



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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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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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" (Sandeem, 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.

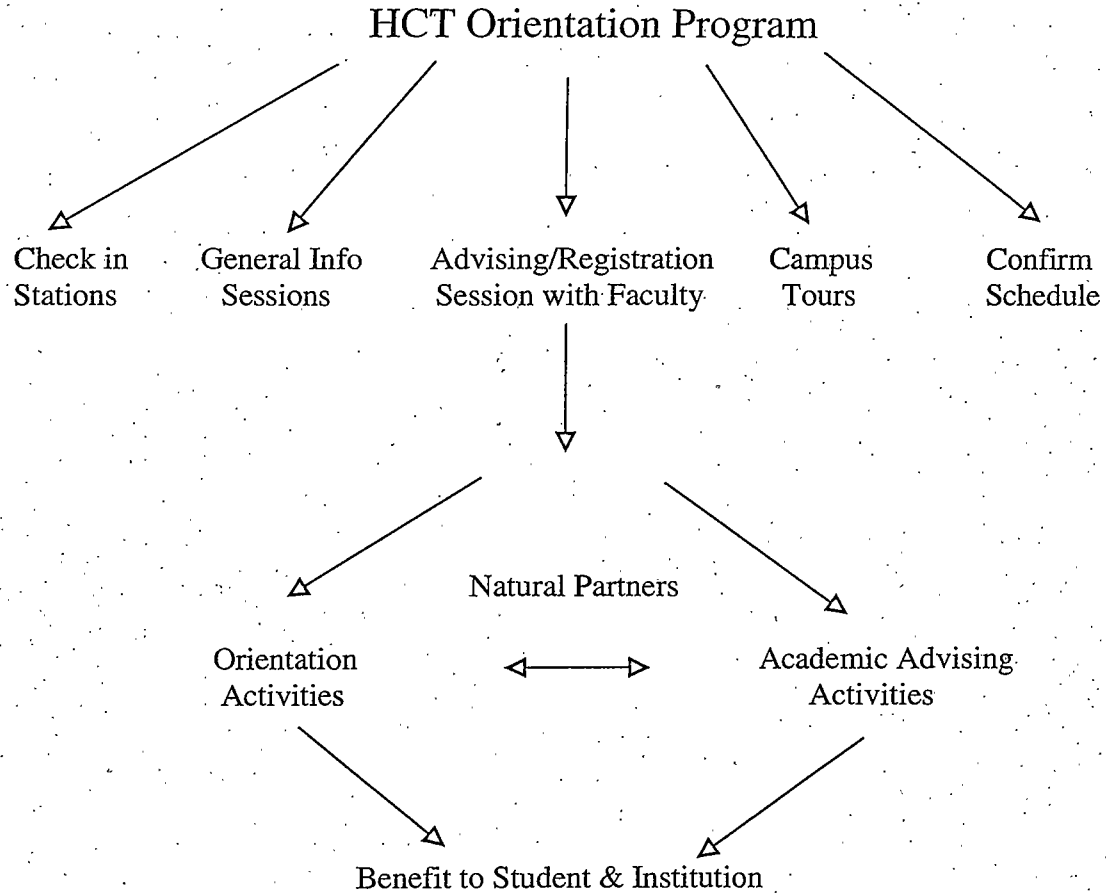


Figure 1: HCT Orientation Program Organization & Conceptual Framework.

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 LiteratureCriteria 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 of 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 to 4 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.).

