Key components of faculty advising during the HCT orientation program
by Annette Marie Walstad

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:
The Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana (HCT) is a small, two-year, technical institution located in Helena, Montana. The problem for this study was that although the advising/registration session with faculty was consistently the highest-rated event during the HCT orientation, it was unknown what specific information faculty shared with students. The College anticipated faculty changes caused by retirements, resignations, and the addition of new instructors due to the continued growth experienced by HCT, therefore, determining exactly what information faculty advisors actually transmitted during the session was important to ensure continued high ratings by students. The research question was: What are the key components of the faculty advising session during the HCT orientation? The researcher interviewed the six faculty members from the Diesel and Electronics Technology programs. The interview protocol included predetermined questions, follow-up questions determined during the interview by the researcher, and an opportunity for the faculty to add additional comments. Each faculty member reviewed the written summary and offer additional information. The researcher conducted the initial interviews in November 1999 and follow-up interviews May 2001.

The researcher analyzed the data looking for common themes and differences and identified 21 topics or activities (components) between the two programs. Eleven components were common: Balancing school, work, home; classroom locations; curriculum overview; employment opportunities; homework requirements; introduction of faculty; policies information; program options; registration information; daily structure; and tools and equipment. Ten components were different: Introduction of students; stress of the program and school; math and problem solving ability; block scheduling; structured presentation; general education placement; attitude, commitment, work ethic; academic support; registration responsibility; and Poplar Campus information.

The results of the study suggest that faculty follow procedures during the advising/registration session that are congruent with the goals of orientation and academic advising found in the literature. Over 50 percent of the components were common to both programs, confirming the importance of the components. The key differences may be explained in one of two ways: (a) the component was program specific and therefore, not of immediate interest to the other program; or (b) the component was something that the faculty had failed to recognize as important but were not opposed to implementing in future sessions.

An Advising/Registration Session Model based on this research was created for the use of HCT Faculty at future orientations.

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Date April 15, 2002

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ABSTRACT

The Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana (HCT) is a small, two-year, technical institution located in Helena, Montana. The problem for this study was that although the advising/registration session with faculty was consistently the highest-rated event during the HCT orientation, it was unknown what specific information faculty shared with students. The College anticipated faculty changes caused by retirements, resignations, and the addition of new instructors due to the continued growth experienced by HCT, therefore, determining exactly what information faculty advisors actually transmitted during the session was important to ensure continued high ratings by students. The research question was: What are the key components of the faculty advising session during the HCT orientation?

The researcher interviewed the six faculty members from the Diesel and Electronics Technology programs. The interview protocol included predetermined questions, follow-up questions determined during the interview by the researcher, and an opportunity for the faculty to add additional comments. Each faculty member reviewed the written summary and offer additional information. The researcher conducted the initial interviews in November 1999 and follow-up interviews May 2001.

The researcher analyzed the data looking for common themes and differences and identified 21 topics or activities (components) between the two programs. Eleven components were common: Balancing school, work, home; classroom locations; curriculum overview; employment opportunities; homework requirements; introduction of faculty; policies information; program options; registration information; daily structure; and tools and equipment. Ten components were different: Introduction of students; stress of the program and school; math and problem solving ability; block scheduling; structured presentation; general education placement; attitude, commitment, work ethic; academic support; registration responsibility; and Poplar Campus information.

The results of the study suggest that faculty follow procedures during the advising/registration session that are congruent with the goals of orientation and academic advising found in the literature. Over 50 percent of the components were common to both programs, confirming the importance of the components. The key differences may be explained in one of two ways: (a) the component was program specific and therefore, not of immediate interest to the other program; or (b) the component was something that the faculty had failed to recognize as important but were not opposed to implementing in future sessions.

An Advising/Registration Session Model based on this research was created for the use of HCT Faculty at future orientations.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Academic advising and orientation programs are two functions that almost every college campus offers in some form. The delivery system and the quality of these services, however, can vary dramatically depending on institutional characteristics, human and fiscal resources, and campus philosophy.

The academic affairs personnel of a campus usually control academic advising, while orientation is usually a function of student services. When academic advising takes place during an orientation program, these two worlds must be coordinated so that the goals of each area are met in a way that ultimately benefits the common denominator: students. Without coordination and cooperation between these two areas, academic advising during orientation can be less than effective (Beatty & Standing, 1995).

Academic advising can be defined as an activity designed "to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their life goals (Gordon & Hadley, 2000, p. 417). Orientation can be defined as "the process of helping students learn the history, traditions, educational programs, academic requirements, and student life of the institution" (Sandeen, 1996, p. 437). This research uses these definitions when describing academic advising and orientation in general terms.

Quality academic advising and orientation programs are important because of the impact both have on student retention and ultimately on educational attainment. Pascarella and Terenzini's *How College Affects Students* (1991) reported several studies

that indicated a relationship between orientation and academic advising, and educational attainment (Forrest, 1985; Brigman, Kuh, & Stager, 1982; Louis, Colten, & Demeke, 1984; Meyers, 1981; Taylor, 1982). From these studies it has been concluded that quality orientation and academic advising programs had a strong positive effect on the number of students that successfully graduated from college.

This chapter will state the problem, purpose, and research question for this thesis concerning academic advising during orientation, and will provide background information on the institution where the research was conducted, Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana (HCT). Other sections of this chapter include the conceptual framework for the research; the importance of this study; assumptions and limitations of this study; a review of topic specific terms; and the organization of the remainder of the thesis.

Background Information

The Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana is a small, public, two-year, open admission, technical institution located in Helena, Montana. With a student population of 826, HCT offers 15 programs leading to an Associate of Applied Science degree, an Associate of Science degree, or a Certificate of Completion (HCT Catalog, 2001).

In an earlier study the researcher conducted an assessment of the Helena College of Technology's orientation program (Walstad, 1999). The study was to determine if the College was successfully meeting the goals of the orientation program. The HCT

orientation program's three main goals are: (a) to provide information to the students regarding HCT policies, procedures, and services; (b) to provide an opportunity for advising and course registration; and (c) to acclimate the students to HCT and to increase their comfort level before the start of the semester (Walstad, 1999). A diagram of the organization of the HCT orientation program is depicted in Figure 1 on page 7.

Using the goals of the HCT orientation program as a conceptual framework, students attending the June 1999 orientation session completed a two-page questionnaire regarding orientation events and activities. The questionnaire asked students to evaluate the orientation program events and activities in terms of the helpfulness of the event/activity for them using a 5-point Likert scale (5=*excellent*, 4=*above average*, 3=*average*, 2=*below average*, and 1=*poor*). Data collected from students indicated that the orientation program was successfully meeting its goals and that faculty involvement was a key factor in their satisfaction with the HCT orientation program.

Faculty advisors spend an hour and fifteen minutes during orientation with the students who have applied to their program. During this session, advisors present program specific information, assist with registration and class selection, explain catalog requirements, and answer group and individual questions.

The students attending the June 1999 orientation gave the advising/registration session with advisors an average Likert score of 4.56, giving it the highest rating of any event at orientation (Walstad, 1999). The written comments of the students attending orientation supported this high rating. Forty-six percent of the students indicated that the most helpful part of orientation was the advising/registration session with the faculty

advisors (Walstad, 1999). Although the advising/registration session with faculty was consistently one of the highest-rated events during orientation, the initial study did not assess the specific information faculty shared with students.

Problem, Purpose, and Research Question

Statement of the Problem

The problem was that although the advising/registration session with faculty was consistently one of the highest-rated events during orientation, the initial study did not assess the specific information faculty shared with students. In 1999, at the time this thesis project began, the College anticipated faculty changes caused by retirements, resignations, and the addition of new instructors due to the continued growth experienced by HCT; therefore, determining exactly what information faculty advisors actually transmitted during the session was critical in order to ensure continued high ratings by students.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify the key components of the faculty advising session during the Helena College of Technology orientation. The results of this study serve as a resource for administrators and personnel involved in the HCT orientation program. The information was added to orientation training materials for faculty and disseminated to faculty during advising training sessions conducted by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Statement of the Research Question

The specific research question was: What are the key components of the faculty advising/registration session during the Helena College of Technology orientation?

Introduction to the Study

Importance of the Study

Although survey results indicated that students were very satisfied with the advising/registration sessions held during orientation, the initial study did not assess the specific information faculty shared with students.

In addition, over 50 percent of the faculty had been at the Helena College of Technology for three years or less (HCT Self-Study, 2000). In the future, new faculty will join the HCT staff because of retirements and expansion in some programs. Because of the potential turnover and addition of faculty, it was important to identify the areas faculty cover during the advising/registration session to ensure this information would be available to new faculty in the future.

Several studies have shown a positive relationship between strong advising and orientation programs and student retention and graduation (Beatty and Standing, 1995; Upcraft and Gardner, 1989; Tinto, 1987). In the current funding structure for the Montana University System, every student counts. It is important for the Helena College of Technology to understand what positive efforts are currently taking place on campus, and to determine what improvements are needed to ensure continued institutional success with academic advising during orientation.

Design of the Study

This study concentrated on three technical programs at the Helena College of Technology: Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology, Truck-Diesel Technology, and Electronics Technology. Faculty from the Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology and Truck-Diesel Technology programs were interviewed together because these departments share faculty. The main reasons for selecting these programs for the study were the technical nature of the curriculums, the active interest the program faculty had in academic advising issues, and the long tenure of the faculty.

The interview protocol included predetermined questions, follow-up questions determined during the interview by the researcher, and an opportunity for the faculty to add additional comments. Each faculty member had an opportunity to review the written summary of the researcher and to offer clarification and additional information if necessary. The researcher utilized member checking to ensure completeness and accuracy of fact. The timeline for the initial study and the thesis study are shown in Appendix A.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Beatty and Standing's research that concluded that orientation and academic advising share many of the same goals and functions that benefit both student and institution, and are "natural partners" (1995, p. 97). The organization of the HCT orientation program and the framework depicting the partnership of orientation and academic advising is shown in Figure 1.

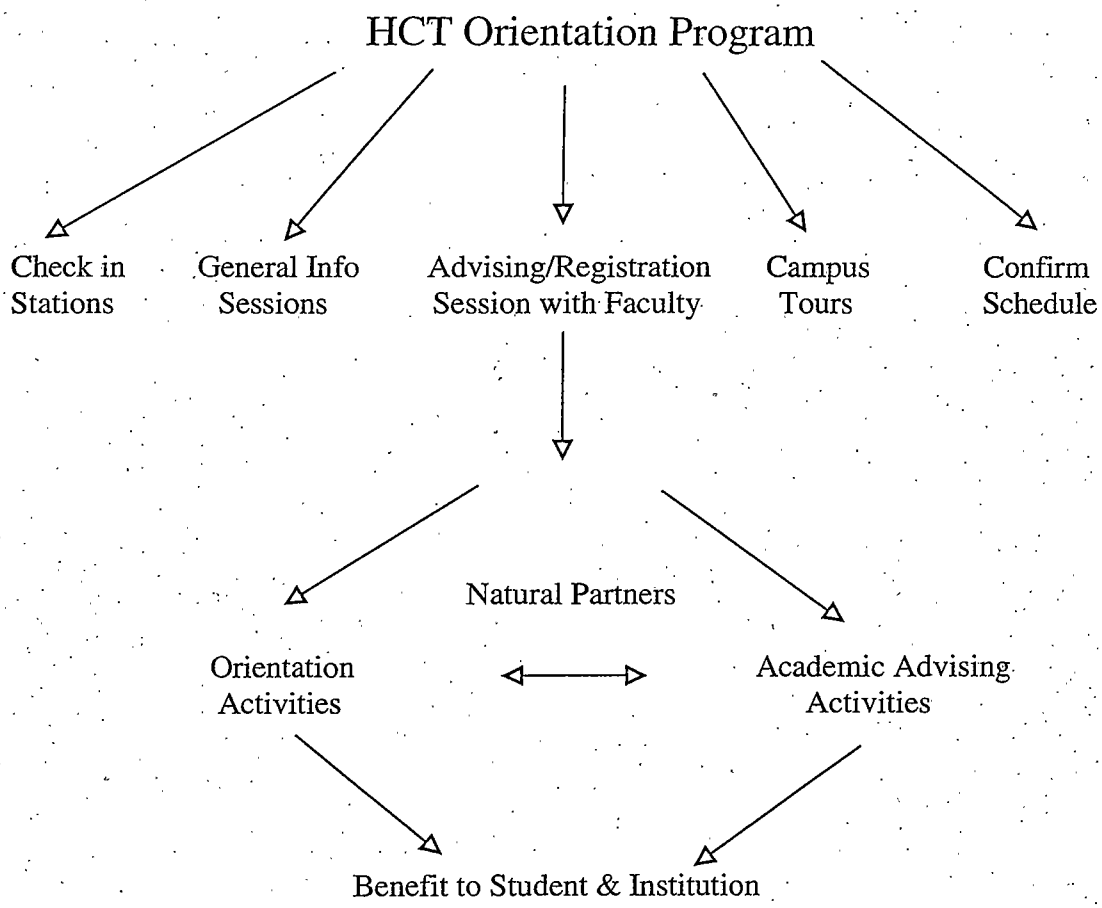

Figure 1: HCT Orientation Program Organization & Conceptual Framework.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) has developed standards and goals for both orientation programs and academic advising, which supports this partnership between orientation and academic advising. Chapter 2 presents a detailed review of the CAS orientation and academic advising goals. For the purposes of this study, the literature review and the research results were analyzed using the categories of orientation and advising as a framework.

Definitions of Terms

Advising. At the Helena College of Technology, faculty advising includes any formal contact between students and faculty outside the classroom. This is an important distinction at a technical college such as HCT where the faculty advisor is usually the student's primary instructor. In most technical programs at HCT, faculty and students will have 20 to 25 hours of classroom and lab contact each week.

Advising/Registration Session. This term refers to the 75-minute meeting between HCT faculty and new HCT students that have been accepted for admission. The session is program specific and includes one to three faculty members and approximately five to fifteen students.

Open Admission. The Helena College of Technology's academic requirements are best described as "open admission," which means that any student holding a high school diploma or its equivalency may enroll. The College does not have specific requirements for minimum grade point average or standardized test scores.

Orientation. At the Helena College of Technology, orientation refers to the one-day program held one to three months before the start of the semester. The orientation focuses on specific HCT information, students' acclimation to campus and adjustment to college, and registration for classes. Attendance at each orientation session ranges from 80-120 students.

Programs. At the Helena College of Technology the term *program* is used to describe a student's area of study. The terms *program* and *major* are used interchangeably but it is less common for HCT faculty and students to use the term *major*. On the HCT campus, the term *program* is also used interchangeably with *department.*

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher approached this study with the following assumptions: (a) The Ag and Industrial-Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics Technology programs have high quality faculty advising occurring; (b) no significant personnel, enrollment, or fiscal problems were consuming the time or attention of the faculty thus distracting them from quality academic advising; and (b) a positive relationship existed between the researcher and the faculty selected for this study. The researcher had worked at the Helena College of Technology for eight years. She had worked with all of these faculty members on a variety of committees and projects, and viewed these relationships and experiences as positive.

The researcher approached this study with the following limitations: (a) The data for this research paper was gathered over the course of 18 months. One faculty member in the Electronics program who was part of the initial interview resigned in May 2000. His replacement, who was hired in August 2000, was not included in the follow-up interview held in May 2001; and (b) the researcher's personal responsibilities and the

departure of her thesis committee chair lengthened the timeframe required to analyze the data and to write the findings of the study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the problem, purpose, research question, conceptual framework, design of the study and the importance of the study. The researcher introduced the conceptual framework for the study; academic advising and orientation are natural partners and together play an important role in student retention and educational attainment, in this chapter. This study is an analysis of one aspect of this interconnection and will focus on the key components of faculty advising during the HCT orientation program. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of the literature regarding academic advising and orientation programs at institutions of higher education is presented in Chapter 2. This chapter will include a synthesis of the literature by explaining the criteria for selecting the literature, the conceptual framework for the study and how it relates to the literature, and a review of the academic advising and orientation literature. The evaluation of the literature will include a summary of the review, overall strengths and weaknesses of the literature, gaps and saturation points in the review, and ideas for further inquiry.

Synthesis of the Literature

Criteria for Selection of the Literature

The literature review for this thesis focused on two main themes: academic advising and orientation programs. Most of the literature reviewed was written in the 1990s and several important resources were published in 2000. Foundation pieces, written prior to 1990 from such authors as Pascarella, Terenzini, Tinto, Astin, Upcraft, Winston, Enders, and Miller, were also reviewed because of the significance of and respect held for their research.

Most of the literature on the two areas, academic advising and orientation, focused solely on one area or the other. A few sources, however, looked at the

relationship between these two areas. Special consideration was given to research that specifically looked at academic advising during the orientation process.

Conceptual Framework

Academic Advising as a Comprehensive Campus Process (1995) is a monograph series that explores academic advising in relation to administrative support services, academic advising services, and student support services. In chapter 16 of the monograph, "Academic Advising and Orientation;" authors J.D. Beatty and Robert Standing explored the interconnections between of these two areas.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Beatty and Standing's research that concluded that orientation and academic advising share many of the same goals and functions that benefit both student and institution, and are natural partners. Beatty and Standing believe that orientation programs should enhance retention and include services that take the student from initial enrollment through graduation. Academic advising is "the common thread that reinforces the past, the present, and the future for students as well as the institution...Orientation and academic advising are natural partners for addressing the needs of special populations" (1995, p. 97). This framework is depicted in Figure 1 on page 7.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) supports this partnership between orientation and academic advising. This organization has developed standards and goals for both orientation programs and academic advising.

According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards, the goals of quality orientation programs are:

1. Aid new students in their transition to the institution;
2. Expose new students to the broad educational opportunities of the institution, and
3. Integrate new students into the life of the institution. (1986, p. 97)

The academic advising goals provided by CAS are:

1. Development of suitable educational plans;
2. Clarification of career and life goals;
3. Selection of appropriate courses and other educational experiences;
4. Interpretation of institutional requirements;
5. Enhancement of student awareness about educational resources;
6. Evaluation of student progress toward established goals;
7. Reinforcement of student self-direction;
8. Referral to and use of institutional and community support services; and
9. Collection and distribution of data regarding student needs, preferences, and performance for use in making institutional decisions and policies. (Gordon & Habley, 2000, p. 417)

Beatty and Standing's conclusion that orientation and academic advising share many of the same goals and functions is supported by the CAS goals for each area. Each CAS orientation goal connects with one or more of the CAS academic advising goals. Orientation goal 1 (aid new students in their transition to the institution) connects to academic advising goal 1 (develop educational plans), goal 6 (progress toward goals), and goal 8 (referral to support services). Orientation goal 2 (expose new students to the broad educational opportunities of the institution) supports the academic advising goal 2 (clarify career and life goals), goal 3 (selection of appropriate courses), goal 5 (student awareness about educational resources), and goal 8 (referral to support services). Orientation goal 3 (integrate new students into the life of the institution) connects with

the academic advising goal 4 (interpretation of institutional requirements), and goal 7 (reinforces student self-direction). CAS academic advising goal 9 (collection and distribution of student data) is not directly associated with a CAS orientation goal.

Pascarella and Terenzini's *How College Affects Students* (1991) reported several studies that indicated a positive relationship between orientation and academic advising, and educational attainment (Forrest, 1985; Brigman, Kuh, & Stager, 1982; Endo & Harpel, 1979; Louis, Colten, & Demeke, 1984; Meyers, 1981; Smith, 1980; Taylor, 1982). This research concluded that quality orientation and academic advising programs had a strong positive effect on the number of students that graduated from college.

Upcraft and Gardner listed interaction between new students and others in the academic community, in particular faculty involvement, as a component necessary for freshman success (1989). *The Freshman Year Experience* (1989), devoted a separate chapter to orientation and academic advising The main themes in the orientation chapter included the connection between orientation activities, academic achievement, and student retention. The main focus of the academic advising chapter was the role faculty advisors play in student learning and success.

For the purposes of this study, the literature review and the research results were analyzed using the categories of orientation and advising as a framework.

Orientation Literature

Orientation to college comes in many forms. Institutions must consider many factors such as institutional type and philosophy, fiscal and time constraints, availability

of personnel and space, and the specific needs of the student population when determining the optimum orientation format. The overwhelming theme in the orientation literature is that "the most important goal of orientation is to help freshman succeed academically" (Perigo & Upcraft, 1989, p. 83).

Perigo and Upcraft stressed that effective orientation programs must be much more than fun and games; effective programs: (a) are based on student development theory; (b) are appropriately timed and sequenced; (c) include families; (d) encourage interaction among new students and faculty, staff, and other students; (e) introduce new students to the academic demands of the institution; (f) are responsive to the needs of all students; (g) are coordinated by a central office; and (h) are evaluated to determine their impact on student success (1989, p. 94). Although these points are more detailed than the three goals of quality orientation programs established by CAS, they are fundamentally the same.

Noel and Levitz stated that having strong orientation and advising programs is key to helping students begin their college experience in a positive way. "We can make orientation programs especially effective by linking with advising and reaching out to those freshmen who need particular support services" (1989, p. 72). Noel and Levitz also found that connecting students to institutions is the key to retention and student success and research has shown that the single most important step in this connection is for the student to feel attached to some person at the institution.

The National Orientation Directors Associate (NODA) and the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience (FYE) collaborated to develop a comprehensive orientation handbook. The monograph series entitled *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College* was published in 1993 and serves as a fundamental reference on many orientation topics. Chapter 14 of the monograph covers issues such as trends and issues in orientation programs; theoretical perspectives on orientation; orienting diverse population; orientation activities for the families of new students; and orientation standards, evaluations, and assessments.

Chapter nine of the NODA/FYE publication focused specifically on the unique orientation needs of two-year institutions. In this chapter, "Meeting The Demands of Many: Orientation at Two-Year Institutions," authors Les Cook and Barry Stearns presented three key components of orientation. The first is pre-enrollment assessment, which usually involves some type of entrance exam designed to place the student in the appropriate course level. The second component is advising. The authors stated that "success in faculty advising lies in selection and training of those faculty" (1993, p. 115), but that others may also advise students if properly trained and supported by the institution. The third orientation component is registration, which is often the incentive to get students to attend orientation.

An article in *The Journal of College Orientation and Transition* stressed the importance of utilizing effective faculty members and having the orientation experience reinforce the student's decision to enroll at the institution. Academic advisors and others who work closely with new students during orientation must be able to get the students

registered but also show they care about the student. The orientation should immediately reinforce the student's decision to enroll and be a pleasant but worthwhile experience (Mann, 1998).

Beatty and Standing agreed with Mann about the importance of faculty involvement in the orientation process.

> Faculty academic advisors are essential to most institutions' orientation programs: first, because the majority of institutions depend on faculty to deliver quality academic advising, and second, because most studies have found that faculty are a critical influence on student and family attitudes about the institution. On the other hand, faculty academic advisors learn a great deal about the activities and support programs at the institution as well as its policies and procedures by participating in orientation. (2000, p. 98)

Vincent Tinto, a leading authority on student attrition and retention, supports an information-dominant approach to orientation, but he believes this must be taken several steps further. Although students are looking for accurate information, what is expected of them, and where to find assistance when necessary through the orientation process, this event must also provide opportunities to connect with others.

> Here in the realm of interpersonal affiliation lies one of the keys to effective orientation programs...Namely, that they go beyond the provision of information per se to the establishment of early contacts for new students not only with other members of their entering class but also with other students, faculty, and staff of the institution. (1987, pp. 146-147)

Orientation programs often utilize group advising sessions. This is often the case because of the time constraints of a one- or two-day orientation program. A University of Minnesota study found no significant differences between the team method and the one-on-one method of advising. Students in the study who were advised in groups showed no significant differences in satisfaction with the advising process or knowledge of college

policies and procedures. The study concluded that the team approach saves an advisor ten hours during each registration period (Grahn, 1982).

Current Practices in Academic Advising: Final Report of ACT's Fifth National Survey of Academic Advising (Habley & Morales, 1998) offered statistical data on a multitude of advising topics. One survey question asked respondents to indicate the type of group advising formats utilized by faculty advisors. The results of the question indicated that 61 percent of two-year public institutions used "small group meetings during orientation or registration" (p. 21).

Although the majority of two-year colleges continue to use the group advising format for advising during orientation, the use of this method has declined overall. This may change in the future as institutions face limited or declining human and fiscal resources available for academic advising. A group advising format is an excellent delivery choice when students need basic information, have common goals, majors, and questions, and limited time available (Teitelbaum, 2000, pp. 398-399).

Nancy King, author of "Advising Students in Groups," offered several ideas for enhancing group advising: (a) establish a comfortable environment by engaging in icebreakers or introductions aimed at welcoming the students; (b) introduce students to the broad purpose of academic advising; (c) encourage students to think for themselves rather than providing all the answers; (d) provide guidance in the decision–making process that encourages students to make informed choices and to take responsibility for their decisions; (e) create opportunities for group discussions rather than lectures; and (f) collaborate with other areas of campus to meet the needs of the group (2000).

Academic Advising Literature

Academic advising has existed in the United States in some form since the creation of institutions of higher education (Frost, 2000). What items are covered and how the advising is delivered have changed dramatically over the years. According to Wesley Habley, three events in the 1970s changed the role and function of academic advising. These three events were: (a) the publication of articles by Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) that expanded the definition of an academic advisor; (b) significant declines in student enrollment following the peak of the baby boomers becoming college aged; and (c) the creation of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the first professional academic advising organization in 1979. After the organization of the National Academic Advising Association, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) developed the CAS Standards for Academic Advising and the CAS Self-Assessment Guide for Academic Advising (Habley, 2000, pp. 35-36).

A 1990 study on improving education through academic advising looked at the advising practices and attitudes of faculty. The study suggested that the advising relationship does encourage student success if it: (a) involves students in their individual college experiences, including advising; (b) explores with students those factors contributing to student success; and (c) displays the advisor's interest in students' academic and extracurricular progress (Frost, 1990, p.10).

In the "Academic Advising" chapter in *The Freshman Year Experience*, Gary Kramer and Robert Spencer concluded that in order for an institution to have a good freshman advising program, it must:

> (a) Determine and focus on the unique advising needs of freshman; (b) determine what the institution plans to do to prepare the potential student for entry; (c) develop a mission statement and definition of the institution's advising program for freshman; (d) anticipate and assess advising program needs; (e) begin early to advise potential students on admissions criteria, financial aid, etc.; (f) tailor admissions information to tell freshmen what they need to know to succeed in the institution; (g) assign a personal advisor to each new student; (h) equip advisors with required information through staff development; (i) use computer technology to track and monitor academic requirements; and (j) evaluate program efforts and refine the advising program. (1989, pp. 106-107)

The general consensus regarding academic advising is that it is important to student transition and success. In the 1988 article "Improving Academic Advising at the Community College," Railsback and Colby offered eight steps for improving academic advising: (a) determine the goals and functions of academic advising; (b) select advisors that are willing to do more than help students schedule classes; (c) establish regular meetings between students and their advisors; (d) create a teamwork approach to academic advising; (e) reward quality academic advising; (f) train advisors in basic counseling skills and techniques; (g) utilize technology academic advising; and (h) evaluate the advising system to determine if it is meeting its goals (Railsback & Colby, 1988).

ACT's Fifth National Survey of Academic Advising provided statistical data on a wide range of advising topics. Of particular interest were the number of contacts between faculty advisor and each advisee during an academic term. At two-year public

institutions the mean number of faculty/advisee contacts was 6.8 per academic year. This number fell to 4.0 when considering all institutions. Another item studied was the percentage of time faculty spent on advising. At two-year public institutions the mean percentage of faculty time spent in advising was 11.6 per academic year. This number held steady at 11.5 when considering all institutions (1998, p.23). The study concluded that this information was important because it appeared to dismiss commonly held attitudes that faculty only see advisees during registration, and that faculty spend little time advising students.

A potential trouble spot for academic advising during orientation is the fact that on most campuses, orientation is a student services function while academic advising is an academic affairs function. Without coordination and cooperation between these two areas, academic advising during orientation can be less than effective (Beatty and Standing, 1995). Institutional support of advising and orientation efforts is critical to the success of either program. Beatty and Standing concluded their chapter "Academic Advising and Orientation" with the following statement.

> Both academic advising and orientation programming share an unlimited potential to teach as well as to stimulate independent and interdependent learning. In order for continued growth to occur, both must be viewed as fundamental institutional responsibilities, much like quality teaching, scholarship, and appropriate outreach activities. Institutional commitment is the best opportunity to maximize potential. (1995, p. 99)

Evaluation of the Literature

Summary of the Review

The literature review for this research paper concentrated on academic advising, orientation, and advising that occurs during orientation. The literature offered suggestions for creating quality academic advising and orientation programs, which comply with the standards for both academic advising and orientation published by The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS). Several pieces of literature specifically looked at the unique relationship between advising and orientation. Some of the advising and orientation topics reviewed include the importance of faculty-student involvement, steps for improving academic advising and orientation, and the positive side of group advising.

Overall Strengths of the Literature

The overall strength of the literature for this research topic was the number of quality studies available for review. Many well-respected authors and researchers have written in the areas of academic advising and orientation. The national organizations for orientation, academic advising, and related areas (e.g., NODA, NACADA, FYE, CAS) were also valuable resources.

The clear guidelines for orientation and academic advising created by the Council for the Advancement of Standards was another strength of the literature. These clear, concise guidelines provided credibility and consistency to practitioners and researchers. Each CAS orientation goal connects with one or more of the CAS academic advising

goals. Orientation goal 1 (aid new students in their transition to the institution) connects to academic advising goal 1 (develop educational plans), goal 6 (progress toward goals), and goal 8 (referral to support services). Orientation goal 2 (expose new students to the broad educational opportunities of the institution) supports the academic advising goal 2 (clarify career and life goals), goal 3 (selection of appropriate courses), goal 5 (student awareness about educational resources), and goal 8 (referral to support services). Orientation goal 3 (integrate new students into the life of the institution) connects with the academic advising goal 4 (interpretation of institutional requirements), and goal 7 (reinforces student self-direction).

The literature reviewed supports the importance of faculty involvement in the advising, orientation, and registration process.

Weaknesses and Gaps in the Literature

Only a limited number of studies looked specifically at two-year institutions and the advising or orientation process. The literature review did not cover the unique advising relationships found between faculty and students at two-year technical colleges. The design of technical programs often results in the advisor also being the lead faculty member in a program. It is not uncommon for an academic advisor/faculty member to have 25 or more hours each week of informal and formal contact with his or her advisees/students.

The researcher did not find any studies that specifically looked at the research question for this thesis. In addition, the literature did not provide a model for academic advising during orientation.

Chapter Summary

An overview of academic advising and orientation literature that was the basis for this study was presented in this chapter. A synthesis of the literature included the criteria for selection or literature and a more detailed look at the conceptual framework for the study. In the review of previous research in the areas of academic advising and orientation, the general theme found in the literature was that faculty and student interaction is a key component to a student's academic success.

The literature review concluded with a summary of the review, the strengths of the literature, and the weaknesses and gaps of the literature. The next section of this thesis, Chapter 3, describes a detailed account of the methodologies used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A detailed account of the methodology used to collect data from selected faculty members involved in the advising/registration session of the HCT orientation program is offered in Chapter 3. This chapter includes information regarding the history, philosophy, and institutional structure of the Helena College of Technology; the chapter also provides background information on the faculty and students. Other sections of this chapter include the method of data collection, the procedure followed during data collection, the timeline for the data collection, and the strategy selected for data analysis.

Institutional History

The Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana is a small, public, two-year, open admission, technical institution located in Helena, Montana. With a student population of 826, HCT offers fifteen programs leading to an Associate of Applied Science degree, an Associate of Science degree, or a Certificate of Completion (HCT Catalog, 2001).

The Montana Legislature created the Helena College of Technology (then known as the Helena Vocational-Technical Center) in 1939 to provide vocational and technical training to the citizens of Montana. In 1994, the eleven unit Montana University System (MUS) was restructured from a stand-alone, independent campus structure to one of

multi-campus affiliation. The Helena College of Technology became affiliated with The University of Montana-Missoula, along with Montana Tech in Butte and Western Montana College in Dillon.

Institutional Philosophy

The philosophy of the Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana is published, as follows, in the 2000-2001 College catalog:

> The Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana is dedicated to providing skill development and personal growth that will enable students to make a positive contribution to the workplace and the community. The highest priority is to present the best quality of educational programs possible within the limits of space, personnel, and finances. (p. 2)

Since the restructuring of the Montana University System, the Helena College of Technology has experienced dramatic enrollment increases and administrative changes that have challenged the College's physical, fiscal, and human resources. For the HCT orientation program, and other student services, it has not only been a case of doing "more with less" but doing more with less for approximately 54% more students since neither professional nor support staff positions have increased (HCT Enrollment and Personnel Reports, 1992-1999). As student enrollment increased, faculty were added to teach additional sections of courses. Since the number of staff did not increase during this same timeframe, the Student Services staff was required to make changes within the orientation program to accommodate the additional students. One change implemented by Student Services was having faculty provide College and program specific information to students during the advising/registration session to ensure that the College

was able to maintain its philosophy of providing the "best quality of educational programs possible within the limits of space, personnel, and finances..." (p.2).

Institutional Structure

The Helena College of Technology's Chief Administrative Officer holds the title of Dean and reports directly to the President of The University of Montana. The HCT Management Team consists of the Dean, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, the Assistant Dean for Finance, and the Assistant Dean for Student Services. Professional staff at the College includes Directors of Admissions, Financial Aid, Career Services, Learning Center/Disability Services, and the Library. The Director of Admissions coordinates all new student services including orientation. This position reports to the Assistant Dean for Student Services.

The faculty are responsible for academic advising and classroom instruction, and report to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

HCT Faculty

At the time of the 2000 Self-Study, the faculty of the Helena College of Technology consisted of 36 full-time and 28 adjunct members. Thirteen faculty were teaching in the trade and industry programs. The faculty's longevity averaged three years. At the time of the 1992 Self-Study, the average longevity of faculty was 15 years. The longevity of the HCT faculty had steadily declined because of retirements across campus (HCT Personnel Reports, 1992-1999). New faculty have joined HCT to meet the

instructional demand needs of the College caused by the addition of new programs and increased student enrollment (HCT Self-Study, 2000).

HCT Students

The 2000 Self-Study offered the following profile of the HCT student body:

> The Helena College of Technology serves a student body comprised primarily of Montana residents. In the fall of 1999, 57 percent of the students were male; 43 percent were female. They ranged in age from 16 to 60, with the average age 28.1. Ethnically and racially, the College's student body was not particularly diverse: 92 percent were Caucasian; 3 percent, Native American; and 5 percent, other. However, students' educational attainment levels varied widely: 7 percent had baccalaureate or higher degrees; 12 percent had some college or a two-year degree; 62 percent had high school diplomas; and 13 percent had high school equivalences. Over 75 percent qualified for financial aid assistance.... (p. 3.1)

Students are strongly encouraged to attend orientation, but it is not a mandatory event. Approximately 81 percent of HCT students attend a formal orientation session.

HCT Orientation Program

The HCT orientation program is conducted four times each academic year. Each full-day session includes formal group presentations, individual meetings between students and campus personnel, program specific meetings with faculty advisors, registration for classes, financial aid sessions, and campus tours. Eighty to one hundred-twenty new students attend each orientation and over 30 HCT faculty, staff, administrators, and current students participate in this event. Registration and advising are the focal points of the orientation program and major emphasis is placed on faculty involvement.

The day begins with students stopping at five "check-in" stations. At each station the student confirms specific information or completes a necessary task: (a) Station #1-Welcome (information packets and name tags); (b) Station #2-Application Status (verification of admission paperwork); (c) Station #3-Placement (math and English course placement based on standardized testing completed earlier); (d) Station #4-Financial Aid (verify financial aid status); and (e) Station #5-I.D. Photos (photos and distribution of parking decals).

After the check-in process is complete, all students attend a 40-minute general information session conducted by the Director of Admissions. This session includes information regarding the College catalog, handbook, policies, procedures, and personnel. This section of orientation concludes with an overview of the registration procedure and an introduction of the program faculty in attendance. After the introduction of faculty, the students are assigned to advising groups by program of study. The faculty take the students to assigned locations for advising/registration.

Faculty advisors spend the next hour and fifteen minutes with the students who have applied to their program. During this session, advisors present program specific information regarding registration procedures, the selection of classes, class scheduling, and catalog requirements; advisors also allow an opportunity for group and individual questions.

After the advising/registration session, students gather again as a large group for a general session where presenters provide information about campus and community services. In the afternoon, students receive a confirmation of the registration in the form

of a schedule bill that lists each class and the fees associated with the semester of enrollment. Unless specifically requested by the student, faculty advisors do not meet again with students until classes begin.

Participants

Method of Selection

The Helena College of Technology has seven programs that are categorized as trade and industry. These programs include Automotive Technology, Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology, Truck-Diesel Technology, Aviation Maintenance Technology, Metals Technology, Construction Technology, and Electronics Technology. One of the distinguishing factors of these programs is the delivery of the curriculum. All of these programs are structured around a five-hour block of time designed to enhance the hands-on nature of these programs. Thirteen full-time faculty are assigned to these seven programs.

The researcher collected data from the six faculty members teaching in the Ag and Industrial-Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics programs. The primary reasons for selecting these programs for the study were the technical nature of the curriculum; the active interest the program faculty had in academic advising issues; and the long tenure of the faculty. The following is a brief profile of each faculty member selected for this study:

Instructor #1, Truck-Diesel Technology. This instructor attended Western Technical College, Northern Montana College, and Eastern Montana College. He has 8

years of work experience in addition to his 25 years in education, 22 of which have been at the Helena College of Technology.

Instructor #2, Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology. Instructor #2 earned a B.S. from Montana State University-Bozeman. He is currently pursuing his master's degree at Montana State University-Northern. He has 3 years of work experience in addition to his 14 years in education, 10 of which have been at the Helena College of Technology.

Instructor #3, Ag and Industrial-Diesel and Truck-Diesel Technology. This instructor earned a B.S. degree and M.S. degree from Montana State University-Northern. He has 4 years of work experience in addition to his 19 years in education, all of which have been at the Helena College of Technology.

Instructor #4, Electronics Technology. Instructor #4 received his electronics education through the U.S. Navy Electronics and Nuclear Engineering Technical Training program. He was in the U.S. Navy for 9 years, 3 of which were spent in this technical training program. In addition to his military experience, this instructor has 9 years of work experience in addition to his 10 years in education, 7 of which have been at the Helena College of Technology.

Instructor #5, Electronics Technology. This Electronics instructor earned an A.S. degree from Montana State University-Northern. He has 11 years of work experience in addition to4 years in education, all of which have been at the Helena College of Technology.

Instructor #6, Electronics Technology. Instructor #6 earned his B.S. degree from Montana State University-Bozeman. He is certified as a N.A.R.T.E. First Class Engineer, and he holds two F.C.C. certifications. This instructor has 13 years of work experience in addition to his 14 years in education, 6 of which have been at the Helena College of Technology.

Method of Data Collection

Interview Protocol

The researcher referred to Gay and Airasian's *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application* (2000) to determine the best way to discover the key components of faculty advising during the HCT orientation program. Gay and Airasian stated, "qualitative, interpretive research is useful for describing or answering questions about particular, localized occurrences or contexts and the perspectives of a participant group toward events, beliefs, or practices" (p. 202).

Gay and Airasian also offered guidelines for determining which type of qualitative research to use based on the characteristics of the study. Interviews were suggested if the researcher had access to the group, could establish trust and rapport, and needed on-going access to the interviewees (pp. 219-220). The researcher determined that based on Gay and Airasian research suggestions, the best way to discover the key components of faculty advising during orientation was to interview faculty members directly involved with the advising/registration session.

The interview protocol asked predetermined questions, and follow-up questions determined during the interview. The researcher gave faculty the opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the interview.

The researcher interviewed the faculty in groups designated by program. All members of the program faculty were present during the interviews. The Ag and Industrial-Diesel and Truck-Diesel faculty were interviewed together because of the shared faculty between these two programs.

Development of the Interview Protocol

The researcher developed the interview questions with input from the Assistant Dean for Student Services and the Learning Center Coordinator, both of whom are involved in the HCT orientation program and knowledgeable on this topic. Dr. Richard Howard, a Professor at Montana State University in the Adult and Higher Education Program, also reviewed the questions. The researcher's thesis committee reviewed the questions during the Thesis Proposal meeting. The interview questions were created or clarified using suggestions from all of these sources.

The goal when designing the interview was to allow the faculty an opportunity to adequately describe what happens during the 75 minutes they were with the students. A mix of general and specific questions were designed for the interviews.

The questions approved by the thesis committee and used by the researcher were:

Question 1: Identify the faculty members involved in your advising session.

Question 2: Describe the initial activities you engage in when you first arrive at your advising location (introductions, ice-breakers, etc.).

Question 3: Do you follow an agenda/outline for the advising session? How do you structure the advising session (include time spent on each activity/topic, if possible)? Who covers each activity/topic?

Question 4: What program information do you provide to the students? What general HCT information do you provide to the students?

Question 5: What materials do you distribute? Why?

Question 6: Do you have the students complete a questionnaire/data sheet? If so, what do you do with the data?

Question 7: How much time (approximately percentage or actual time) do you spend: 1) presenting to the group?, 2) with each student, one-on-one?

Question 8: What, in your opinion, is the most useful/valuable part of the advising session for the faculty? What is the most useful part for the students?

The researcher also conducted follow-up interviews with each group of faculty approximately 18 months after the initial interviews. The three questions approved by the thesis committee and used during the follow-up interviews were:

Follow-up Question 1: What changes have you made in the advising/registration session in the past 18 months?

Follow-up Question 2: Describe any value the advising/registration session has for faculty.

Follow-up Question 3: Describe any value the advising/registration session has for students.

Validity and Reliability

A member of the HCT Computer Technology faculty agreed to pilot the interview questions. The pilot interview took place on Wednesday, November 17, 1999. The researcher reworked several questions for clarity, and added two questions to the interview based on information gained through the pilot testing process. The questions added were:

Question 9: What are some common questions students have during the advising/registration session?

Question 10: Are there things you plan to change in the future? If yes, please describe.

Each interview session was audio taped while the researcher took notes of the faculty's comments. After the interview, the researcher summarized the notes and reviewed the audiotapes for clarification and confirmation of fact. The researcher submitted the written summaries of the interviews to each faculty member for their review and comment. The use of member checking ensured accurate interpretation of the data.

Research Design

Rationale

The specific research question for this study was: What are the key components of the faculty advising session during the Helena College of Technology orientation? The rationale for this study was based on the following factors: (a) Although survey results from earlier research indicated that students were very satisfied with the

advising/registration portion of orientation, the specific information students received was not researched; (b) the literature reviewed for this study showed a strong positive connection between quality orientation and advising programs, and educational attainment; and (c) determining what information was transmitted during the advising session was critical to providing consistency. This was important because over 50 percent of the HCT faculty had been at the College 3 years or less, and new faculty would continue to join the staff due to program expansion and replacement of retiring/resigning faculty.

Researcher Background and Bias

The researcher who conducted this study was the Director of Admissions at the Helena College of Technology. One of the responsibilities of this position was planning, implementing, and coordinating all orientation and registration services to incoming students. She joined the HCT staff in October of 1993 and had organized 34 orientation/registration sessions for the College by Fall 2001. The researcher viewed her working relationship with the HCT faculty and administration as positive experiences.

Procedure

In October 1999, the researcher contacted the faculty selected for this study and invited them to participate in a research project designed to identify the key components of faculty advising that occurred during the HCT orientation program. All of the faculty invited to participate in this study agreed to be interviewed. Over the course of the next several weeks, the researcher designed and pilot tested the interview questions.

The interviews for the study took place in November 1999. The researcher interviewed the faculty in groups designated by program and each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. All members of the program faculty were present during the interviews. The Ag and Industrial-Diesel and Truck-Diesel programs share faculty so these programs were interviewed together.

The researcher took notes of the faculty's comments and audio taped each interview. After the interview, the researcher summarized the notes and reviewed the audiotapes for clarification and confirmation of fact. Each faculty member reviewed the written summaries of the interviews. The faculty noted no significant discrepancies between the information they provided during the interview and what the researcher had written in the interview summary.

The researcher conducted follow-up interviews to clarify information and to determine if the faculty had made any changes in the 18 months that had passed since the first interviews. The researcher also asked faculty to describe any value the advising/registration session had for them, and in their opinion, for their students. The follow-up interviews were conducted in May 2001 and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Analysis Strategy

The researcher analyzed the data looking for common themes and differences among the programs selected for this study. First, the researcher compiled a list of all of the topics or activities mentioned by the faculty. Next, these key components were identified as a topic discussed and/or an activity utilized during the advising session by either the Electronics faculty or the Diesel faculty, or both. Third, each component was

identified in relation to the CAS orientation goal or goals and/or the CAS academic advising goal or goals. As discussed in chapter 2, each CAS orientation goal connects with one or more CAS academic advising goal thus supporting the conceptual framework for this study.

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher approached this study with the following assumptions: (a) The Ag and Industrial-Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics Technology programs have high quality faculty advising currently available; (b) no significant personnel, enrollment, or fiscal problems were consuming the time or attention of the faculty thus distracting them from quality academic advising; and (c) a positive relationship existed between the researcher and the faculty selected for this study. The researcher had worked at the Helena College of Technology for eight years. She had worked with all of these faculty members on a variety of committees and projects, and viewed these relationships and experiences as positive.

The researcher approached this study with the following limitations: (a) The data for this research paper was gathered over the course of 18 months. One faculty member in the Electronics program who was part of the initial interview, resigned in May 2000. His replacement, who was hired in August 2000, was not included in the follow-up interview held in May 2001; and (b) the researcher's personal responsibilities and the departure of her thesis committee chair lengthened the timeframe required to analyze the data and to write the findings of the study.

Timeframe

The researcher proposed the study to her advisor in the Fall of 1999. The data collection for this thesis project began in November 1999 and concluded in May 2001. The researcher's committee approved the thesis proposal in March of 2001. The majority of the data analysis and writing of the thesis took place in May and December 2001. The submission of the completed document and the defense of the study occurred during the 2002 Spring semester. A complete timeline for the study is presented in Appendix A.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher provided the methodologies used to identify the key components of the faculty advising session during the HCT orientation. Historical, philosophical, and organization information regarding the Helena College of Technology were provided, as well as profiles of the faculty and students. A detailed account of the orientation program and the method of selecting the participants of the study concluded the first section of this chapter.

The method of data collection section of chapter 3 included information on the interview protocol, development of the interview questions, and the validity and reliability of the data collected. The final section of this chapter was the research design, which outlined the rationale, researcher background and bias, the step-by-step procedures followed, the analysis strategy selected for the data, assumptions and limitations of the study, and the timeframe for the study.

The next chapter is the presentation of the findings of the research.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter 4 is the presentation of the research findings of this study, which was designed to identify the key components of the faculty advising/registration session during the Helena College of Technology orientation. In this chapter, detailed accounts of each interview will be presented.

The meaning of the data will be discussed in relation to common themes and differences found during interviews with faculty in each program. The components identified will then be discussed in relation to the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Beatty and Standing's research (1995) that concluded that orientation and academic advising share many of the same goals and functions that benefit both student and institution, and are natural partners. This chapter concludes with a presentation of the weaknesses in the data, and a brief summary of the research results.

Results

Electronics Technology Interview

The researcher interviewed the three faculty members of the Electronics Technology program on Friday, November 19, 1999, to learn more about how they structure the advising/registration session and what information they shared with new

students. The interview took approximately 40 minutes. The faculty chose to be interviewed together since the advising/registration session always takes place in a group setting.

All of the faculty members try to attend each orientation. If they are unavailable for a session, they coordinate their schedules to make certain at least one faculty member is in attendance. As the faculty brings the group of students to the advising/registration location, usually an electronics classroom, they try to relax them with light humor and joking. When they enter the classroom, the faculty does not engage in any organized icebreakers but usually ask the students their names and where they are from.

There is no written agenda for the advising/registration session, but all three faculty members agree that the same basic information is shared with each group they advise. There are three main focuses for the session: (a) sharing program information; (b) answering student questions; and (c) registering students in classes. The general information covered during the advising/registration session and the approximate time used for each area are as follows:

1) General program information	(approximately 20 minutes)
2) Student questions	(approximately 20 minutes)
3) Registration	(approximately 20 minutes)
4) Unscheduled time	(approximately 15 minutes)

The faculty estimated that they use approximately 60 minutes of the allotted 75 minutes available for advising/registration. The faculty explained that the reason they do not use all of the allotted time is the new block scheduling format, which speeds up the registration process for first-semester Electronics students. Block scheduling is a

predetermined set of classes that have been reserved for a particular program or group of students.

The faculty estimated that half of the time used is in group presentation and the other half is used advising individual students that have unique situations such as transfer credits, and reassuring nervous students by answering their specific questions. One faculty member mentioned that if one of them forgets to say something important, another faculty member or a student (in the form of a question) usually reminds them.

The topics included by the Electronics faculty in each advising/registration session (in no particular order) are:

- Program options (general, computer systems, and bio-medical)
- Classroom locations
- How to read the schedule/how to complete registration form
- Format of the curriculum
- Required and recommended tools, materials, and expenses
- Areas of expertise of the three faculty members
- Employment and employability (in-state and out-of-state)
- The structure of a typical day
- Homework requirements through the semester
- Stress factor of being in this program/school
- Balancing work and school

Students usually have many questions regarding the amount of homework, the consistency of the workload, financial aid, personal math skills/fears, and their own ability to succeed in school. The faculty described the mood of the students as anxious to start school '*right now,*' nervous about their academic abilities (especially math), and wanting confirmation of math skills needed to succeed in the Electronics program. The faculty voiced a concern for how best to advise under-prepared students and students who have limited ability to problem solve.

The faculty does not have students complete a questionnaire or data sheet. The only material the faculty distributes is the tool list (also found in the catalog) and materials that Student Services provides (e.g., changes in the schedule, lists of closed classes, etc.).

The Electronics faculty agrees that changes in the advising/registration process have greatly benefited both faculty and students. One of the most significant changes was the elimination of the "Tally Station." Prior to Spring Semester 1997, after a very quick advising session with faculty, students took their completed registration sheet to a central location called the Tally Station. Here each class the students desired was checked off and it was determined if there was space in the course. If students requested a closed class, they returned to the advisor for assistance in finding a suitable alternate course. By changing the schedule to allow more time for advising and eliminating the Tally Station altogether, there is no longer the pressure or incentive to hurry through the advising/registration process so students have a chance at getting a good class schedule.

The faculty said the most valuable parts of the advising/registration session for them are the chance to get to know the students they will soon have in their classroom and to establish themselves as the "leaders" of the group. The faculty believe the students benefit most from the "comfort factors" of being on campus, such as having the opportunity to meet their future teachers, getting more detailed information about the program, meeting fellow students, and learning where all of the rooms are located.

Follow-up Interview with Electronics Faculty

On May 4, 2001, the researcher met briefly with two members of the Electronics faculty. Instructor #4, the other faculty member interviewed in November 1999 for this research project, was no longer employed by HCT.

The purpose of this follow-up interview was to determine if any significant changes had occurred in the way the faculty conducted the advising/registration session, and if the faculty had any additional comments or information they wished to share on this topic. The Electronics faculty reported that no major changes had been made in the session. One minor change noted was the use of most of the allotted 75 minutes of the session, by increasing the time spent on explaining the program and answering student questions. The faculty also reported that they continue to use the "block scheduling" format of registration by writing the preferred class schedule on the board and having the students copy it onto the registration forms.

The researcher asked the faculty to describe the value the advising/registration session had for them and for their students. The Electronics Instructors agreed that the value of this session from a faculty point of view was getting to know the students and to ease any concerns the students might have before the start of the semester. The greatest value these two faculty saw for the students was the chance to learn about the program first-hand and to see how they (the students) would fit into the program.

Ag and Industrial-Diesel and Truck-Diesel Technology Interview

The researcher interviewed the three faculty members of the Ag and Industrial-Diesel and Truck-Diesel Technology program on Tuesday, November 23, 1999, to learn

more about how they structure the advising/registration session and what information they shared with new students. The interview with the Diesel Faculty took approximately 50 minutes. The faculty chose to be interviewed together since the advising/registration session always take place in a group setting.

All of the faculty members reported that they try to attend each advising/registration session and they coordinate their schedules to make certain at least two faculty members are in attendance. The faculty firmly believes that attending each orientation is one way of showing program unity, teamwork, and commitment to the students.

When the group arrives at the advising/registration location, the faculty introduce themselves and the areas they teach. The faculty does not engage in any organized icebreakers nor do they ask the students to introduce themselves. Students are asked to identify which Diesel option (Truck or Ag and Industrial) for which they are registering.

There is no written agenda for the advising/registration session but all agree that the same basic information is shared with each group they advise. The general information covered during the advising/registration session and the approximate time used for each area are as follows:

1) General program information	(approximately 15 minutes)
2) Registration	(approximately 30 minutes)
3) Student questions	(approximately 15 minutes)
4) Specific Program Tasks	(approximately 15 minutes)

Instructor #1 usually leads the general session and facilitates the "student questions" part of the advising/registration session. Instructor #2 finds necessary

information from the General Education faculty and Student Services, as needed, and follows up with each student and handles individual questions. Instructor #3 covers the registration portion which includes instructions on how to complete the forms, how to read the catalog and class schedule, etc.

Instructor #3 stated that a message the faculty tries to get across is the student's personal responsibility in the registration process. Although the Diesel curriculum is arranged in the "block schedule" format, the faculty does not write the course numbers, sections, and names on the board so students can just copy the information onto their registration sheets. By requiring the students to use the registration materials provided, the faculty believes it is introducing a department philosophy of teamwork with personal responsibility on the part of the student and the faculty member.

Topics included by the Diesel faculty in each advising/registration session (in no particular order) are:

- Program options (Truck and Ag and Industrial)
- Tools (what to buy, when to buy, etc.)
- Policies such as attendance, grading, importance of grades, etc.
- Attitude, commitment required for success in the Diesel program
- General Education requirements/placement into math and English courses
- Extended Day classes (Welding in the Fall, Safety in the Spring)
- Food Service availability and other unique Poplar Campus features
- Learning Center and Library services/taking advantage of free services
- Importance of reading/comprehension in the Diesel program
- Employment opportunities during and after graduation
- Classroom locations
- How to read the schedule/how to complete registration forms
- Format of the curriculum
- The structure of a typical day
- Balancing work and school

Students usually have many questions regarding the purchase of tools, working while in school, the daily schedule, transfer of credits, financial aid and agency funding related to purchasing tools, housing, and how to locate classrooms.

The faculty described the mood of the students as anxious and looking for validation that they are in the right program. The faculty believes that they are offering the students reassurance by providing relevant information in a non-threatening environment. The faculty believe that students can see the respect the faculty has for each other and for students, that the faculty loves what they do, and that people care about students at this institution and in this department.

The faculty does not have students complete a questionnaire or data sheet. Materials distributed by the faculty include a sample of a student's weekly schedule, the tool vendor list, and materials that Student Services provides (e.g., changes in the schedule, lists of closed classes, etc.).

The Diesel faculty reported that they use all of the time allotted for student advising/registration. The faculty also meets with the students later in the day to give them a tour of the Poplar Campus where the Diesel classrooms and shops are located. The Poplar Campus is located approximately three miles from the Donaldson Campus where the advising/registration session occurs. The faculty estimates that 60-75 percent of the students tour the Poplar Campus during orientation. During the Poplar Campus tour, the faculty often answers individual questions or concerns not appropriate for the larger group setting.

The faculty said the most valuable parts of the advising/registration session for them are connecting with the students and helping to calm some of the student's fears. Instructor #3 summarized the Diesel advising philosophy as trying to be a "springboard rather than a hurdle." The faculty are careful not to engage in "weed out" language and try to be encouraging although realistic with students. However, the faculty strongly stressed the importance of grades received in the program and future employment opportunities. The faculty believe the students benefit most from having the chance to meet the faculty and seeing them work as a team, touring the facility, and finding the locations of classrooms.

The Diesel faculty noted that they planned to explore the possibility of having students complete a data sheet and would likely have the students introduce themselves at the beginning of the advising/registration session.

Follow-up Interview with the Diesel Faculty

On May 4, 2001, the researcher met briefly with the three members of the HCT Diesel faculty. These individuals were part of the initial interviews conducted in November 1999 for this research project.

The purpose of this follow-up interview was to determine if any significant changes had occurred in the way the faculty conducted the advising/registration session, and if the faculty had any additional comments or information they wished to share on this topic. The most significant change implemented in the advising/registration session in the past 18 months was now the students introduce themselves and share a few personal items with the group. The faculty reported that they continue to place a large

amount of responsibility for registration on the students and that individual advising does occur even in the group advising format because of the varying general education requirements of each student.

The researcher asked the faculty to describe the value the advising/registration session had for them and for their students. Instructor #3 stated that the value he gained from the advising/registration session was an established comfort level for both faculty and students. By meeting the students before the first day of classes, the faculty and the students are put at ease. "Just by knowing where they [the students] need to show up on the first day [of classes] eliminates a lot of the jitters. There is a noticeable difference between students who attend orientation and those who don't."

Instructor #2 commented on the value of the session for students. "The students often arrive scared and leave with a great sense of relief." He also said that the value of the session varies from student to student but most benefit greatly from the advising/registration session during orientation. He believes this is especially true if the student has never been on campus before attending orientation.

The Diesel faculty have not implemented the idea of having students complete a data sheet, which was discussed during the interview in November 1999.

Discussion of the Meaning

Themes

The researcher analyzed the data from the initial and follow-up interviews looking for common themes and differences among the programs selected for this study. First,

the researcher compiled a list of all of the topics or activities mentioned by the faculty. Next, these key components were identified as a topic discussed and/or an activity utilized during the advising session by either the Electronics faculty or the Diesel faculty, or both. Third, each component was identified in relation to the CAS orientation goal or goals and/or the CAS academic advising goal or goals. As discussed in chapter two, each CAS orientation goal connects with one or more CAS academic advising goal, thus supporting the conceptual framework for this study.

The researcher discovered 21 components between the two programs. Eleven components were common to the Ag and Industrial-Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics programs, while 10 components were different. These themes will be discussed in terms of the common components and differences between the programs.

Common Components. The six faculty members agreed that both they and the students benefited from the advising/registration session. All voiced some sentiment that a level of comfort was established during the session, which calmed the students' nerves and reinforced the students' decision to enroll at HCT. A priority of both groups was making the students feel welcome and comfortable at the College. The faculty offered several examples of ways, such as introducing themselves, showing or describing classroom locations, and identifying where to report on the first day of classes to help students feel more comfortable on campus.

Program specific information was the hallmark of each program's advising/registration session. The faculty from both programs shared detailed information with the students regarding program options; faculty background and areas

of expertise; the structure of a typical day; faculty expectations; and program policies regarding attendance, grading, and performance.

The faculty reported that the students asked many similar questions during the advising/registration session. In particular, questions were asked regarding tool and equipment requirements; employment opportunities during and after college; homework expectations and time commitment; and how to balance the demands of school, work, and home.

The key common components between the Electronic and Diesel programs are depicted in Table 1. The table also lists the CAS orientation goal or goals and the most appropriate corresponding CAS advising goal or goals for each common component.

Table 1: Key Common Component by Program and CAS Goal.

Component/Topic	Electronics Program	Diesel Program	CAS Orientation Goal	CAS Advising Goal
1. Balancing school, work, home, etc.	Yes	Yes	1	1, 5, 6, 8
2. Classroom locations	Yes	Yes	1	NA
3. Curriculum overview	Yes	Yes	2	2, 3, 5, 8
4. Employment opportunities	Yes	Yes	2	2, 3, 5, 8
5. Homework requirements	Yes	Yes	3	4, 7
6. Introduction of faculty	Yes	Yes	1	5, 8
7. Policies: Grading, importance of grades, attendance, etc.	Yes	Yes	3	4, 7
8. Program options	Yes	Yes	2	2, 3, 5, 8
9. Registration information	Yes	Yes	3	4, 7
10. Structure of a typical day	Yes	Yes	3	4, 7
11. Tools and equipment	Yes	Yes	3	4, 7

Differences. One difference between the programs was how the faculty introduced themselves and the students. The Electronics faculty engaged humor and made an attempt to get to know the students by having each student state his or her name, hometown, and program interest. The Diesel faculty spent a fair amount of time introducing themselves, but did not attempt to learn even the most basic information about their students.

Although neither program formally followed an agenda or outline during the advising/registration session, the Diesel program was much more systematic in the delivery of information. Each Diesel faculty member had a well-defined role during the 75-minute advising/registration session whereas the Electronics faculty was less concerned with establishing a protocol.

Key differences also included the faculty's approach and attitude toward student registration. Although both groups were successful in accomplishing this step, the approach was program specific. The Diesel faculty spent a significant amount of time and effort educating the students on "how" and "why" they were registering for classes. The Diesel faculty stated that the message they were attempting to relay to the students was that registration was the student's responsibility with the assistance of the faculty. The Electronics faculty, in contrast, relished the "block" scheduling system that allows for little individual freedom when selecting courses. The Electronics faculty viewed registration as a process, which requires the faculty to write the students' schedule on the board and each student copying it verbatim onto the registration sheet.

The final major difference identified between these programs was the emphasis placed on specific academic abilities. The Electronics faculty placed a great amount of emphasis on math preparation and skill level, and problem solving ability. During the Electronics interview, math issues such as skill level, anxiety, placement, and ability were discussed numerous times. The Diesel faculty never mentioned math as an area of faculty or student concern. However, the Diesel faculty discussed the importance of reading comprehension and encouraged students to take advantage of academic support services on campus (e.g., Learning Center, Library). The Diesel faculty also placed great emphasis on attitude, attendance, and work ethic.

The key differences between the Electronic and Diesel programs are depicted in Table 2. The table also lists the CAS orientation goal or goals and the most appropriate corresponding CAS advising goal or goals for each key difference.

Table 2: Key Differences by Program and CAS Goal.

Component/Topic	Electronics Program	Diesel Program	CAS Orientation Goal	CAS Advising Goal
1. Introduction of students	Yes	No	1	NA
2. Stress of program/school	Yes	No	1,3	1, 5, 6, 7, 8
3. Math and problem solving ability	Yes	No	1	1, 5, 6, 8
4. Block scheduling style	Yes	No	3	4, 7
5. Structured presentation	No	Yes	NA	NA
6. General education placement in math and English courses	No	Yes	1	1, 5, 6, 8
7. Attitude, commitment, work ethic, etc. required for success in the program	No	Yes	3	4, 7
8. Learning Center/Library information	No	Yes	2	5, 8
9. Registration responsibility of students with faculty help	No	Yes	3	4, 7
10. Specific Poplar Campus information	No	Yes	1,3	5, 8

Weaknesses in the Data

The faculty offered only limited feedback regarding the written comments the researcher sent to them after the program interviews. The lack of faculty response might be explained in a number of ways: (a) the limited timeframe available to conduct the initial interviews; (b) end of the semester commitments of the faculty; and/or (c) the accuracy and completeness of the written comments did not require comment.

The researcher also acknowledges the fact that "knowing" the faculty and the programs very well had both benefits and drawbacks. Rapport and trust between the interviewer and the faculty were established through eight years of working together. The researcher must acknowledge that with this established relationship comes a concern of lost objectivity and possible false assumptions.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the key components of faculty advising presented to students during the advising/registration session. This study has shown the specific information covered and procedures followed by the Diesel and Electronics faculty during the advising/registration session during the HCT orientation. The researcher discovered 21 components between the three programs. Eleven components were common to the Ag and Industrial-Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics programs, while 10 components were different. These themes were discussed in terms of the common components and differences between the programs.

Chapter Summary

The research findings from interviews conducted with selected faculty at the Helena College of Technology regarding the advising/registration session during orientation were presented in Chapter 4. The researcher presented detailed accounts of the initial and follow-up interviews. Data collected during the interviews were discussed in regard to common themes and differences found between the programs in this study. Each of the key components identified were then linked to the appropriate CAS orientation or academic advising goals, thus connecting this research to the conceptual framework for this study.

The researcher concluded the chapter with a summary of the results of the study. The final chapter in this study, chapter 5, the researcher will summarize the study, present an advising/registration session model that might be used by HCT faculty in future orientation advising/registration sessions, and offer ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The researcher presents the conclusions of the study in this chapter. The researcher will provide a summary of the problem, a description of the methodology, the results of the study, and the interpretation of the results. The research will also be discussed in terms of the broader implications of the study, including the introduction of an advising/registration session model. This chapter concludes with a summary of the study, suggestions for future research, and recommendations for implementation of the findings.

Summary of the Problem and Methodology and Results

Summary of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that although the advising/registration session with faculty was consistently the highest-rated event during the HCT orientation, it was unknown what specific information faculty shared with students. In 1999, when this thesis project began, the College anticipated faculty changes caused by retirements, resignations, and the addition of new instructors due to the continued growth experienced by HCT; therefore, determining exactly what information faculty advisors actually transmitted during the session was critical in order to ensure continued high ratings by

students. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify the key components of the faculty advising session during the Helena College of Technology orientation.

Summary of the Methodology

The researcher determined that based on Gay and Airasian research suggestions in *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application* (2000), the best way to discover the key components of faculty advising during orientation was to interview faculty members directly involved with the advising/registration session. The researcher interviewed the six faculty members from the Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology, Truck-Diesel Technology, and Electronics Technology programs, which are three of the seven technical programs at the Helena College of Technology. One of the distinguishing factors of these programs is the delivery of the curriculum. All of these programs are structured around a five-hour block of time designed to enhance the hands-on nature of these programs.

The primary reasons for selecting these programs for the study were the technical nature of the curriculum; the active interest the Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology, Truck-Diesel Technology, and Electronics Technology faculty had in academic advising issues; and the long tenure of the faculty. Faculty from the Ag and Industrial-Diesel Technology and Truck-Diesel Technology programs were interviewed together because these departments share faculty.

The researcher developed the interview questions with input from the following sources: (a) HCT Student Services personnel; (b) Dr. Richard Howard, a Professor at Montana State University in the Adult and Higher Education Program; and (c) the

researcher's thesis committee. The researcher conducted a pilot test of the interview questions with a member of the HCT Computer Technology faculty prior to the Diesel and Electronics interviews.

The interview protocol included predetermined questions, follow-up questions determined during the interview by the researcher, and an opportunity for the faculty to add additional comments. Each faculty member had an opportunity to review the written summary of the researcher and to offer clarification and additional information.

The researcher conducted the initial interviews in November 1999. She also had follow-up interviews with the faculty in May 2001 to determine if any significant changes had been implemented in the 18 months since the initial interviews and to ask the faculty's opinion on the value of the advising/registration session.

Summary of the Results

The researcher analyzed the data looking for common themes and differences among the programs by compiling a list of all of the topics or activities (components) mentioned by the faculty; identifying each as a component utilized by either the Electronics faculty or the Diesel faculty, or both; and connecting each component to one or more CAS orientation goal and/or academic advising goal. The researcher discovered 21 components between the two programs. Eleven components were common to all three programs, while 10 components were different.

Key Common Components. Both the Electronic faculty and Diesel faculty engaged in the following discussions during the advising/registration session:

1. Balancing school, work, home, etc.
2. Classroom locations
3. Curriculum overview
4. Employment opportunities during college and after graduation
5. Homework requirements for specific courses and the programs in general
6. Introduction of faculty (background, areas of expertise, etc.)
7. Policies: Grading, importance of grades, attendance, etc.
8. Program options (Ag-Industrial or Truck-Diesel; General, Computer Systems, or Biomedical for Electronics)
9. Registration information: How to read the class schedule booklet, how to complete necessary forms, etc.
10. Structure of a typical day
11. Tools and equipment required or suggested for the program

Key Differences. The key differences discovered between the advising/registration sessions conducted by the Diesel faculty and Electronics faculty were as follows (the program using/covering the component is in parentheses):

1. Introduction of students (Electronics)
2. Stress of the program and school (Electronics)
3. Math and problem solving ability required for coursework (Electronics)
4. Block scheduling style: Faculty write the class schedule on the board and students copy it onto their registration sheet (Electronics)
5. Unstructured presentation (Electronics) versus structured presentation (Diesel)

6. General education placement in math and English courses (Diesel)
7. Attitude, commitment, work ethic, etc. required for program success (Diesel)
8. Learning Center and Library information (Diesel)
9. Registration seen as the responsibility of students with faculty assistance (Diesel)
10. Specific Poplar Campus information (Diesel)

Interpretation of the Results

The results of the study suggest that the Ag & Industrial-Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics faculty generally cover information and follow procedures during the advising/registration consistent with the goals of orientation and advising programs described in the literature. Over 50 percent of the components identified by this study are common to both programs. The key components connect directly to the CAS goals that support student transition, exposure to campus opportunities, and integration into the life of the institution.

The key differences cannot be dismissed as unimportant because they were not common to both programs. The research revealed that these differences might be explained in one of two ways. First, the component was program specific and, therefore, not of immediate interest or importance to the other program. For example, the Electronics curriculum emphasizes math whereas the Diesel programs have minimal math requirements. Math, in terms of preparation, placement, proficiency, and anxiety, is a common topic of discussion and concerns for Electronics faculty and students but rarely surfaces during Diesel advising.

The second explanation for the differences may be that the component was something that the faculty had failed to recognize as important or of interest to the students. For example, during the interview the Diesel instructors provided great detail on how they introduce themselves. When the faculty was asked if they had students introduce themselves, one faculty member responded, "No. (pause) Why don't we do that?" The faculty had simply never considered this action, but they were not opposed to implementing it in future sessions.

The study also revealed a major philosophical difference between the Electronic faculty and the Diesel faculty regarding the responsibility of students in the registration process. The Diesel faculty stressed student responsibility with faculty assistance, while the Electronics faculty utilized the block scheduling method of writing the students' schedule on the board and having the students copy it onto their registration sheet.

The research also suggests that although the faculty were comfortable with conducting the advising/registration session, the consistency and overall quality of the session might be increased if the faculty followed a model that contained the key components of a successful advising/registration session. The interview with the Diesel faculty revealed that they follow a loosely structured presentation format that incorporates established roles for each faculty member. The research suggests that the Diesel faculty have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and therefore, rarely overlook sharing important information with students. The interview with the Electronics faculty revealed that if the faculty forget to cover important information, a student usually reminded them by asking a relevant question. This situation and the

potential to overlook or forget important information altogether could be eliminated or greatly reduced by following a comprehensive advising/registration session model.

Discussion of the Broader Implications

Theoretical Implications

The prior research on orientation and academic advising has primarily focused on these areas in very broad terms. The research has offered general suggestions on how to structure orientation and academic advising to enhance program quality and provide the best benefits to students; however, no specific details were offered as a model.

Pascarella and Terenzini's *How College Affects Students* (1991) reported several studies that indicated a positive relationship between orientation and academic advising, and educational attainment (Forrest, 1985; Brigman, Kuh, & Stager, 1982; Endo & Harpel, 1979; Louis, Colten, & Demeke, 1984; Meyers, 1981; Smith, 1980; Taylor, 1982). This research concluded that quality orientation and academic advising programs had a strong positive effect on the number of students that successfully graduated from college.

The past research has clearly shown that quality orientation and advising programs must (a) involve faculty (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; King, 2000; Beatty & Standing, 1995; Mann, 1998; (b) provide information that is beneficial to students (Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Tinto, 1987; Cook & Stearns, 2000); and, (c) connect students with the institution (Mann, 1998; Frost, 1990; Tinto, 1987; Noel & Levitz, 1989).

This research study looked at one specific aspect of orientation and academic advising to gain knowledge of what happened specifically in the advising/registration session. This study, based on Beatty and Standing's concept that orientation and academic advising are natural partners (1995), builds on past research and offers the specific components that should be included in the actual advising/registration session. The knowledge learned in this study will be presented in the form of an advising/registration session model in the practical implications section of this thesis.

Practical Implications

This study revealed many practical implications for the College, the faculty involved in the advising/registration session, and the orientation program.

Practical Implications for the College. This study serves as a catalyst for discussing the multiple roles and responsibilities faced by faculty advisors during the advising/registration session. The key components identified through this study will create a framework for the session that will encourage the delivery of information that is consistent, efficient, and ultimately beneficial to students.

Practical Implications for the Faculty. The researcher believes that the practical implications of the research would greatly benefit faculty because the information learned through the study most directly affects them. The advising/registration session is designed, functionally and organizationally, to provide practical information to students. The practical implications for the faculty involve improving the organization of the material and the overall functioning of the session.

The following model is based on the analysis of the data collected for this research project and orientation and academic advising literature. The model, depicted in Table 3, provides broad guidelines regarding organization of the session, the amount of time to spend on each area, and the components/topics to cover.

Table 3: Advising/Registration Session Model for HCT Faculty.

I. Welcome (10-15 minutes)

   a. Faculty and students leave the Student Center to go to the assigned advising/registration area.

   b. Faculty introduce themselves by sharing their name, education, teaching and work experience, areas of expertise, interest, etc.

   c. Students introduce themselves by sharing their name, hometown, interest in the program area, work experience, hobbies, etc.

II. Registration (20-30 minutes)

   a. Faculty provides an overview of the advising/registration session, the importance of educational planning, and advisor/student relationship.

   b. Faculty discusses any program specific information that might be important to the educational planning and registration process. For example, program options that would require a different sequencing of courses.

c. Faculty distributes registration materials; discusses the importance of registration, student involvement, and shared responsibility; and explains the registration process, how to read the schedule book, etc.

d. Faculty and students work on the task of registration. Faculty answers individual questions regarding placement into general education courses, transfer credit, and academic concerns that might affect course selection.

III. General Program Information/Student Questions (20-30 minutes)

a. Faculty presents information on the following topics:

i. Transition to HCT (faculty and student introductions; balancing home, work, school, etc.; general education placement information; and how to deal with the stress of starting school)

ii. Exposure to the broad educational opportunities at HCT (academic and student support; clubs and interest groups; program options and curriculum overview; financial aid; and employment opportunities during college)

iii. Integration into life at HCT (HCT policies and procedures; homework requirements; registration procedures and expectations; structure of a typical day; attitude, commitment, work ethic, etc. necessary to succeed at HCT)

b. Students ask questions regarding the information presented by the faculty or any relevant area of interest or concern.

IV. Program Specific Tasks (0-10 minutes)

a. Faculty accompanies students to the HCT Bookstore for coverall fittings.

b. Faculty are encouraged to give their students a tour of the Bookstore and lead a discussion on tools, books, and supplies required by the program.

c. Faculty arrange tours of the Poplar Campus or other HCT campuses.

The faculty will find that the design of the model allows flexibility and customization to suit the needs of the program and students.

Practical Implications for the Orientation Program. The researcher, who also directs the orientation program, has gained valuable insight from this research regarding the importance of establishing compatible goals for orientation and advising, and the need for on-going discussions and research aimed at improving the quality of the program. This study has shown the importance of evaluating the specific components of the orientation to ensure the overall quality of the program and consistency in the delivery of services.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study is that it involved only three of the 15 programs at the Helena College of Technology. The qualitative nature of this study makes it impossible to generalize the findings of the research to all HCT programs or a larger population. The research may be specifically helpful or interesting to the Ag & Industrial Diesel, Truck-Diesel, and Electronics faculty. The research may also be generally

helpful or interesting to the remaining program faculty, but great caution should be exercised in making major changes to the advising/registration session based *solely* on this research. However, many of the conclusions and recommendations, and the advising/registration session model were based on the CAS orientation and advising goals and other literature, in addition to the information learned through this study.

Summary

The research question for this study asked: "What are the key components of the faculty advising session during the Helena College of Technology orientation? This study revealed the following information.

- The key components of the advising/registration session during the HCT orientation can be categorized using the CAS goals for orientation and academic advising.
- Using the general terminology of the CAS orientation goals and placing the HCT key components that correspond with each goal in parentheses, the goals and key components are:
  - Goal 1: Transition to HCT (balancing home, work, school, etc.; faculty and student introductions; general education placement information; and how to deal with the stress of starting school).
  - Goal 2: Exposure to the broad educational opportunities at HCT (academic and student support; clubs and interest groups; program options and curriculum overview; financial aid; and employment opportunities during college).

- Goal 3: Integration into life at HCT (HCT policies and procedures; homework requirements; registration procedures and expectations; structure of a typical day; attitude, commitment, work ethic, etc., necessary to succeed at HCT).

- Faculty cover information and follow procedures during the advising/registration session that are congruent with the goals of orientation and academic advising found in the literature.
- Over 50 percent of the components were common to both programs, confirming the importance of the components for faculty and student discussion during the advising/registration session.
- The key differences cannot be dismissed as unimportant because they were not common to both programs but may be explained in one of two ways: (a) the component was program specific and therefore, not of immediate interest or importance to the other program (e.g., math concerns for Electronics); or (b) the component was something that the faculty had failed to recognize as important or of interest but they were not opposed to implementing it in future sessions (e.g., introducing students for Diesel).
- The Diesel faculty followed a loosely structured presentation format that incorporated established roles for each faculty member. The research suggests that the faculty have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and therefore, rarely overlook sharing important information with students.

- Philosophical differences exist between the programs regarding the responsibility of students in the registration process.

Recommendations and Implementation of Findings

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study and will be presented in relation to the College, the faculty, and the orientation program.

Recommendations for the College. The researcher recommends that the College increase awareness of the Council for the Advancement of Standards goals for orientation programs and goals for academic advising. After the initial introduction of these goals, the institution could facilitate campus-wide discussions on how best to personalize the goals to support the institutional mission and philosophy. For example, the institution's interpretation of the CAS academic advising goal # 7, reinforcement of student self-direction, could affect the way the faculty conducts the registration process.

The researcher also recommends that the Helena College of Technology encourage opportunities for academic advising in-service training for *all* faculty, not only *new* faculty. This study has shown that experienced faculty also benefit from learning how other faculty members conduct the advising/registration session. Faculty with all levels of experience would benefit from exchanging practical insights, sharing tips on structuring the session, and developing unique approaches to answering difficult or contentious questions.

Recommendation for the Faculty. The researcher has two recommendations for the faculty involved in the advising/registration session. First, faculty should develop handout materials or a program handbook that would serve as a reference guide for students. These handouts or handbooks would allow students to hear the program-specific information during orientation and to review it again at a later date. Second, the faculty should consider developing a data sheet, based on the CAS academic advising goals, that students could complete during the advising/registration session. The faculty-student advising relationship would be established during this first meeting by collecting information on the students' educational, career, and life goals, current and past work experience, and other areas, such as concerns, interests, or questions.

Recommendations for the Orientation Program. The researcher recommends that the orientation evaluation form be revised to ask students to identify the information they found most helpful during the advising/registration session. The orientation staff should also consider publicizing and promoting the program's goals, and assessing the program annually to see if these goals are being met.

Further Research

As with most research, this study raised as many questions as it attempted to answer. More research is necessary before any generalization of the results is possible. The researcher suggests the following area for future research.

Additional Programs. This study focused on three of the 15 programs available at the Helena College of Technology. The next phase of the research should look at more, if not all, of the programs at the Helena College of Technology.

Students. An earlier study revealed that students were very satisfied with the advising/registration session during the HCT orientation. However, the study did not assess why the students were satisfied or what benefits they received from attending the session. The researcher recommends the continuation of the earlier study to ask students these questions.

Student Characteristics. The researcher would be interested to learn if characteristics of the students enrolling in a program, such as age and life experience, make a difference in how the faculty structures the advising/registration session and addresses the key components. This study could reveal very significant information at an institution like the Helena College of Technology. The age and life experience of students enrolled at HCT varies greatly from program to program. The faculty may employ different methods and strategies for the advising/registration session if significant difference were discovered.

Evaluating the Advising/Registration Session Model. The advising/registration session model has been distributed to the HCT faculty and administrators involved with new faculty orientation and faculty in-service training. If the faculty implements the model, it would be necessary to evaluate the model's effectiveness and practicality, and make adjustments as needed.

Procedural Adjustments

In a future study, the researcher would suggest shortening the timeline between the initial interviews, the analysis of the data, and the dissemination of the research findings. Timely distribution of the results of the study to faculty, administrators, and student services staff may sustain interest in the project, encourage implementation of the suggestions, and increase the possibility of more on-campus research in the area of faculty advising and orientation.

Replication

The researcher would recommend replicating the study, with the adjustments mentioned above, involving other programs at the Helena College of Technology. The College has experienced many changes since the initial interviews in November 1999. Some of these changes include a new Dean, faculty replacements, and orientation staff changes. This study served as a solid foundation for creating an advising/registration session model for faculty to utilize during the advising/registration session. The Helena College of Technology would benefit if future studies identified more ways to improve or enhance advising and orientation.

New Questions

This study looked at the advising/registration session during orientation from a faculty prospective. The logical next questions are: What are the key components of the advising/registration session during the HCT orientation that most benefit students? How do these components make a difference in the students' satisfaction and/or success?

Implementation of Findings

The results of this study now serve as a resource for administrators and personnel involved in the HCT orientation program. The information was added to orientation training materials for faculty and disseminated to faculty during advising training sessions conducted by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

The advising/registration session model has been distributed to the HCT faculty and administrators involved with new faculty orientation and faculty in-service training. The researcher recommends to those coordinating faculty orientation and in-service training that the faculty evaluate the model at the next orientation program in June 2002.

Chapter Summary

In chapter 5, the researcher has presented the conclusions of the study. The chapter included a summary of the problem and methodology, an overview of the results of the study, and the interpretation of the results. The research was discussed in terms of the broader implications of the study, including the introduction of an advising/registration session model. This chapter concluded with a summary of the study, suggestions for future research, and recommendations for implementation of the findings.

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APPENDIX A

TIMELINE

TIMELINE FOR ORIENTATION ASSESSMENT AND THESIS PROJECT

June 1999	Initial Orientation Program Assessment
September 1999	Thesis topic proposed by the researcher to her Faculty Advisor
October 1999	Researcher develops interview questions
November 1999	Researcher conducts interviews with selected HCT faculty
March 2001	Proposal approved by Thesis Committee
May 2001	Researcher conducts follow-up interviews with HCT faculty
February 2002	Dissemination of Faculty Advising/Registration Model
April 2002	Researcher defends her thesis

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