

A CONVERSATION: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ADVISING

Utilizing research from the NACADA Journal Volume 37(2) 2017

“Qualitative Analysis of Student Perceptions:

“Some Advisors Care. Some Don’t.””

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STUDY COMPLETED BY:

RUTH V. WALKER, MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

ALEXANDRA I. ZELIN, THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA

CAROLYN BEHRMAN, THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

RACHEL STRNAD, THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

Conversation Led By:

Kathryn Marzec, Senior Academic Advisor, Niagara University

Dr. Agnieszka Zak-Moskal, Director of Student Success, Villa Maria College

Maria Brickhouse, Coordinator, Academic Center for Excellence,
Arthur O. Eve Educational Opportunity Program, Buffalo State College

Susan Stiner, Academic Adviser, Academic Commons, Buffalo State College

Dr. Heather Maldonado, Assistant Provost for Academic Success, Buffalo State College

METHOD

- 24 story circles at a large state institution designed to support freshmen.
 - 24 individual interviews with students recruited from story circles.
 - 162 freshmen from 10 campus advising centers.
 - Types of centers:
 - 2 centers for freshmen who were required to complete a preparatory program before admission to the colleges. Admitted with an emergent status.
 - Honors students were housed in one advising center
 - Five department based centers for declared majors such as engineering, business, education...
 - 2 students utilized advising services with military services or athletics
- ❖ All participants received a gift card and some also received class credit.

PROCEDURE

- Phase 1: Story Circle Approach
 - Each participant had 3 minutes to share a personal advising experience.
 - Group discussion followed: participants served as co-analysts by “identifying common and divergent themes from the stories” (Walker, Zelin, Behrman, Strad, 2017, p. 45).
- Phase 2: Individual Interviews
 - Average length of interviews were 15 minutes (6 to 42 minute range)
 - Private location
 - Asked about:
 - High school guidance counselor experiences
 - Advisement expectations prior to starting university
 - University advising experiences
 - Intention of continued enrollment at the university

RESULTS

Four Themes Identified as described by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (p. 45)

1. High school guidance counselor roles and roles of college academic advisors: student challenges differentiating between the two.
2. Advisor communication: positive and negative aspects.
3. Desire for a relationship with the advisor.
4. Advisor accessibility.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GUIDANCE COUNSELING AND ACADEMIC ADVISING

as explained by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 45-46)

Guidance Counseling Experiences	Advisement Expectations Coming into College
<p>Some students noted guidance provided more than scheduling, grade reviews, and college planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assistance applying for scholarships.• Assistance applying for jobs.• Provided some academic support.• Discussed personal and academic concerns.• Developed personal relationships• Worked with the same counselor.	<p>Expectations varied coming into college:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some expected to be a “number” and that it would be difficult to develop a relationship because they expected their advisor to have many more students than their guidance counselor.• Others expected advisors to help schedule classes, choose a major, suggest resources, be supportive and answer questions.• Some expected to develop a personal relationship and have personal attention.• Expected to have a consistent advisor.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ADVISOR COMMUNICATION

as described by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 46).

- Appreciated receiving pamphlets, handouts, supplemental material, flowcharts, etc.
- Discussing the path to graduation and the classes need to stay on track. (freshmen surveyed)
- Long range plans preferred rather than semester to semester conversations.
- Delivery of information in a personal and caring way resulted in positive perception of advisor communication.
- Students taught how to register and to follow a long range plan did not feel the need for extra meetings.
- Appreciated an advisor calling someone to get correct information to share with a student.

AREAS TO IMPROVE ADVISOR COMMUNICATION

as explained by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 46-48)

- “Lack of understanding of the general advising process in college created a major roadblock for some advisees” (p. 46).
 - Students didn’t understand when to go or who to see.
- “semester-to-semester planning as a source of frustration and anxiety” (p. 47) for 25% or the participants.
 - Advising only 12 credits and leaving a student behind
 - Lack of clear communication on the long-range plan for courses. Clearly citing what to take when and why.
 - Inconsistently using supplemental materials.
- Student confusion resulted when inconsistent information was communicated between advising centers. Especially when scheduling to keep students on track for graduation.
 - “eroded student confidence in advising and risked damaging relations between the students and the university” (p.47).

AREAS TO IMPROVE ADVISOR COMMUNICATION

as explained by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 46-48)

- Listening and following through.
 - Concerns raised in a meeting by the student not addressed.
 - Some not feeling like they had a say in their courses or the way they were scheduled. (ex. too much or too little time between classes)
- Not sharing information – participants indicated feeling that advisors were not sharing all available options to students.
 - ex. Students advised in the honors center could go to the advising center associated with their major, but were not encouraged to go.

AREAS TO IMPROVE ADVISOR COMMUNICATION

as explained by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 46-48)

- Advisement across multiple advising centers: students expressed concerns with the need to make separate appointments with different areas.
 - Ex. Lack of connectedness between double major advisors.
 - The need to go to multiple offices to get signatures to add classes was surprising to participants.
- “Students attributed the advisors’ poor communication to three different reasons: (a) Advisors are poorly trained or resourced, and therefore, do not have the necessary knowledge to communicate with them; (b) advisors are knowledgeable but choose not to share information because of time constraints or disinterest in the students; and (c) the poor organization of the advising system interferes with successful communication” (p.48).

ADVISOR-ADVISEE RELATIONSHIP

as described by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 48-49)

- *Some students in the study were comfortable with a superficial advisor relationship, while others expected a close connection.*
- **Satisfaction** with advisement was related to developing a relationship.
 - Advisor knows who the student is (beyond the name).
 - Advisor tailors meetings to student interests and is knowledgeable about student needs.
 - Advisor communicates politely and is invested in the student's success.
 - Extra effort to reach out: "She sent me an e-mail that was asking me why I was taking classes that weren't in my major... the fact that she looked into that, made me feel very important" (p.49).

ADVISOR-ADVISEE RELATIONSHIP

as described by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 48-49)

- **Dissatisfaction** with advisement was particularly related to a lack of connection.
 - Advisor does not know the student: “I just have the same advisor I did when I went for my freshman orientation, and this lady has yet to remember my name. She talks at me, not to me...” (p. 48).
 - Felt they were just a name or a number. Met with multiple advisors.

POINTS ON ADVISOR ACCESSIBILITY

as described by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 49-50)

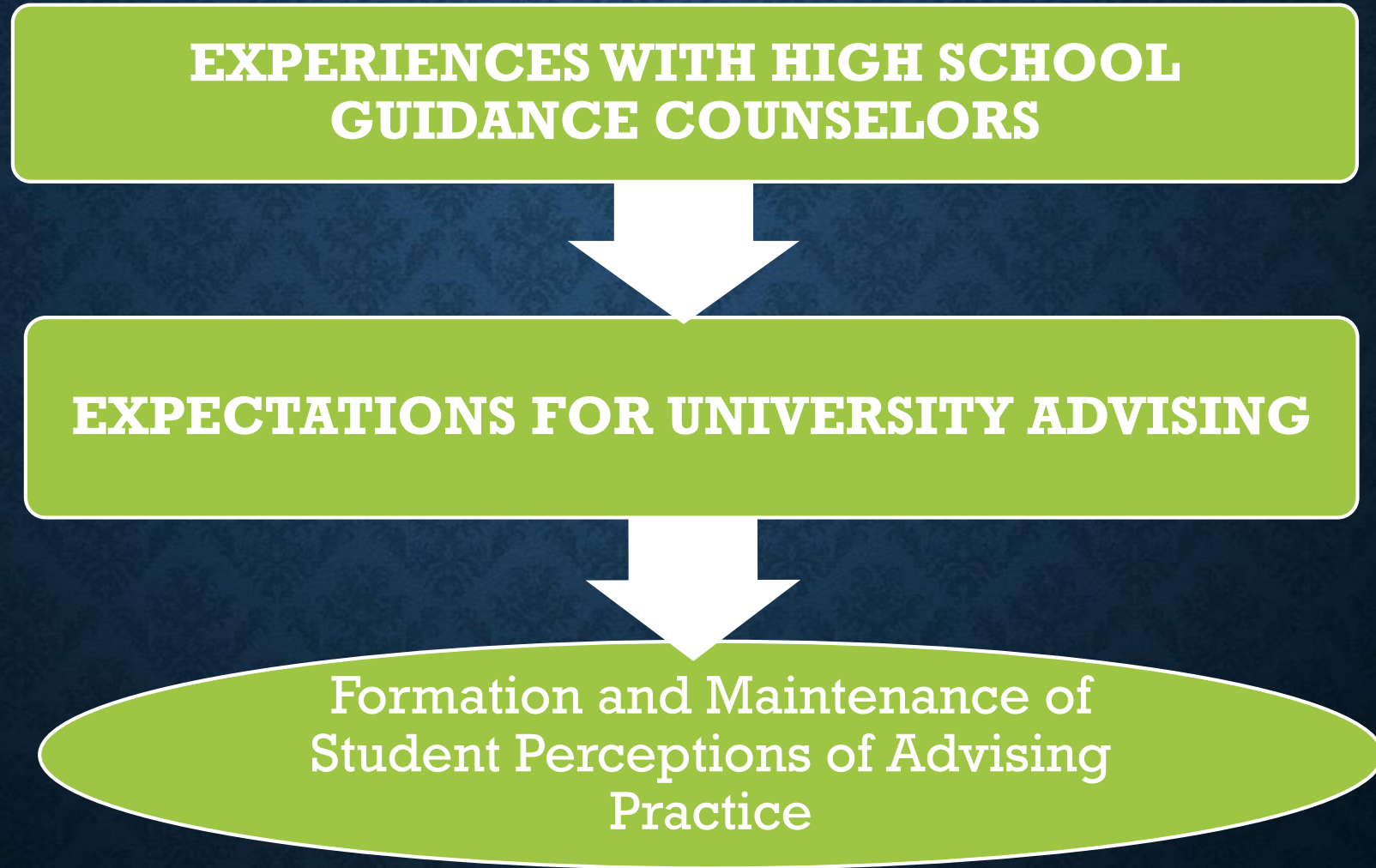
- Walker et al. (2017) indicated that perceptions of accessibility may be influenced by the level of accessibility of high school guidance counselors.
- 37 percent indicated difficulty scheduling meetings and did not receive return phone calls or e-mails.
 - Negative perceptions: not able to meet “whenever” as with the high school guidance counselor, unable to schedule during periods of drop-in meetings, drop-in appointments felt rushed, drop-in wait times could be inconvenient.
- 20 percent of students shared that they did not have an issue communicating with their advisors by phone, email or scheduling meetings.
 - Positive accessibility perception related to: quality of meeting (not length of time met).

FIGURE 1. PROPOSED MODEL OF STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ADVISING PRACTICE, (P. 52)

Formation and Maintenance of Student Perceptions of Advising Practice



FIGURE 1. PROPOSED MODEL OF STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ADVISING PRACTICE, (P. 52)



PERCEPTION DEVELOPMENT

as reviewed by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017, p. 50-51)

- The study shows a divide between advisement practice and student expectations of advisement based on past perceptions.
 - Many students in the study expected similar advisement to their high school experience.
 - Individualized attention, relationship, accessibility, a clear academic outline.
- The challenge is closing the gap to improve perceptions.
 - The researchers acknowledged that bridging the gap is particularly challenging at large universities due to limited resources.
 - Creativity is suggested across the board.

CONVERSATION: WHAT CAN WE DO TO BRIDGE THE GAP TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADVISEMENT?

- What have been your experiences with fulfilling the criteria in the model?
- What challenges are posed with your advisee load?
- What little extra's do you do to help connect with students?
- How much attention do you feel is necessary?
- Do you assess your student's satisfaction with advisement?
- The study argues that advisement and retention are interconnected, do you agree or disagree.
- We all have our own style, but do you share any unique methods you have developed? If you find an interesting resource, do you share it with other advisors on campus, how?
- Discuss [15 to Finish from Complete College America](#) – relationship to advising
- What else can we do to help shape student's perceptions of college advising?
 - What are reasonable expectations we can establish for ourselves given the scope of our jobs?

REFERENCE

Walker, R., Zelin, A., Behrman, C., & Strnad, R. (2017) Qualitative Analysis of Student Perceptions: “Some Advisors Care. Some Don’t.” NACADA Journal, 37(2), 44-53.