

Targeted Group Advising

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Student advising is an integral part of the faculty student relationship. However, with the increasing enrollment of pre-nursing students and the complexity of university requirements, advising requires more time and expertise. Further, many students need more flexibility because they are actively employed or balancing a family and education. In an effort to meet the diverse needs of students, our faculty has developed targeted group advising, an innovative method for advising students that remains student centered.

Targeted group advising allows faculty to provide student advisement that adheres to the same principles as traditional individual advisement but with added benefits for students and faculty. Targeted group advising matches the knowledge of faculty with the needs of specific student groups, provides multiple opportunities for students to attend a session, while continuing to demonstrate caring. By matching faculty to specific groups, range of GPAs, second degree, rising junior, or rising senior, the advisor can prepare remarks for this particular group rather than having to be well-versed in every need for every student.

In addition, this method enhances the student's development of competence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose in decision making about a career. Important general information, such as instructions for registration, university requirements, and policies and procedures is easily communicated in a group situation. The group approach also allows the faculty member to remain fresh when sharing this information. In contrast with the traditional one-to-one advising method where these messages are repeated constantly, important information may inadvertently be omitted. One of the greatest benefits of targeted group advising for students is the ability for students to form peer groups.

Targeted Group Advising Method

Our university has an enrollment of 1005 nursing majors, including prelicensure, and RN to BSN students; approximately 30 undergraduate faculty support these students. This translates to 33 advisees per faculty member. Additionally, many students require extra time due to the complexity of their program of study.

Selecting Students

Four faculty members volunteered to participate in a pilot of targeted group advising in collaboration with the director of the school of nursing's undergraduate advising center. All 4 faculty members' advisees (N = 84) were placed in a pool, which was then sorted by the director to identify commonalities for constituting smaller groups, such as GPA scores, second degree students, those entering the upper division, or graduating seniors. The 4 faculty members selected times that the students were most likely available for group advising sessions, based on the students' class schedule.

Notices were mailed to all students in the pool, inviting them to participate in the pilot project and suggesting that an individual appointment could still be made if they were uncomfortable in the group setting. Students were instructed to register for a targeted group advising session in the advising office. A notebook was available to students for this purpose. Schedules were kept in the advisement center and private conference rooms were reserved for the group sessions. All student files were collected for the students attending specific sessions, enabling the faculty to review each file prior to the session.

Each group session began with comments about the pilot project and the intent to bring students together to facilitate a discussion of student plans or opinions on courses to take. Groups averaged 6 students each and involved 30 to 60 minutes per session depending on the discussion's depth.

Process

The initial attempt at group advising was not without challenges. First, a small number of students did not respond to the electronic notification concerning group advisement. When contacted by telephone about not responding, several of the students reported being told by friends that the information was "wrong." Because students "missed" their group advisement session, faculty had to schedule individual appointments with these students. We anticipate that this will be corrected when the group sessions are more widely used.

Another problem was confusion over the appointment book left in the school of nursing advisement office. Several students signed up for sessions and then forgot their specified time. This problem will be corrected by using an online appointment scheduler. The group with low GPAs took a little longer than the scheduled hour because their needs varied greatly.

The final challenge was dealing with the "no shows." As caring faculty, we felt the need to call students who missed their scheduled session and schedule individual appointments. However, by making calls, we were "enabling" negative behaviors. Faculty plan to work to correct negative behaviors, while continuing to be nurturing with undergraduate advisees. For example, a final note was sent to students who did not reply to as many as 4 notices and a phone call expressing that advisement is a service to facilitate success in college and that by failing to participate the student has forfeited one of his or her rights. Other requests for individual appointments resulted from conflicts with their schedules more than for personal privacy issues.

Outcomes

There were many positive outcomes of the group advisement. From 3 to 8 students attended 1 of the 15 scheduled times (an average of 4 sessions per faculty member). Students were able to

share faculty and course recommendations with another and many students commented that it was beneficial to hear from other students as to which professors were most effective and which courses were most interesting and beneficial. Several students arrived ill prepared for their advisement session; however, those who were prepared role modeled for other students on how to prepare for advisement. Preparation for advisement included being familiar with their progress in the curriculum, being able to state their performance to date in the semester, and bringing a tentative plan of study for the next semester.

Another positive outcome that students reported the group advisement as very “non-threatening.” There was no pressure, such as that which was felt in the former 1-on-1 advisement sessions. Additionally, students reported they met new peers. Many of the students had seen each other in the dorms or library but were unaware they were nursing majors.

The most positive outcome reported by faculty was the amount of time group advisement saved. A time analysis submitted by 2 faculty members conducting individual advisement demonstrated that they had spent 9.6 and 5.4 hours, respectively, for an average of 7 hours of advisement time. This was 154 to 274% of the time spent per faculty using the targeted group advisement method. Therefore, targeted group advising not only benefited the student, but allowed the faculty more productive time.

Summary

Recommendations for future targeted group advisement include: (1) advising juniors and seniors after 1 of their classes so the appointment time is most convenient for them; (2) advising sophomore students after they have received acceptance/rejection into the nursing program; (3) using online advisement for RN to BSN students and second degree students who have difficulty scheduling any advisement time; (4) having smaller groups for students with low GPAs; (5) asking students to bring their own report of progress in the plan of study the advisement session; and (6) having registration passwords for all students printed for easy access. We recognize that group advising is not suited for everyone, but many students and faculty benefited from process. With faculty responsibilities of teaching, research, and service, with regard to advising, working smarter helps.

Reference

1. American Association of Colleges in Nursing. Thousands of students turned away from the nation’s nursing schools despite sharp increase in enrollment. Available at: <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/NewsReleases/enr103.htm> . Accessed March 1, 2004.