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Academic Advising Support for Students on Academic Probation

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Academic Advising Support for Students on Academic Probation

Kaitlyn N. Stormes

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Abstract

This study compares the results of four different models of academic advising support for students whose first term GPA fell below a 2.0 resulting in academic probation status. Previous research suggested that one-on-one interactions during advising are beneficial for students, especially those on academic probation. Using archival data, the current study compared the effects of four models of advising: one-on-one appointment and monthly follow-up meetings with Learning Center staff; an online orientation, two-hour workshop, and monthly follow-up meetings between the student and Learning Center staff; an online tutorial only; or an online tutorial combined with a single meeting with a professional advisor. Using analysis of variance and Pearson's chi-square tests, the four advising models were compared on the following measures: end of term GPA and overall end of year GPA for all students in the study; end of term GPA and end of year GPA among academic probation students; academic standing at the end of the year; and retention of probationary students. Results suggest no differences in these measures of success for students on academic probation based on the academic advising support model to which they were exposed.

Introduction

Academic advisors play an important role in college student success by providing advice to students on a variety of matters. Academic advising is defined as an intentional process that facilitates students' academic, social, professional, and personal development.¹ Academic advising is associated with measures of academic success for students, particularly in the first two years of college, and for students who are struggling academically.² Overall, research suggests that academic advising should be done by a professional advisor, especially for students on academic probation.

There is a lot about advising that is unknown and under debate.³ Among the main researchers in the field, there is no consensus about the best practices for advising students on academic probation.⁴ Questions include who should advise students, what style of advising to use, when this advising should happen, and for how long.⁵

Academic advising in higher education is difficult to study, but the few studies that exist agree that advising is an important component of student success.⁶ Because advising has been identified as important to student success, further research concerning different advising protocols is indicated.

Humboldt State University (HSU), with 8,790 students, has undergone a lot of changes in the advising support offered to students on academic probation. Since 2009, HSU has moved from individual to group advising, to an online-only advising model. These services were primarily provided by the campus Learning Center whose primary function is academic support such as tutoring, writing, and study skills. The university stopped requiring one-on-one meetings between students on academic probation and professional staff in Spring 2013. In Fall 2014, a new model of advising was initiated; where selected first-time undergraduates on academic probation met one-on-one with their professional advisor within the Academic and Career Advising Center in addition completing an online tutorial. Similar students who were not in this program only completed an online tutorial.

The California State University (CSU) Chancellor's office provides retention rates for all CSUs. The average 1-year retention rate is 82%. HSU has a 1-year retention rate of 74%. For students on academic probation, HSU's 1-year retention rate is 59.4%.⁷ Thus HSU is an ideal environment to evaluate the efficacy of various advising protocols. Note that at HSU, a student is placed on academic probation if their attempted units and resulting cumulative grade point average (GPA) falls below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.⁸

The present study evaluated the effectiveness of various academic advising models provided to students on and off academic probation based on overall academic standing among probation students and retention of probation students. A number of questions were addressed: What difference (if any) did shifts in advising make for students on academic probation; Did having a professional advisor, as opposed to a faculty advisor or student services professional make a difference; Did one-on-one meetings make a difference?

Academic Advising at HSU

This study examined four advising models that HSU has provided to students on academic probation since 2009.

Advising Model 1

Starting Fall 2009 and ending Spring 2011, students on academic probation met one-on-one with a Learning Center staff member to discuss the rules and regulations of being on academic probation and circumstances that contributed to their academic probation status.⁹ During these meetings, an Academic Success Plan (ASP) was also created. The ASP needed to be signed by the student's faculty advisor and brought back to the Learning Center (LC) in order for the student's "Academic Probation Hold" to be removed so they could register for classes. In addition, students also met with staff in the LC for monthly follow-up appointments.¹⁰

Advising Model 2

Fall 2011 to Spring 2012, workshops and an online orientation program replaced one-on-one advising support from LC staff. The ASP was created during a two-hour academic probation on-campus workshop. Students on academic probation were required to bring their ASP to their faculty advisor for a review and signature before getting their hold released. Monthly follow-up meetings with a Learning Center staff member were also required.¹¹

Advising Model 3

Beginning in Spring 2013, students on academic probation (AP) were only required to complete an online tutorial created by HSU.¹² The online-only tutorial, alerts students that they need to take action in order to avoid disqualification. Completion of the tutorial produces an ASP, which is then automatically emailed to the student and their assigned academic advisor but no in-person meetings or signatures were required. The Learning Center estimated that completing the tutorial required about 34 minutes of the students' time, and once students completed the tutorial, holds were removed between 24 to 48 hours later and students were then able to register for courses.

Students were no longer required or held accountable to meet monthly with a LC staff member, but encouraged to follow-up with them and attend workshops as the student felt necessary.

Advising Model 4

In addition to the LC online tutorial, students on academic probation had an additional hold on their student account which was removed only after meeting with their professional academic advisor. At this meeting, the student filled out an intake form, which offered an opportunity for the student to reflect on their life and the circumstances that led to the resulting academic probation standing. This meeting

provided the advisor an opportunity to take a holistic approach to each student's situation. Together, the professional advisor and the student strategize actions and agree on the specific steps the student will take to return to good academic standing.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

An increase in end of term GPA is expected for students on academic probation who met with a professional advisor (Model 4), compared to the GPA of student cohorts who received academic advising without a professional advisor (Models 1, 2, and 3).

Rationale

Research suggests that with an active professional advisor assisting students on academic probation, their GPA and overall academic success will improve.¹³ Students who participated in an academic probation intervention and met with their advisor three or more times improved their GPA compared to students who did not.¹⁴ With the use of these types of probation interventions, previous research found increased GPA. Therefore, it is expected that this study will find a similar outcome.¹⁵

Hypothesis 2

More students on academic probation will return to good standing with Advising Model 4 compared to students who did not receive professional academic advising.

Rationale

Preuss and Switalski found that students moved into good academic standing when participating in academic probation interventions especially when they met with an advisor at least once, compared to students who did not participate or meet with their advisor.¹⁵

Hypothesis 3

One-year retention rates will be higher for students who received professional academic probation advising compared to students who did not.

Rationale

According to Tinto as cited by Kot, "Effective retention programs recognize academic advising as being at the core of institutional success to educate and retain students (p. 529)."¹⁶ Research by Kot suggests retention rates increase when students work one-on-one with professional advisors who are committed to providing advising to students about their academic and career goals. Professional advisors take a holistic approach to advising students and talk not only about academics, but also other aspects of students' lives, and help them feel connected to campus staff.¹⁷ Connectedness is particularly important for HSU, as currently, 85% of current students are from areas outside of Humboldt County.¹⁸

Methods

Participants

This study analyzed a sample of 3,019 Humboldt State University first-time undergraduates who matriculated from 2009 to 2014. As Advising Model 4 only applied to students enrolled in Biological Sciences, Environmental Science and Management, Psychology, Undeclared, Sociology, and Wildlife, only students who were enrolled in those departments were compared in this study.

Four cohorts of students in the same departments from previous years (from 2009 through 2014) were used as comparison groups. Each group received different academic advising support. Advising Model

1 ($n = 956$) was exposed to one-on-one appointments and monthly follow-up meetings. Advising Model 2 ($n = 484$) was exposed to an online orientation, 2-hour workshop, and monthly follow-up meetings. Advising Model 3 ($n = 1029$) was only exposed to an online-only tutorial. Finally, Advising Model 4 ($n = 550$) was exposed to an online-only tutorial and one-on-one meeting with a professional advisor.

Secondary data analysis provided student demographics for all students in this study (Table 1)

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	All Students Count	All Students %	AP Students Count	AP Students %
Participation	3,019	100	881	70.0
First Generation	1,136	38	468	44.4
Remediation	1,220	40	415	47.0
URM	1,136	38	421	47.8
Lives On Campus	2,562	85	761	86.4
Average (14) units	540	18	161	18.3

Note. Count is actual number of students and % represents this percentage. Remediation refers to Math, English, or both.

Study Procedure

Secondary data analysis was used to examine existing data records and demographics of the participants in this study. There was no random assignment when the data was collected, thus the study is a quasi-experiment. Humboldt State University actively collects information and data about their students and this information is then stored in the Strategic Data Repository (SDR). The SDR is an Oracle database that contains all of HSU's student data. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before the study began.

Data Analysis

In order to clean and code the dataset, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 23.0 was used. Data was missing at random. Of the missing data, 9.5% of all participants did not return after their first semester, while 14.87% of students on academic probation did not return after their first semester so end of Spring term GPA was not present for these students. Parametric data was checked for homogeneity of variance, and assumptions of normality were met. For Hypotheses 1 and 2, the dependent variable is GPA at the end of Spring term, a continuous variable, so analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. For Hypothesis 3, the dependent variable was academic standing (good or not), a categorical variable, so Pearson's chi-square test of independence was used. The chi-square test of independence was also used to test Hypothesis 4, as the dependent variable, retention (retained or not), was also categorical.

Before completing the study, power analyses were run to determine minimum sample sizes necessary to avoid a Type II error. Sufficient power of 0.80 was present in all cases, and minimum sample sizes were obtained.

Results

For the first hypothesis, there was not a significant effect of advising treatment on end of term GPA for students on academic probation. There was no difference between Advising Model 1 ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.15$), Advising Model 2 ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.14$), Advising model 3 ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 1.18$), or Advising Model 4 ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 1.18$), $F(3, 746) = 0.275$, $p = .843$, $\eta^2 = .001$. No differences were present in terms of end of term GPA for students on academic probation depending on advising model.

Similar results were found in regards to the end of year GPA. There was not a significant effect on end of year GPA based on advising model for students on academic probation, where Advising Model 1 ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 1.01$), Advising Model 2 ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.19$), Advising Model 3 ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.04$), and Advising Model 4 ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.04$) did not differ, $F(3, 877) = 0.226$, $p = .878$, $\eta^2 = .001$. There is no difference in terms of end of year GPA for students on academic probation regardless of advising model they received.

For Hypothesis 2, academic standing was studied for students on academic probation. The type of advising model of support offered did not have a significant effect on whether students on academic probation return to good standing or not, $\chi^2(6) = 10.89$, $p = .092$, $\phi = .111$. There is no difference in terms of academic standing based on the advising model that students on academic probation received.

For Hypothesis 3, retention was studied and the type of advising model did not have a significant effect on whether or not students on academic probation were retained, $\chi^2(3) = 1.639$, $p = .651$, $\phi = .043$. There was no difference in advising models when looking at retention.

Overall, results suggest that there was no influence of the type of academic advising model on the academic outcomes of the students studied.

Discussion

Significant differences in student success related to academic advising models were expected but it is clear from the results that this was not the case. Regardless of the advising model studied, the type of academic advising had no significant influence on end of term GPA, end of year GPA, academic standing, or retention. It is important to acknowledge that this was the first year that Advising Model 4 program was implemented. Though significant differences were not found for one-on-one academic advising, if changes are made in the future, it is unknown if professional advising will make a difference.

Limitations, Impact, and Suggestions for Future Studies

Assessing programs at a university brings many challenges and limitations that may have contributed as to why this study did not find differences among advising models. The first limitation is the lack of randomized control available in higher education.

The data obtained for this study from the university database was messy. First, the provided data needed to be defined by the Humboldt State University Data Dictionary, and matched to the CSU Enrollment Reporting System (ERS). After fields were determined, further work needed to be done to ensure variables were valid. For example, the provided GPA variable was not the initial GPA students earned when they were first on academic probation; it was upwardly adjusted for the classes they retook after the original probation notice. When studying students and their GPAs over time, the valid variable would be the GPA students earned that put them on academic probation, not the adjusted GPA. The university was made aware of this issue, and was able to create a valid measure of original GPA for students. Note that for this study the valid and correct GPA was used.

Further issues with the data came when defining treatment groups and who would be included in the sample for this study. For example, even with a Fall census to Spring census definition for the Advising Model 4 cohort, it is unknown whether students remained in the program the entire academic year. One reason is because, at the time the study was done, the data was not available to follow students in and out of Advising Model 4 departments to get an accurate sample of students who were actually served. When

a student uses campus services, their interactions are documented in the Oracle database PeopleSoft through the use of student service codes. Even if a student met with an advisor, there were no codes indicating what the meeting was about. Thus, there was not an accurate way to measure how many meetings a student attended, how long meetings were, and amount of meetings for students in this study. Discovering the issue of coding deficiencies through this study provided an opportunity to bring awareness of this issue to the director of advising, and resulted in the creation of new and specific coding protocols for a variety of advising services to eliminate this problem going forward.

The previous example of advising service codes led to further investigation of the processes and other documentation for the meetings Advising Model 4 students had with their professional advisor. It is possible that with more structure to academic advising meetings, less advising variability, less advisor turnover, a better definition of the Advising Model 4 cohort, more than one required meeting, and better documentation for students support services, different outcomes may be found. Although this program was partially implemented, this study provided stakeholders an opportunity to communicate efforts and design a stable structure for advising prior to going campus wide.

Lastly, this research did not find differences in advising models a student received on measures of student success, but there were many potential influences not accounted for. Some issues not controlled for include: financial, home, and food insecurity, class times or availability of classes, students in the wrong majors, and inconsistency with students receiving additional services such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, and involvement with high-impact practices such as research, clubs, and other activities.¹⁹

Recommendations

Future research may consider other variables that the literature supports as affecting measures of academic success. For example, amount of hours students work, extracurricular activities, first-generation, high school GPA, SAT scores, financial aid, if students live on or off campus, involvement in clubs, research on campus or within the community, and distance from primary caregiver could be areas for future exploration.

Another option may be to look at correlations between number of meetings with professional advisor and measures of student success. For example, as noted earlier, the research suggests that the more times a student meets with their advisor, the higher their GPA; thus, indicating a positive relationship between meetings and GPA. It would also be beneficial to run analyses on the responses to the student success forms that students fill out at the initial academic probation meetings. For example, the number of study-hours students report spending compared to the recommended 2:1 study rule HSU has (two hours of studying for every one hour a student is in class).

Finally, recommendations to provide additional support opportunities for students on academic probation include: students on academic probation to take a course similar to Supplemental Instruction (SI) about how to manage time and be a successful student, require monthly meetings between professional advisors and students, create study groups within the caseload of advisees in similar courses, mandatory meetings between the student and each of their professors, and have the students log their hours spent studying. By conducting this study, the university was made aware of several important areas that needed improvement. It is gratifying to note that these changes are currently being implemented.

About the Author

After graduating with a Master of Arts degree in Academic Research Psychology from Humboldt State University, Kaitlyn is pursuing her passion of studying student success initiatives at California State University, Long Beach as a Research Analyst in the Institutional Research and Assessment Office. Kaitlyn would like to thank Su Karl and Cai Stuart-Maver from the Learning Center; Clint Rebik from the Registrars Office; Dr. Kathy Thronhill, Kelda Quintana, and Dana Deason from the Academic and Career Advising Center; Dr. John Lee, the Dean of College of Professional Studies; Dr. Peg Blake the Vice President

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