**Advising: We’re doing it more but no one seems to know how to evaluate it.**

Abstract

Advising is a part of faculty evaluations in many institutions of higher education. However, it is a performance dimension that raises concerns and discussion regarding how subjectively it is measured and evaluated. Because this topic has not been widely researched and addressed by faculty in business schools, this session presents a roundtable discussion in which participants can share the advising approaches and evaluation methods at their institutions. It also offers a brief review of Feedback-Informed Treatment (FIT) as a possible solution that can be adapted to improve advising for faculty and, ultimately, students.

Keywords: Advising, Faculty performance, FIT.

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**Introduction**

Student retention is a major problem for universities. In fact, fewer than half of first-time students at 4-year colleges in the U.S. complete a degree within four years at the college they initially attend (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018). Many complex factors contribute to this problem and a variety of solutions are needed, but one solution that has proven helpful is effective student advising; academic advising capabilities have been directly linked to positive student outcomes such as graduation rates and future job and career satisfaction (Tudor, 2018). Thus, university administrators are increasingly focusing on improving their institutions’ academic advising services and resources in order to help guide students and improve retention (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). While some schools hire full-time professional advisors to bolster their advising capabilities (White & Schulenberg, 2012), others ask faculty to take on the role of advisor (Mcarthur, 2005).

This MOBTS roundtable is targeted at those management faculty members who are being asked to engage in student advising in addition to their traditional teaching, scholarship, and service responsibilities. The roundtable will provide an opportunity for participants to share information about successful and unsuccessful advising practices at their institutions and to discuss best practices for evaluating faculty who engage in student advising. The following questions will be considered:

* How are teaching and advising related? Is advising simply a distraction that competes for faculty time and attention, or can it be integrated with good teaching practices?
* What quantitative and/or qualitative measures best capture effective advising?
* How does advising fit with the traditional faculty performance evaluation paradigm of teaching/scholarship/service?

We will also introduce a practice called FIT (Feedback-Informed Treatment) that draws from coaching and psychotherapy and offers a simple way to gather feedback from students. This practice provides quantified feedback that can be used by faculty to improve their advising and by institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of faculty advisors.

The expected outcome of the session is that useful ideas will be shared for integrating advising with teaching—in terms of both performance and evaluation. If participants are interested in exploring the topic further, a working group may be formed to consider opportunities for research in this Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) area. Troxel (2018) points out that the scholarship of advising is gaining attention, and He and Hutson (2017, p. 72) envision “scholarly discussions regarding ways to identify meaningful cognitive and noncognitive learning outcomes as a result of academic advising and effective measures of advising impact.”

**Theoretical Foundations/Teaching Implications**

Academic advising has been described as a form of guidance through which students develop an individual pattern to follow while they complete their education (White & Schulenberg, 2012). It is also described as an activity that “applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education” (Larson, Johnson, Aiken-Wisniewski, & Barkemeyer, 2018, p. 86). Asking faculty to fill this role makes sense because academics typically understand their programs and outcomes better than anyone, so they are well-positioned to offer information that helps students navigate courses and design a career path. In addition, having faculty serve as advisors provides increased contact between faculty and students, and “college impact research has continually demonstrated a positive relationship between student-faculty interaction and a broad range of student educational outcomes, including academic achievement, educational aspirations, intellectual growth, and academic satisfaction” (Y. K. Kim & Sax, 2009, p. 2).

However, adding advising to faculty workloads can be problematic: it reduces the time available for teaching and other responsibilities and it is an activity that is difficult to equitably measure and evaluate. While each faculty member must figure out their own priorities for how to divide their time, the performance evaluation issue is an institutional one. Performance evaluations for faculty typically focus on three areas: teaching, scholarship and service (He & Hutson, 2017). Contributions in these three categories tend to be easy to quantify, so it is not difficult to create objective performance criteria. For example, teaching is primarily evaluated directly through faculty members’ teaching evaluation scores and feedback submitted by students. Scholarship tends to be scored according to the number of intellectual contributions or publications authored by faculty. Lastly, service is measured by the amount of time that a faculty member spends on committee work and other activities that support their department, school, university, community, and/or professional and academic organizations.

One of the difficulties with assessing faculty advising efforts is that advising does not fit neatly into one of the three traditional performance review areas. While many institutions fold advising into faculty service, labelling it as a support activity, He and Hutson (2017, p. 73) argue that advising is “an endeavor extending beyond service” and that faculty should strive to “not only monitor the quality of existing advising practices but also to offer insights that advance advising theories, practices, and research.” Others such as Lowenstein (2020, p. 72) argue that advising is a teaching function because students learn “how to find/create the logic” of their education, how to connect the pieces of the curriculum into a whole, “how to base educational choices on a developing sense of the overall edifice being self-built,” and “how to enhance learning experiences by relating them to knowledge that has previously been learned.” In addition, advising has traditionally suffered from "inconsistent evaluation practices" (Powers, Carlstrom, & Hughey, 2014, p. 64), and there is evidence that common metrics such as the number of advisees or the hours dedicated to this function do not provide a real measurement of faculty responsibility or performance (Stringer, MacGregor, & Watson, 2009). Administrators know that “quality of academic advising services is a key determinant of students’ GPA, satisfaction as a student, perceived value of a college education for future employment, intent to leave the university, and the public’s perception of the institution” (J. Kim & Feldman, 2011, p. 222), but they struggle to measure advising quality and reward those who do it well.

We propose that looking to other contexts may be helpful, and we note that academic advising has a lot of similarities with practices in psychology and coaching. For instance, in psychotherapy, an individual shares its thoughts with a professional with the intention that this process will help the individual reexamine their thinking and behavior. In coaching, an experienced person provides guidance and context to help a less experienced person achieve a task or objective. Considering the similarities between advising and these activities, we believe that adapting assessment tools from these domains may help faculty to assess their advising performance.

One such tool used in clinical therapy treatment is feedback-informed treatment (FIT), which is used to enhance the quality of therapy services (Bertolino & Miller, 2012). FIT involves surveying the patient in order to measure both the quality of the therapeutic alliance and the therapeutic outcomes that have been achieved (Prescott, Maeschalck, & Miller, 2017). Simple graphical scales (often with sad and happy faces on the extremes) allow patients to indicate their feelings. The therapeutic alliance scale captures four dimensions regarding the quality of the therapist: Relationship, Goals and Topics, Approach or Method, and Overall. The outcomes scale captures four dimensions of potential change in therapy: Overall (general sense of well-being), Individual (personal well-being), Interpersonal (family, close relationships), and Social (work, school, friendships) (Nylund & Filippelli, n.d.). Contrasting these eight dimensions with some of the advising student learning outcomes (cognitive, behavioral, affective) indicated by Powers et al. (2014), we find important similarities.

Prescott et al. (2017) present FIT's applicability in multiple settings including groups, couples, children, and the criminal justice system. Therefore, considering an adaptation of FIT in academic advising seems feasible, and it seems that data collected in this way could be used longitudinally to evaluate and improve individual faculty advising as well as overall advising at an institution, particularly if feedback is tied to student records that track graduation timing and other long-term advising outcomes. Surveying students to measure aspects of advising is not novel (for instance, Walters & Seyedian (2016) proposed using an operations methodology called Quality Function Deployment to improve academic advising quality), but the immediacy and simplicity of FIT make it an especially attractive option. Furthermore—and consistent with the theme of this year’s MOBTS conference—adapting practices based on FIT could capitalize on the use of technology to provide greater accountability and effectiveness to improve student advising (Feghali, Zbib, & Hallal, 2011).

**Session Description**

We propose formatting our session as a 60-minute roundtable discussion. The session leaders will guide a structured discussion about current faculty advising practices and advising evaluation methods, and they will introduce a method for evaluation called Feedback-Informed Treatment (FIT). The timeline for the session will be:

* 5 min: Introduction to the topic of student advising and why it is increasingly falling on faculty shoulders.
* 15 min: Participants will introduce themselves and answer these questions:
  + What are the advising expectations for management faculty at your institution?
  + How are management faculty evaluated for their advising?
  + What is the best aspect of faculty advising at your institution?
  + What is the worst aspect of faculty advising at your institution?
  + How does advising affect or integrate with teaching at your institution?
* 15 min: Organization and discussion of what was shared.
  + What are the commonalities?
  + What are the best practices that should be highlighted and spread?
* 15 min: Introduction to the concept of FIT (Feedback-Informed Treatment) as a way to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of faculty advising. Examples and materials will be provided.
* 10 min: Wrap-up
  + What issues does FIT help to solve and where does it fall short?
  + How can FIT be used to integrate good advising with good teaching?
  + What are the key takeaways from today’s discussion?
  + Is there interest in continuing to explore this topic via a discussion group or research project?

Attendees will be expected to participate by contributing their own experiences, opinions, and knowledge to the discussions. In addition, they will help to organize the information that is shared, and they will provide feedback regarding a proposed method for improving the performance and evaluation of student advising.

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