

ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE ADVISING PRACTICES AMONG UTM FOUNDATION LECTURERS

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ABSTRACT - Academic advising is one of the most important levels to pull within the university to positively impact student success. It provides perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in the institution who cares about them. This paper aims to establish effective advising practices among UTM foundation lecturers. A structured questionnaire consisting of twenty-seven items was designed and distributed to the foundation lecturers. These twenty-seven items are characteristics/responsibilities that are most often cited in the literature as critical for ensuring effective academic advisory. The study found that 44.4% of the lecturers answered that they have conducted a mass meeting 1 - 2 times in a single semester and another 44.4% have conducted a mass meeting with their advisees 3 - 4 times in a semester. Students also reported to discuss on their drop in CGPA with their academic advisors on a regular basis. Almost half of the lecturers were ‘neutral’ on the effectiveness of online and face-to-face academic advising. Majority agreed that they addressed students’ personal problems; self-esteem / interpersonal skills / study skills; student values, beliefs, and attitudes during the academic advising sessions.

Keywords: effectiveness of academic advising; lecturers; foundation students

1. INTRODUCTION

Providing excellent student performance advice to foundation students has always been an important but challenging task. Students need strong support systems in place to help them transit from one education level to the next. Generally, students begin their tertiary education with limited knowledge about career prospects related to the courses they are enrolled in. Students who are undecided about their major can be vulnerable to outside influences that could either help or hinder their decision with regard to selecting the right academic course. An academic advisor

can help keeping students focused on important goals. It is vital as it is related to the student's performance, success, satisfaction, and retention.

Based on the previous research [1], another factor that is related to the student's success is education. The mission of academic advising is to assist students in their growth and development in academic or non-academic matters by constructing meaningful educational plans compatible with their life goals. This is a continuous and consistent process built on frequent and accumulated personal relationships between an advisor and advisee. Advice from educators through informal and formal advising sessions gives positive impacts on students' academic performance, career goals, intellectual curiosity, and development of educational and interpersonal skills [2].

The faculty or department of a university also plays an important role in helping students to adjust and integrate into university life [3]. The mission of academic advising and counselling unit is to support students in recognizing and achieving their educational and career goals which facilitate their learning experience and student success [4]. The publication of Academic Advising Handbook is a proactive step in ensuring that students' academic achievement, character development, and positive characteristics are always monitored from the first semester to the last semester. Continuous monitoring and guidance is the responsibility of all academic advisors in helping to produce successful graduates and fulfil the aspects of soft skills and noble values [5].

Academic advising is one of the most important levels to pull within the university to positively impact student success. It provides perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in the institution who cares about them. Therefore, this paper aims to establish effective advising practices among UTM foundation lecturers.

Some of the researchers defined academic advisor as the institutional staff or faculty member that takes the duty of providing assistance, guidance, and communication with students in term of many aspects especially in life planning, career goals and navigation of how those goals intersect with institutional course and programme offerings [6]. Academic advising is the second most important function in the college [7]. Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students, campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education [8].

Academic advising is an important aspect of higher education and student academic performance. [9] pointed out that academic development, personal development and career development are the first, second, and third themes most stated by the academic advisors when asked regarding their perceptions towards academic advising.

Research finding also showed that the relationship built between the students and their assigned academic advisors was reported to increase satisfaction as a part of their college experience, positively develop the students, [10], and give impact on self-efficacy in the practical applications of study skills [11]. The advising strategies in assisting students are used to develop rapport with them, evaluate student motivation, and explain university rules, policies, regulations, and procedures that affect academic programmes and activities [12]. Furthermore, academic advisor's personality and behaviour are also crucial in ensuring its effectiveness which could be seen by providing references to other university resources when necessary, helping the students to assess their college major choice realistically, assisting the students to attain their immediate educational goals, providing information regarding courses, requirements, tests, registration, course changes, and helping students to evaluate and understand their educational goals, and providing ample opportunities for students to ask questions [13].

There are few ways to improve the quality of academic advising as determined by previous researchers. [14] identified a dozen targeted areas of improvement where any potentially effective attempt to improve academic advisement must be guided by a clear vision of what "good quality" or "poor quality" advising actually is. [15] found that professional values, professional skills and behaviour, plus training and continuing professional education/development are the aspects and skills in ensuring the effectiveness and success of Academic Advising and Personal Tutoring.

Furthermore, while academic advising meetings are necessary for developing rapport with students, there are no fixed frequencies for mass meetings and no one-size-fits-all approach to conduct an academic advising meeting (depends on the reason for the meeting). It is important for advisors to manage an advising file for each advisee with proper documentation from the meeting [16]. Many types of meeting contacts are available such as in person contact, telephone contact, email contact and online meeting. Any involved information during in person contact that will assist current or future advisors and academic support staff in guiding the students to the successful completion of degree needs to be documented and

summarized, while all telephone contacts should be documented electronically [17].

The literature review proves that effective academic advising provides many benefits and impacts on student's achievements; hence, this study focuses on establishing effective advising practices among UTM foundation lecturers.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research design

The researcher endeavoured to investigate the feedback from foundation lecturers regarding the aspects needed in academic advising and their satisfaction towards the implementation of the current academic advising approach in UTM foundation programme. The study incorporated quantitative research design in order to achieve the objective of the study.

2.2. Participants

A total of nine respondents from UTMSPACE foundation programme lecturers who were assigned as academic advisors had participated in this study. The number of samples was obtained purposively as the nine lecturers participated in the study are qualified and has the characteristic of sample required. They were the assigned academic advisors who had specifically catered to the foundation students who are the main focus of the study. [18] also emphasises that the samples for sampling that "can provide useful information for answering questions and hypotheses" are sufficient.

2.3. Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire consisting of twenty- seven items was designed and distributed to the lecturers who were assigned as the academic advisors to foundation students. These twenty-seven items consist of characteristics/responsibilities that are most often cited in the literature as critical for ensuring effective academic advising. The lecturers were asked to provide some aspects of academic advising background, share their past experiences in handling the students under their supervision and rate the aspects and factors that

can contribute to effective academic advising on each item on a 5-point Likert scale namely; strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Respondent background

Among the 9 respondents, 22.2% of them have had experience as the academic advisors for 2 batches of UTM foundation students, while the remaining 77.8% have only recently been appointed as the academic advisors for UTM foundation students for the first time.

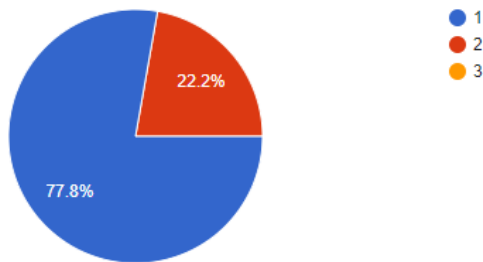


Fig. 1: Number of batches under 1 advisor

Even though each academic advisor has more than 40 students under him/her, different views on the appropriate number of advisees can be seen in the chart below. 44.4% advisors agreed that only 1-10 students should be put under the supervision of one academic advisor, while 33.3% of the respondents agreed that 11-20 students in a single academic advising group is sufficient. On the other hand, only 1 respondent agreed that 21-30 students and more than 40 students is appropriate to be supervised by one academic advisor.

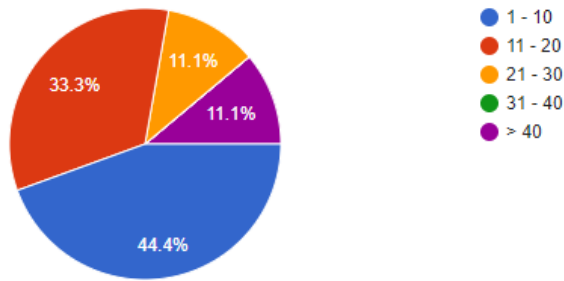


Fig. 2: Number of Students Suggested Under One Academic Advisor

The frequency of conducting a mass meeting with the academic advisees in one semester are is as illustrated in Figure 3 as follows.

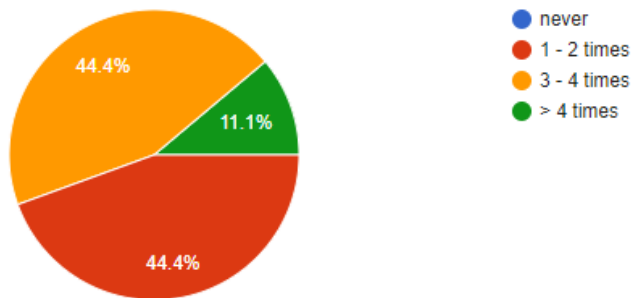


Fig. 3: Frequency of Conducting a Mass Meeting with Academic Advisees

The chart above shows the result on the frequency of mass meeting being conducted with the academic advisees in one semester (4 months) where four advisors answered that they have conducted at least 1 - 2 times and the other four of them have conducted it for 3 - 4 times in a semester. Surprisingly, it can also be seen that one advisor managed to meet his / her advisees more than 4 times during the mass meeting throughout one semester.

Based on Figure 4 below, the frequency of the academic advisors to personally contact their academic advisees who achieved lower than 3.0 CGPA are as follows.

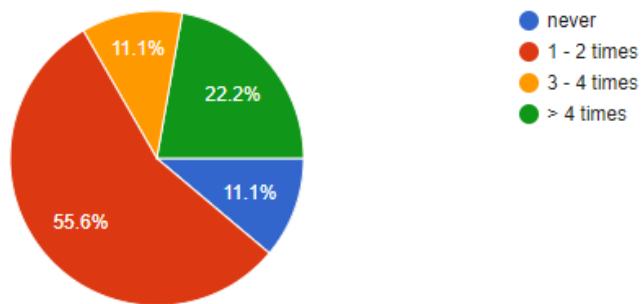


Fig 4: Frequency of the academic advisors personally contacted the academic advisees

The result shows that majority of the lecturers who were appointed as academic advisors have personally contacted their academic advisees who achieved a CGPA of 2.9 and below around 1 - 2 times in one semester. Only two of them have contacted the advisees for more than four times which could be considered a sign of commitment and accountability, while one respondent contacted his / her advisees 3 - 4 times per semester and one advisor who has never contacted his/her advisees who obtained lower than 3.0 CGPA.

3.2 Common Topics Discussed during Academic Advising Session

The common topics discussed during academic advising session with advisees are as depicted in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1: Common Topics Discussed during Academic Advising Session with Advisees

Common topics discussed during academic advising session	Percentage
Drop in CGPA	55.6%
Career aspirations	22.2%
Personal problems	22.2%
Health issues	0%

Under the aspect of common topics being discussed during the meeting with academic advisees, 55.6% of the academic advisors have responded that students commonly discussed related to their drop in CGPA, while 22.2% of them agreed that advisees would discuss on their career aspiration issues in setting up a goal to

be reached as they progress in their studies. In addition, 22.2% of the academic advisors reported that personal problems were among the common topics being discussed during the sessions. This provides a platform for the advisees to discover effective solutions on their own.

3.3 The effectiveness of academic advising practice among foundation lecturers

The survey was conducted to identify the effectiveness of academic advising practices among UTM foundation lecturers and finding the best way to improve the quality of advising practices. Based on the results below, it was found that majority of the lecturers with 87.5%, agreed to have one specific guideline for academic advising. The guidelines are intended to provide a standardized procedures or approaches in academic advising and to enhance the appropriateness of practice while improving the quality of academic advising.

Table 2. Lecturers’ Perspectives on Academic Advising Matters

Lecturers’ perspective	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
A necessity to have specific guidelines for academic advising.	87.5%	12.5%	0%
Online academic advising can be conducted as effective as face-to-face academic advising.	33.3%	44.4%	22.3%
Conversation on non-academic topics, including students’ personal problems; self-esteem / interpersonal skills / study skills; student values, beliefs, and attitudes and the conflicts between them have been discussed during academic advising session.	88.8%	0	11.2%

As for some of the academic advisors, it was their first time being appointed as an academic advisor, 87.5% of them agreed to have one specific guidelines on academic advising, while 12.5% were just neutral on that matter. It is believed that if academic advisors are equipped with adequate training and guidance, the advisees would receive the best advice or service possible as mentioned by [15], professional values, professional skills and behaviour, plus training and continuing professional education/development are the aspects and skills in ensuring the effectiveness and success of Academic Advising and Personal Tutoring.

Being an academic advisor during this pandemic period has led to the emergence of comparison between online and face-to-face academic advising. As stated in the table above, 44.4% respondents were ‘neutral’ when being asked on the effectiveness of online and face-to-face academic advising. Most probably, many of them have chosen ‘neutral’ because they have not been given the chance to be an academic advisor before the pandemic, so they would not be able to compare on the effectiveness. However, 33.3% of them agreed that they could make the online academic advising as effective as the face-to-face. Nevertheless, 22.3% respondents found it hard to fulfil the responsibilities of an academic advisor when they could not communicate face-to-face with the students. This was supported by [12] that the advising strategies or method in assisting students is one of the contributing factors in ensuring the effectiveness of academic programmes and activities.

Other than discussing on the academic matters, 88.8% respondents agreed that they addressed students’ personal problems; self-esteem / interpersonal skills / study skills; student values, beliefs, and attitudes during the academic advising sessions. This is to show that addressing only academic matters is insufficient. However, 11.2% respondent did not include all the above mentioned issues during those sessions. This can be further supported by [9] who pointed out that academic development, personal development and career development are the first, second, and third themes most stated by the academic advisors when asked regarding their perceptions towards academic advising.

4. CONCLUSION

To summarize, an academic advisor serves a variety of functions in providing the guidance needed by students throughout their journey in the tertiary level institution. Apart from providing advice related to academics, an advisor is also the “parent” who monitors the student’s growth and development. Therefore, the way the advisor portrays him/herself in front of his/her students, as well the advice given to them will have an impact on the decisions made by these students during their studies. Some aspects of academic advising had been included in the study as well as discussed with the academic advisors of UTM Foundation Programme in order to determine their practices with their foundation students. Being quite new to the programme, most respondents did not have the experience of being an advisor to more than one batch. Therefore, these guidelines will certainly help to improve the lecturers’ advising skills from one batch to another. Furthermore,

most academic advisors believed that by monitoring no more than 20 students every batch will likely increase the quality of their service as an advisor when compared to monitoring up to 40 or more students per batch. Apart from that, regular meetings with students are quite low, with advisors holding up to 2 meetings only per semester. Overall, this study was a success for the researchers in identifying UTM Foundation academic advisors' practices with foundation students, allowing them to provide additional suggestions or room for improvement in their advising skills which would likely affect their students.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Dear academic advisors,

We would like to invite you to participate in this research survey on 'The Effectiveness of Academic Advising on Students' Performance' in our institution. Thank you for your willingness to spare your time in answering this questionnaire. The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of academic advising on students' performance. We would like to humbly request you to read the questions provided carefully and to respond as accurately as possible. All information provided in this survey will in no means reflect the identity of the participants. It will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for the purpose of the research. Your kind cooperation in this study is highly appreciated. Thank you.

1. Number of batches (UTM foundation students) that have been under my academic advising including the current one
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3

2. Number of students that would be suitable to be placed under a single academic advisor
 - 1 – 10
 - 11 – 20
 - 21 – 30
 - 31 – 40
 - > 40

3. Frequency of conducting a mass meeting to see the academic advisees in 1 semester (4 months)
 - Never
 - 1 – 2 times

- 3 – 4 times
- > 4 times

4. Common topic being discussed during the meeting

- career aspirations
- Drop in CGPA
- Personal problems
- Health issues

5. Frequency of personally contacting my academic advisees who get lower than 3.0 (CGPA) in 1 sem

- Never
- 1 – 2 times
- 3 – 4 times
- > 4 times

6 - 21. Instruction: Please (√) to indicate your answer based on the scale of: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), agree (4), Strongly agree (5)

No.	Questions	1	2	3	4	5
6.	It is necessary to have specific guidelines of academic advising that will provide necessary information, procedures and resources in handling students.					
7.	Academic advising is a fun task to be done as an academician.					
8.	Being an academic advisor would be tough for me.					
9.	With online academic advising, I would be able to recognise and remember every single one of my academic advisee.					

10	I would be able to make online academic advising as effective as face-to-face academic advising.					
11	I have personally asked my academic advisees (CGPA : <3.0) to send their aim for the upcoming semester in order to monitor their CGPA.					
12	I have taught my academic advisees on how to calculate their CGPA.					
13	I do not mind if my academic advisees choose to seek for advice from other academic advisors / lecturers instead of me.					
14	If my academic advisee decides to change to another section, I think that he / she should still be under my supervision.					
15	Searching for financial assistance (scholarship, zakat, bursary etc) is a part of my responsibilities.					
16	I have included conversations on topics other than academics, including students' personal problems; self-esteem / interpersonal skills / study skills; student values, beliefs, and attitudes and the conflicts between them when I conducted my academic advising.					
17	Giving advice which focuses on student's values and attitudes would be as significant as giving advice on student's academic performance.					
18	I have a balance in enhancing both student's values & attitudes and student's academic performance.					
19	I have experienced a difficult situation / problem due to my negligence in my academic advising process.					
20	I have learnt and discovered a better solution after facing that problem.					
21	I would restructure my strategies in academic advising if I am given another batch under my supervision.					

22. In what aspect that SPACE can help you in enhancing your academic advising skills?
