	38
Neither agree nor disagree	18	21	32
Disagree	19	58	30

Table 7
Liberal Studies Advice (%)

	Want advice	Reviewed requirements
Agree	44	53
Neither agree nor disagree	31	20
Disagree	25	27

Table 8
Advice on Majors and Minors (%)

	Want advice on majors	Received advice on majors	Wanted advice on minors	Received advice on minors
Agree	27	31	27	19
Neither agree nor disagree	31	31	35	35
Disagree	42	38	38	46

Table 9
Advice on Graduation Requirements (%)

	Want advice	Received advice	Want advice on progress	Received help with grad app
Agree	85	77	74	50
Neither agree nor disagree	8	10	20	19
Disagree	7	13	6	31

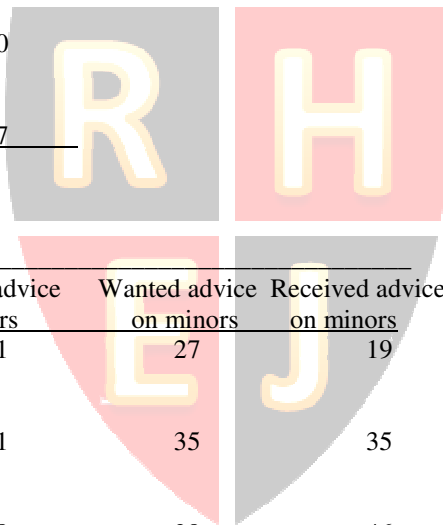


Table 10
Advice on Internship Opportunities (%)

	Want internship information	Received internship information
Agree	59	23
Neither agree nor disagree	26	30
Disagree	15	47

Table 11
Advice on Careers (%)

	Want advice	Received advice
Agree	59	27
Neither agree nor disagree	24	22
Disagree	17	51

Table 12
Advice on Personal Issues (%)

	Need advice	Received advice
Agree	9	25
Neither agree nor disagree	26	23
Disagree	65	52
Good		22
Neither good nor bad		72
Bad		6

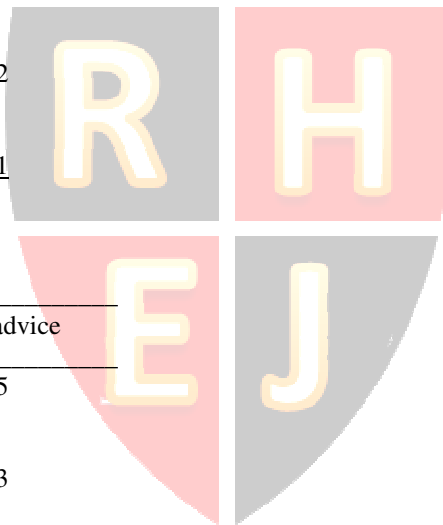


Table 13
Rate My Advisor (%)

<u>My advisor Is</u>	
Good	73
Neither good nor bad	19
<u>Bad</u>	<u>8</u>

