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FACULTY ADVISORS AND ADVISING PROGRAMS
IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS DEPARTMENTS IN THE NORTHEAST

Josef M. Broder, Rod F. Ziemer and Lewell F. Gunter

ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes selected findings of a study of faculty advisors and advising programs in departments of agricultural and resource economics. Undergraduate advising program characteristics in the Northeast are contrasted with those in other regions. Interdepartmental advising loads, advising budgets and allocation of advising resources are measured. Differences were found in advisor selection, training, support, coordination, rewards and evaluations. Advising programs were generally strong in advisor accessibility and weak in career follow-ups. Advising faculty members in the Northeast generally earned lower salaries and taught more terms during the year than nonadvising faculty members. Continued program documentation, support and rewards are recommended.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing demands for students trained in agricultural economics have created new challenges for universities to supply adequately trained graduates. Greater diversity in student backgrounds and interests and a wider range of job opportunities for graduates have made the job of faculty advisors particularly challenging. However, faculty advising is seldom given high priority among competing faculty activities and incidences of ineffective or inadequate academic advising are fairly commonplace in higher education (Borgard, *et al.*; Bostaph and Moore).

Agricultural economics faculty in the Northeast appear to show particular concern for the quality of their undergraduate programs. The implementation of broader and diversified curricula with greater emphasis in communication skills and additional requirements in Social Sciences and Humanities were evaluated by Thatch (1978). Increasing enrollments of female students in agricultural economics and the availability of new opportunities for women were studied by Templeton. Departmental experiences in meeting demands for new degree programs and course offerings at Maryland were examined by Strand and Bender while changes in resource economics and community development programs in agricultural economics at New Hampshire were highlighted by Jansen. An in-depth analysis of former graduates from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing at Rutgers was done by Thatch (1976). In a more recent issue of this Journal Thatch examined the conventional wisdom on the interrelationships between teaching and research (1981). These studies generally emphasize a need to document

The authors are assistant professors of agricultural economics at the University of Georgia, Texas A & M University and the University of Georgia, respectively.

the structure and performance of undergraduate education and periodically to evaluate performance changes over time.

METHOD AND FORMAT

Within the area of agricultural economics teaching related research, the faculty activity which has received the least amount of documentation and evaluation has been advising. In response to this need for documentation and evaluation, a survey of faculty advising in agricultural economics departments was undertaken. A mail survey of fifty-seven agricultural, food and resource economics departments at land grant universities in the United States and major agricultural colleges in Canada and Puerto Rico was conducted in January of 1980. Department chairpersons were asked to complete a comprehensive set of questions on the structure, implementation and performance of their advising programs. Forty-seven departments responded to the survey. These data are supplemented with data from a survey of individual agricultural economics faculty also undertaken early in 1980. The objectives of this paper are to: 1) describe various characteristics of undergraduate agricultural economics advising programs in the Northeast, 2) describe average characteristics of faculty advisors and nonadvisors in the Northeast, and 3) contrast average advising program characteristics of the Northeast with those in other regions. The delineation of the Northeast Region was adapted from a study of agricultural economics faculty mobility by Peck and Babb which includes the following departments: Connecticut, Cornell, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania State, Rutgers and Vermont.

Interregional differences reported in Tables 1, 2 and 3 are based on data reported by department chairmen in the advising survey and represent mean differences between departments located within and outside of the Northeast. Because the number of schools which responded closely approximated the population of departments, tests of statistical inference were not deemed appropriate and were omitted from these tables. For these reasons, the observed regional differences can generally be interpreted as being statistically significant. However, whether these differences are of any practical significance remains a topic of further research.

Mean differences between advising and non-advising faculty in the Northeast, shown in Table 4, are based on data reported by individual faculty in the general faculty survey. Because these faculty members represent a sample of the population of advisors and nonadvisors in the Northeast, tests of statistical inference were performed on these data to account for difference due to sampling error.

Table 1. General Characteristics of Faculty Advising Programs in Agricultural Economics Departments in the Northeast, 1979

School	Total Undergraduate Enrollment	% Upper-class Enrollment ^b	Total Advisors	EFTF ^c Per 100 Advisees	Average Time Spent With Advisee (min/mth)	% Found Job Through Advisor	% of Advisors Time Spent Advising on Various Subjects			
							Academic	Career	Personal	Other
Cornell	570	60	25	.00	30	50	60	30	10	0
Penn State	211	62	16	.28	53	90	80	15	5	0
Rutgers	185	57	11	.50	a/	20	70	20	5	5
Maine	182	a/	12	.00	8	a/	75	20	0	0
R. Island	150	37	1	.38	23	30	60	40	0	0
Massachusetts	110	73	10	.00	3	33	70	20	10	0
Vermont	103	71	7	.00	11	10	75	15	10	0
Maryland	78	45	6	.00	17	18	75	15	10	0
Connecticut	46	57	5	.00	5	20	60	25	5	5
N. Hampshire	38	82	4	2.00	15	25	60	20	20	0
NORTHEAST REGION	167.3	60.4	9.7	.32	13.5	32.9	68.5	22.0	7.5	1.5
ALL OTHER	208.3	63.6	10.2	.15	18.2	24.8	69.2	15.7	8.9	3.2

^aData not available

^bJunior and senior enrollment : total enrollment

^cEquivalent full time faculty

Source: Advising survey

Table 2. Implementation of Faculty Advising Programs in Agricultural Economics Departments in the Northeast, 1979

	Percentage of Departments	
	Northeast	All Others
Criteria for Assigning Advisors:		
Faculty interest or specialty	90	51
Achieve equality across faculty	60	65
Student choice	40	57
Faculty or staff budgeted	10	27
Faculty or staff popularity	10	5
Training and Support Available:		
Advising handbooks	70	76
Advisor workshops	50	30
Special instruction	40	27
Understudy	10	16
None	20	24
Advisor Coordinator(s):		
Faculty or staff	60	54
Department chairperson	40	30
Departmental committee	0	16
None	20	8
Measurement of Outstanding Advising:		
Informal student feedback	80	86
Administrative review	40	24
Formal student evaluations	10	11
Review by other advisors	0	14
Not measured	20	11
Rewards for Outstanding Advising:		
Salary increases	70	54
Rank promotions	60	38
Special recognition	30	22
Not rewarded	20	32
Priorities Assigned to Faculty Activities:		
	MEAN RANK	
	Northeast	All Other
Research	1.1	1.1
Teaching	1.4	1.9
Service	2.3	3.1
Administration	2.9	4.0
Advising	3.4	3.6

Source: Advising survey

Table 3. Department Chairperson Evaluations of Advising Programs in Agricultural Economics Department in the Northeast, 1979

Characteristic	EVALUATION ^a			
	Northeast		All Other	
	MEAN	RANK	MEAN	RANK
1. Attitude of faculty toward advising	83.5	4th	84.7	2nd
2. Proportion of faculty actively involved	72.0	5th	73.6	5th
3. Faculty interest in undergraduate activities	60.0	6th	67.2	6th
4. Accessibility of faculty to students	90.5	1st	86.8	1st
5. Uniformity among advisor in counseling knowledge and interpretation	85.5	2nd	77.7	4th
6. Follow-up of student careers by advisors	59.5	7th	57.1	7th
7. Experience of advisors in general	84.5	3rd	80.5	3rd
Index ^b of advising quality	76.5		75.3	

^aEvaluations based on a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 = excellent and 0 = poor

^bSimple average of seven previous scores

Source: Advising Survey

DEPARTMENT CHARACTERISTICS

General characteristics of faculty advising programs in ten of the eleven Northeastern departments which responded to the survey are shown in Table 1. The largest and smallest undergraduate programs were reported by Cornell and New Hampshire respectively. Cornell also headed the list in total advisors while Rhode Island reported the fewest advisors. During the study period, the Northeast generally had smaller programs and fewer advisors when compared to the average for schools in other regions. However, specific budgeting by Penn State, Rutgers, Rhode Island and New Hampshire, as expressed by EFTF (equivalent full time faculty) per 100 advisees in Table 1, was well above the national average. Schools not reporting specific budgets for advising generally considered advising as part of the faculty's teaching appointment. This survey did not explore the question of whether schools without specific budgeting for advising made adjustments in teaching loads to accommodate advising activities or whether faculty were expected to advise during their spare time.

A probable reason for the absence of specific budgeting for advising in some departments may stem from problems associated with identifying a

practical distinction between advising and teaching. The interface between advising and teaching, especially in smaller departments, might encourage students to seek advice from their instructors. Given such arrangements, administrators might tend to budget advising as an inseparable part of teaching. Questions on the actual degree of interface between teaching and advising will be further addressed in comparisons of advising and nonadvising faculty.

Another characteristic which affects the level and content of advising is the distribution of undergraduates by class standing. There are differences between advising beginning freshmen and junior-level transfer students. The degree of flexibility associated with freshmen advising is often absent when advising junior transfers. With transfer students, the advisor encounters the problem of deciding if students have the necessary prerequisites. Advisors also have the problem of salvaging courses in lower level programs. While the survey did not ask specific questions about transfer students, some indication of transfer student numbers can be inferred from the percentage of upper-class enrollment shown in Table 1. Large percentages of upper-class enrollment are taken as partial evidence of transfer student numbers. The question of

Table 4. General Characteristics of Individual Agricultural Economics Faculty in the Northeast Region, 1979

	FACULTY	
	Advising	Non-Advising
<u>General</u>		
Percentage of sample	69.0	31.0
Average appointment:		
Teaching	38.0*	24.5
Research	48.3	42.2
Extension	13.7	18.2
Administration	0.0**	15.1
Years of professional experience:		
Graduate student	3.9	3.4
Assistant Professor	4.2	4.5
Associate Professor	3.3	3.7
Full Professor	3.0	5.8
Average age	41.7	44.9
Employment changes	0.7	1.2
Salary actual	\$27,298*	\$32,750
Annual consulting income	2,255	1,677
<u>Teaching</u>		
Courses taught:		
Undergraduate	1.3***	0.4
Dual level	0.7*	0.2
Graduate	0.5*	0.9
Average class size		
Undergraduate	91.3	61.7
Graduate	9.3	10.0
Credit hours taught:		
Undergraduate	5.0**	1.2
Dual level	2.0	0.5
Graduate	1.2*	2.8
Terms not teaching	0.7	1.3
Teaching awards:		
Departmental	0.0	0.2
College	0.0	0.0
University	0.1	0.0
Professional	0.0	0.0
Advisees:		
Undergraduate	21.7***	0.0
Masters	2.1	2.5
PhD	0.9	1.1

*Significant at the $\alpha = .10$ level.

**Significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level.

***Significant at the $\alpha = .01$ level.

Source: Faculty survey

whether schools with large percentages of transfer students actually used more advising time per student remains a topic for further research.

The allocation of the advisor's time is also shown in Table 1. When averaged by departments, advisors in the Northeast spent less time per month with advisees than the average for other schools. However, schools in the Northeast made more intensive efforts at finding employment for their graduates, with 33 percent finding jobs through their advisors as compared with 25 percent for the rest of the nation. These differences are supported by data on the percentage of time advisors spend on various subjects; schools in the Northeast generally spent more time counseling on career and employment related matters.

ADVISING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

A summary of advising program implementation, as measured by departments, is shown in Table 2, including criteria for assigning, training and supporting advisors, and means of coordinating, measuring and rewarding quality. More than one criterion were reported by some departments. Also shown are priorities assigned to various faculty activities by departments. Particularly noteworthy of schools in the Northeast are the criteria for assigning advisors. Faculty assignments were made more on the basis of faculty interest and specialty in the Northeast when compared to other regions which reported their primary criterion as achieving equality across faculty. Faculty or staff popularity appears to play a minor role in assigning advisors.

Once assigned, advisors must learn of accepted procedures and periodically adapt their advising programs to curricula and employment changes. Departments used a variety of means to train and support their advisors. Handbooks were used most frequently across all departments, followed by advisor workshops, and special instruction. Approximately one fifth of all departments reported that no support or training was made available to advisors. The task of coordinating the departmental advising program was assigned to an individual faculty or staff member in a majority of schools. Twenty percent of the schools in the Northeast had no formally designated advising coordinator.

Although faculty interest is a key element in the success of an effective advising program, faculty rewards are also thought to be important (Davis, *et al.*; Bostaph and Moore). Shown in Table 2 are measurements, rewards and priorities associated with advising in Northeastern schools. Informal student feedback was used primarily by schools across the nation, followed by administrative review. Schools in the Northeast reported using salary increases as the primary reward for outstanding advising, followed by rank promotions and special recognition. The percentage of schools in the Northeast using salary increases (70%) was substantially higher than the percentage for other regions (54%), perhaps indicating a greater willingness by the Northeast to maintain advising support. However, 20 percent of the schools in the Northeast and 32 percent of the schools in other regions reported that no

rewards were given for outstanding advising. As a separate faculty activity, advising was ranked fifth on the average behind research, teaching, service and administration in terms of importance for salary increases and promotions in the Northeast. As expected, research ranked first across all regions followed by teaching and service. These findings are consistent with those implicated by Thatch, that is to say, "our profession has grown and gained recognition mostly for its research accomplishments," (1981, p. 51).

ADVISING PROGRAM EVALUATION

Department chairpersons were asked to evaluate selected dimensions of their advising program on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 = poor and 100 = excellent. Data shown in Table 3 indicate that department chairpersons in the Northeast gave the highest quality rating to the accessibility of faculty to students, followed by advising uniformity, advisor experience and faculty attitude. In other regions, accessibility was also ranked first, followed by faculty attitude, advisor experience and advising uniformity. An overall quality index was constructed using the simple mean of the seven characteristics in Table 3. In general, department chairpersons in the Northeast rated the quality of their advising program about the same as the average rating in all other schools surveyed.

Department chairpersons' evaluations were selected for study because of the chairperson's dual role as faculty member and administrator. These evaluations were not intended to serve as a means of rating or ranking advising quality of individual schools, rather they are intended to illustrate strengths and limitations of advising programs in general. Results reported in Table 3 indicate that the strength of many programs is their general accessibility of advisors to students while the weakness of many departments is poor performance in following-up on student careers. Whether such follow-up activity is the proper role of department level advising was not addressed in this study. However, the potential for obtaining constructive student feedback on curricula and advising programs is a primary benefit of follow-up activity (Thatch, 1976).

Of equal importance is the poor evaluation which department chairpersons gave to faculty interest in undergraduate activities (Table 3). This poor evaluation suggests that faculty may have little interest in undergraduate activities which fall outside of the regular classroom or advising settings. This study speculates that with the exception of a few individuals, most faculty may see little monetary or nonmonetary rewards to active involvement in undergraduate activities.

ADVISOR CHARACTERISTICS

A general overview of individual advisors in the Northeast and in other regions was obtained from a separate study of agricultural economics faculty. In the spring of 1980, 500 randomly selected agricultural economists at land grant universities were asked to complete a mailed ques-

tionnaire. Respondents were selected at random from agricultural food and resource economics faculty listed in Professional Workers in State Agricultural Experiment and Other Cooperating State Institutions, 1978-79. Of the 311 responses, 241 held Ph.D. degrees. The survey results shown in Table 4 are based on the 42 agricultural economics faculty in the Northeast who held Ph.D. degrees as of 1979. Thirteen faculty members indicated that they did not advise any undergraduate students. Significant means differences based on a standard student t-tests between undergraduate advising and nonadvising faculty are indicated by asterisks.

Referring to Table 4, a number of significant differences were found between undergraduate faculty advisors and nonadvisors. In terms of appointments, advising faculty had significantly higher teaching loads but lower average administrative appointments. Salaries were also significantly lower for undergraduate advising faculty. These salary differences were partially attributed to the priorities assigned to faculty activities reported in Table 2. Advising in the Northeast received the lowest average ranking for purposes of promotion and salary increases.

Advising faculty taught more undergraduate level courses but fewer graduate level courses (Table 4). Greater teaching loads among advisors suggest that there may be some complementarity between teaching and advising as implicated in the earlier discussion of faculty budgeting. In terms of credit hours, similar differences were noticeable. During 1979, the average faculty advisor supervised about 22 undergraduate students, two masters students and one Ph.D. student. Nonadvisors supervised about the same number of graduate students as the number supervised by advising faculty. No significant differences between advising and nonadvising faculty were found for characteristics such as age, years of professional experience, number of employment changes and annual consulting income.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Faculty advising is an integral part of undergraduate teaching; however, little is known about the structure and performance of advising programs in agricultural economics departments. A comprehensive study of faculty advising in agricultural economics was undertaken to learn more about this dimension of higher education and to serve as a point of reference to measure future changes. This paper summarized findings of this survey for schools in the Northeast in contrast to schools in other regions. General departmental data were supplemented with data on individual faculty advisors obtained in a separate study.

Schools in the Northeast showed considerable variety in advising program implementation, differed in amount of faculty resources devoted to advising, and differed in the range of counseling services offered by advisors. Considerable variety was also found in the manner in which advisors were assigned, trained, supported, and rewarded. Relative to schools in other regions, schools in the Northeast reported greater empha-

sis on assigning advisors based on their interest in advising, and on rewarding outstanding advising. Department chairperson ratings for overall advising quality in the Northeast were comparable to those reported by other schools.

A survey of individual undergraduate advising faculty in the Northeast indicated that these faculty have larger teaching appointments and teach more courses than their nonadvising counterparts. Salaries were also found to be lower for faculty who advised undergraduate students. No statistically significant differences were found between advising and nonadvising faculty with regard to age or years of professional experience. However, both mean age and average number of years experience as a full professor were approximately three years higher for faculty who did not advise undergraduate students.

This study did not explore individual faculty characteristics associated with good or poor advisors. Among faculties, there are typically some individuals who have the kind of personality and interest which are conducive to advising. Other individual faculty have neither the personality for nor the interest in advising and, when possible, should not be given advising responsibilities. To maintain advising quality, faculty and administrators should concentrate on identifying and utilizing individuals who have an interest in and ability for advising.

With respect to a department's overall advising program, this paper has a few concluding recommendations. Increasing undergraduate enrollments and greater diversity in jobs taken by agricultural economics graduates may place new strains on academic advising programs. Periodic documentation and evaluation of advising performance are recommended for monitoring changes in advising quality. Greater communication between faculty members and former graduates may also serve to help departments evaluate their advising program. Finally, administrators should establish incentives for advising faculty in the form of support and professional rewards. For some departments, an integrated program of documentation, support, and rewards may serve to improve student advising quality.

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