

Advising Workshop Report

Catherine Owens

On Tuesday, November 15, 2005, seventeen AUI faculty members gathered in Room 04 in Building 10 for a presentation and discussion about advising at AUI. The event was informative in that various issues concerning the advising system here were raised. Specifically, the course selections, sequences, pre-requisites and optimal degree paths were all described with a view to minimizing advisor confusion. Additionally, a presentation on developmental advising for treating the student as a whole person was provided, and this encouraged quite a vigorous exchange of ideas, experiences and suggestions. Most of the participants expressed their appreciation for the session.

In planning for this event, two CAD teachers, Cherie Mobasheri and Bob Mittan, provided the general framework and ideas, along with a ready to use Powerpoint presentation by Dr. Mobasheri, dealing specifically with the developmental advising rationale and process. This made a proper choice of the two main issues, such that participants could see the potential directions the workshop could take, and were able to voice an opinion on what they felt to be of maximum utility. Accordingly, when given the choice of developmental advising or course selection advising, the most decisive member of the audience chose course selection advising, in view of pre-registration week coming up.

The discussion focused on specific sources of confusion to teacher-advisors: the MATH sequence in the different degrees, the many courses for which English Composition is pre-requisite, and the implications of that for course selection, as well as the proper sequence and spread of CAD courses. A further issue needing clarification was raised from the floor: that of the Arabic and French requirements for which students and at which levels. John Shoup of SHSS was able to clarify how Arabic and French placement worked, how the student's high school background affected the language requirements, and where one can find the level the student is eligible for.

Helpful input from both Ahmed Legrouri and John Shoup gave participants an insight into the most appropriate ways to help students, with a key reminder that the baccalaureate students come with has significance for their Math courses, also. The group saw the flowcharts of degree requirements for the SSE degrees, which they found immensely useful, especially as all pre-requisites are clearly indicated in the whole diagram. This flowchart would be a very helpful document for all schools to use, and, although Dr. Legrouri has sent it to the other schools, it has not yet made its way into a useable form outside of SSE.

Another very utilitarian outcome of the discussion was the question, often repeated, of the need for 2 Math courses in Humanities and Business degrees. Similarly, the original stipulation that Composition is pre-requisite to History and other humanities courses has decreased in necessity since the introduction of CAD courses, which ensure a high reading and writing load. Further discussion for core curriculum modification may be a logical development in this context.

The insight and support offered by Dr. Mobasher in her presentation on developmental advising and the need to take the whole person into account in student advising were helpful and thought-provoking. Her synopsis of Chickering's theory on multiple areas of student growth was basic to the recognition of the student's journey from adolescence to adulthood, and the several ways this transition impacts all of us in the educational domain. Her further explanation of Perry's model on stages of cognitive development served to inform the audience of the passages students make from the dualistic stage they enter university at to their potential for growth to the relativistic level they need to attain. There was interested discussion around these models, giving everyone a way to a better understanding of just what our students are going through as they try to work with the academic challenges they face.

A final point that was raised and debated was the eternal problem we face of the unmotivated and aimless students who seem to take up a disproportionate amount of our time, but for whom we have no solution. Dr. Mobasher's advice here is cogent: perhaps the student lacking incentive to get to class and do the assignments will be better served by a club membership or an activity that supports growth in perhaps less academic, but more socially or psychologically relevant ways.

Requests for follow-up sessions have already been made, and the CAD teachers feel that this kind of advising session should take place every semester. With continuous support, there might be improvement for the sometimes inadequate advising that takes place at AUI.