Chapter 51

Virtual Compared to Traditional Academic Advising Satisfaction Rates of First–Year College Students:
A Pair Study

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ABSTRACT

This study compared virtual/online to traditional/in person academic advising in terms of student satisfaction ratings. Students were exposed to two advising methods at different times during their first year in college. Upon experiencing an advising method, students completed an online survey that rated their satisfaction in the areas of scheduling/registration, communication, support services/majors, and overall satisfaction. The findings offered some insight into how effective virtual academic advising might be as an alternative to traditional, face-to-face methods. The results of this study indicated that students were slightly more satisfied with traditional advising across 16 questions encompassing four categories. When the survey responses were aggregated and mean responses compared in each category, t-tests results found that scheduling/registration, communication, and overall satisfaction resulted in significant differences between the mean satisfaction ratings between academic advising methods, with traditional being preferred. While the support services and majors category, resulted in no differences existing between virtual and traditional advising methods.

INTRODUCTION

Today many of us are consumed by a virtual world, from posting our baby's first steps on YouTube for the extended family to share in the milestone joys to a college student being able to take a Mathematic placement test online in the summer from the comforts of his home some 1,200 miles from the campus he will attend in September. Technology powers our SmartPhones, iPads, and the navigation system that directs our vehicle however, is technology always the most effective option? To investigate the question as it relates to Web 2.0 and virtual technologies, a study was conducted to evaluate and compare virtual/online to traditional/in person academic advising in terms of undergraduate student satisfaction. The problem of interest was to determine how first-year students answered survey questions and statements rating different aspects of their academic advising experience upon being advised by the method (virtual/online or traditional/ in person) exclusively for a three month period. Virtual advising occurred from May to August, while traditional advising took place from September to December. After each advising method was completed, an online survey was administered to the student.

BACKGROUND

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Were there any significant difference associated with first-year student satisfaction ratings on virtual compared to traditional methods of academic advising?
2. How did first-year students rate the effectiveness of virtual compared to traditional academic advising in the categories of scheduling/registration, communication, support services/majors, and overall satisfaction?
3. Did students prefer virtual or traditional academic advising?
4. What did students like and dislike about each advising method?

Since students experienced both methods of advising independently for three month and each participant provided a unique college user id on their completed survey, the responses could be paired for statistical analysis. This pairing allowed the researcher to determine if there were any significant differences associated with students' overall satisfaction ratings between the two types of advising methods across categories.

Purpose of Study

The learning outcomes associated with this research study were to determine if there were statistically significant differences in satisfaction rating of freshmen students, in association with two types of academic advising methods used in an institution of higher education. Much of the past research has been exclusive to face-to-face academic advising methods. Therefore, there is limited research available about whether technology can be used to fully replace and/or enhance traditional methods. With more students going to college each year and an advisor's caseload of advisees constantly increasing, the need to alleviate and better serve students in the advising capacity is a top concern amongst education administrators. This research served as a starting point to determine if one type of advising experienced better satisfaction ratings while being used to advise first-year college students, who are often the most difficult population to retain from a retention standpoint.

In addition to more students enrolling in college each year, there has been an increase in the students who are fulfilling degree requirements

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