

# ATTITUDES, VALUE, AND PREPARATION OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS FOR ADVISING

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## Abstract

*The role of faculty at colleges and universities is ever changing. Demands placed upon a faculty member's time and efforts seem to be increasing while the struggle for a balanced program of scholarship becomes more difficult. Student advising is an important component of this program and a function of faculty time that has a direct impact on institutional fiscal stability, student retention, and overall student satisfaction. The objectives of this study were to identify the value of advising, as perceived by faculty and administrators; attitudes and perceptions of faculty toward advising; and perceived competence and preparation level of faculty to advise students. A total of 222 respondents from 31 universities participated in the study. Faculty and administrators agreed that there is value in advising students, as well as student organizations. Most faculty perceived advising as a teaching activity and indicated that it should be a component in promotion and tenure review. They reported that advising both undergraduate and graduate students was a good use of their time, although the level of agreement was higher for advising graduate students. Most respondents also reported that they were competent and prepared to advise students on academic matters. However, most respondents had received little or no professional development in advising. Respondents also expressed the need for assistance in advising student organizations and in advising in personal matters.*

## Introduction / Theoretical Framework

There are many serious problems facing agriculture today. The most threatening of these may be the inability of educational institutions to provide an adequate supply of agriculturally competent individuals to fill the positions created by a technologically expanding food and fiber system (Russell, 1993). Graduates equate to dollars – for both the educational institution that produces them and the industry that hires them. However, according to Tinto (1993), if students are not pleased with their educational experiences, they likely will not graduate. A major component of this institutional satisfaction revolves around advising (Pascarella, 1991). According to Pascarella, faculty contact (through advising) positively correlates with student retention and persistence toward degree completion – if that contact is positive. If true, is it plausible to assume that a positive

experience for students results from contact with faculty who are either uncomfortable or unprepared in their roles as advisors?

Whereas faculty play a key role in the supply of graduates, they may not be able to shoulder the entire burden. After all, faculty wear many hats and have many demands placed upon their time, the most notable of which may be their programmatic approach to promotion and tenure. Given the institutional demands of research, teaching, extension, and service, faculty often must allow one area to suffer to meet the expectations of another. These choices often create conflict over the best use of faculty time. According to Boyer (1990), the use of faculty time is the single concern around which all other educational issues pivot.

Arguably, the most often cited criterion for hiring university faculty is expertise in subject matter. Whereas faculty are expected to be skilled in their specific subject matter field, they are generally not expected to

enter the profession with expert advising skills. Yet many agriculture faculty are immediately placed in a role of advisor and counselor to both graduate and undergraduate students. Often, many of these faculty receive little or no preparation or guidance from their institutions to assist in their professional development needs in completing this expectation (Gordon & Habley, 2000; Selke & Wong, 1993). Meanwhile, many students are incredulous that college advisors are not required to have

at least a basic course in advising techniques somewhere in their preparation.

The theoretical framework for this study lies in the work of Boyer (1990) and his concept of scholarship. According to Boyer, scholarship should be defined in four general views or categories: discovery, integration, application, and teaching (Figure 1). Though sometimes overlapping in their activities, Boyer offers that each area is distinctive, with unique faculty expectations in each area.

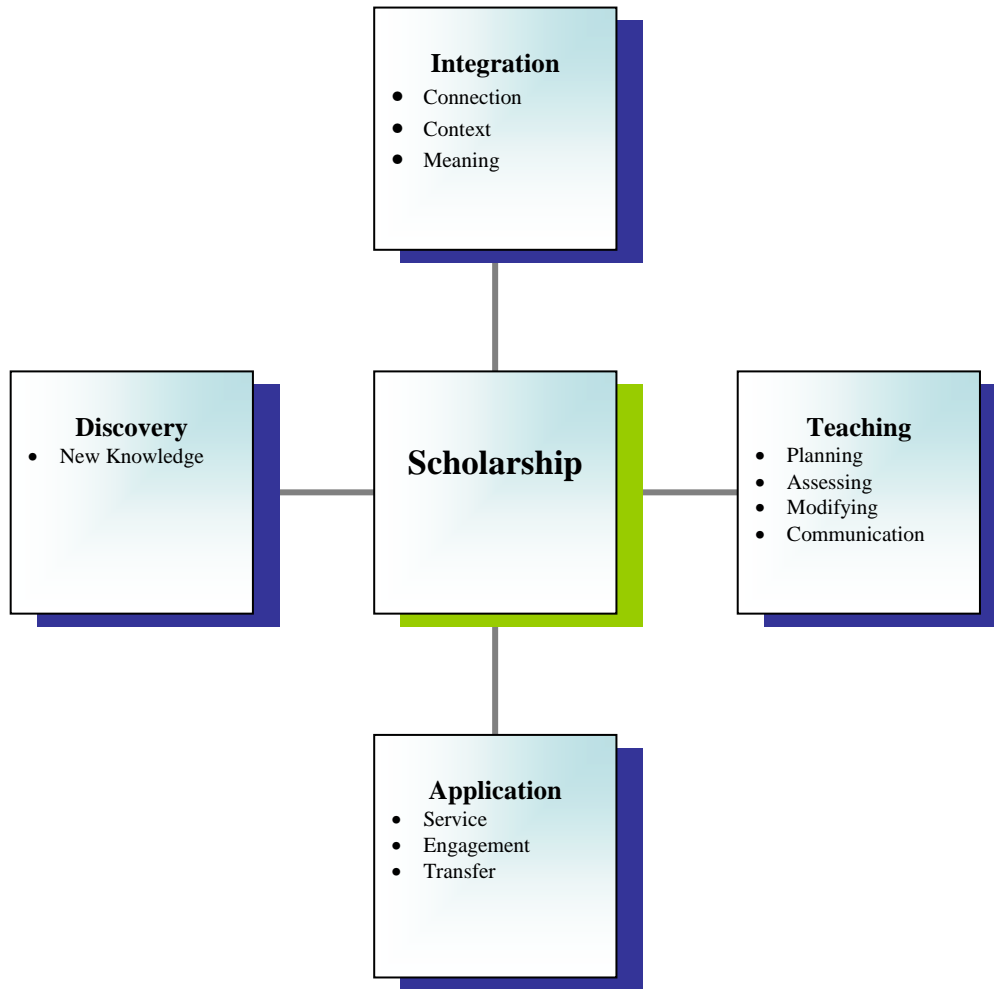


Figure 1. Model of Scholarship (adapted from Boyer, 1990)

Within the scholarship of teaching, both Crookston (1972) and Boyer (1990) have clearly defined advising as a component of teaching. Hemwall and Trachte (1999) support this contention, noting that advising occurs at the intersection of the teaching and learning experience. It is this area of Boyer's model, *Teaching*, that serves as a focus of this study.

Fundamental to Boyer's model, the scholarship of teaching involves the teacher's own knowledge and activity (Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2004). Within this framework, teachers must learn to effectively plan, assess, modify, and communicate – if they are to be successful scholars in this area. According to Trigwell et al., the teacher's focus must be on teaching and learning, the student's experience, and the learning outcomes that are established – whether those areas of learning, experience, and outcomes are course content knowledge, making correct career choices, or solving personal or academic problems. In assisting the student in accomplishing these tasks, the teacher employs a range of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, utilizing the products of reflection, evaluation, and learning (Frost, 1993; Gordon, 1992). Trigwell et al. noted that the teacher must often pursue appropriate professional and/or self development strategies to learn and incorporate new knowledge in the pursuit of scholarly teaching activities. The model suggests that faculty must practice scholarship in teaching (advising), just as they would for the other three components of the model. To do so, however, first requires that faculty (1) be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, (2) have the opportunity to build on strengths and alleviate weaknesses, and (3) possess a favorable attitude toward the task (Trigwell et al.).

The extent to which teaching faculty are expected to advise students continues to create rifts in the higher education community (Boyer, 1990). Perhaps partly because of their self-perceived inadequacy in advising knowledge (Hancock, 1996), many faculty retreat to their expertise in research and “teaching” in the most limiting of contexts. According to Petress (1996),

there are four major factors that affect a faculty member's self perceptions of his or her ability to advise: 1) how advisors interpret their advising role, 2) training and/or guidance provided to advisors, 3) expectations of administrators and colleagues for advisors, and 4) recognition and rewards available for competent or exemplary advising.

In other situations it may be plausible that teaching in the form of advising is neither valued nor rewarded by administrators. Many faculty do not believe that advising is presently considered in promotion and tenure decisions (Dillion & Fisher, 2000; Tien & Blackburn, 1996). In a national survey of college and university faculty, Boyer (1990) reported that at doctorate-granting institutions, only 13% of faculty believed advising to be important in granting tenure. Likewise, Hancock (1996) suggested that if a faculty member believes that promotion and tenure stems more from research than from advising, the faculty member will likely be disinclined to participate in advising activities and focus more on research. Kotrlik, Bartlett, Higgins, and Williams (2002) support this contention, noting that the number of doctoral students advised to be a very powerful explanatory variable for faculty research productivity.

Stull (1997) characterized academic advising as an on-going and active process involving the student, advisor, and institution – the primary goal of which is to assist students in the development and accomplishment of meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their life goals. While a daunting task for a skilled faculty member, this could be an overwhelming expectation for new or unprepared faculty.

The results of expecting unprepared faculty to advise students could have negative effects on an institution and its instructional programs. Kennedy, Gordon, and Gordon (1995) reported that faculty contact plays a significant role in student attitudes toward college. Habley (1993) noted that advising contributes to overall student success. He further stated that faculty and administrators should recognize that students who formulate a sound educational or career plan based upon their

interests, values, and abilities will have an increased chance for academic success, satisfaction, and persistence. According to Habley, academic advising is the most significant mechanism available on college and university campuses for aiding this process.

The results of poor advising may threaten the financial security of some institutions. Tinto (1993) reported that more students actually leave college before completing a degree than graduate. This loss of students translates into a substantial monetary loss and threatens the fiscal stability of institutions (Dyer, Lacey, & Osborne, 1996; Glennen, Farren, & Vowell, 1996). In times when university budgets are scrutinized for ways to eliminate spending, administrators are sometimes tempted to limit allocations to advising programs that are often seen as non-central to the instructional mission of the institution (Glennen et al.).

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (1996) reported that 99% of their institutions considered advising to be an important component of faculty members' expectations. However, the Board also reported that all too often students are forced to "self-advise," emphasizing the need for proper faculty development in the area of advising.

As the higher education community moves toward *carte blanche* course offerings via distance technology, if superior quality advising is not provided to students in these environments, program completion rates are likely to dip below the 60% rate experienced in the past decade (Moxley, 1996). The overall result of this dip could be a less prepared agricultural workforce. However, the *type* of advising strategy used in either a synchronous or asynchronous distance setting will likely be different than one used in a traditional on-campus setting. Are university faculty prepared for this role?

Several authors have called for advising assistance programs for university faculty. Stull (1997) noted that university faculty must be assisted in developing their advising skills in three areas: curricular and programmatic advising, career advising, and developmental advising. Likewise, Gardiner

(1994) emphasized the necessity for assistance in learning how to advise, evaluate advising success, recognize advising problems, and reward faculty for advising. Crawford (1991) called for a university-wide review of the nature and structure of academic advising and the ability of faculty to complete this expectation. Stowe (1996) characterized advising as a unique opportunity for faculty to affect students' opportunities for success, not a chore of faculty.

According to Alexitch (1997), the current system is not working and students are not receiving the type of advising required for academic success. If true, this situation mandates that institutional changes be made. However, since the late 1980s, little has been done to assess faculty attitudes toward advising, their preparation for advising, or their subsequent execution of advising strategies. Likewise, no study could be found in the agricultural literature base that has investigated the perceptions, value, and preparation of college of agriculture faculty for advising. However, this information is needed if faculty and administrators are to understand areas of expertise and deficiency in preparation for advising. This study sought to alleviate that void in the research base and present a depiction of the attitudes, values, and level of preparation of agriculture faculty in advising students. Likewise, findings from this study could be used by both college of agriculture faculty, who serve as advisers, and by college and departmental administrators in the development of professional enhancement activities regarding advising activities.

### Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes, needs, and self-perceived level of competence in advising by faculty and administrators of colleges of agriculture at land grant institutions. The objectives of the study, stated as questions, were as follows:

1. What is the value placed upon advising, as perceived by university faculty and administrators?

2. What are the attitudes of faculty toward their involvement in student advising?
3. What is the perceived competence/preparation level of faculty to advise students?

### Methods

This national study used a descriptive survey research design. A researcher-designed instrument was constructed to assess the attitudes, needs, and perceptions of selected university faculty and administrators toward advising. Respondents were mailed an attitudinal questionnaire that used a four-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree) to assess their attitudes. A four-point scale was chosen to compel respondents to express an opinion about the statement. Dillman (2000) noted that it is appropriate to pose attitudinal questions without giving the option of a neutral opinion or no opinion at all. In addition, each question was designed to be general enough that all faculty and administrators would have adequate knowledge on the subject to form an opinion. Demographic questions were asked using open-ended and short-answer options.

The instrument was evaluated for face and content validity by a panel of experts consisting of faculty, administrators, and graduate students at the University of Florida and the University of Illinois. The instrument was pilot tested using faculty and administrators in positions similar to those in the sample. Reliability for the individual items on the instrument, using a test-retest procedure, was found to be .95.

The population for the study consisted of faculty and departmental administrators in colleges of agriculture at each of the 1862 land-grant universities in the United States. Since no population frame of these individuals existed, the associate dean for academic programs at each institution provided administrator and faculty names. No guidelines were provided to the college administrators for selecting the individuals to participate in this study. It should be noted as a limitation of this study that this sample may not be representative of faculty

in general, and does not allow for the generalization of findings beyond this group. Advisers were identified in 31 of these institutions. From this group a purposive sample was selected consisting of five faculty and three department administrators from each of these institutions.

In an attempt to reduce nonresponse error, a total of six respondent contacts were made (Dillman, 2000). These included a pre-study electronic mail contact, instrument mailings, and reminders via both electronic and land mail. A total of 222 respondents from each of the 31 universities represented returned questionnaires for a 90% response rate.

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. Means and standard deviations were used to analyze and interpret interval data.

### Results

As expected, faculty reported higher advising loads for undergraduate students ( $M = 42.6$ ) than for graduate students ( $M = 3.1$ ). However, faculty met with graduate students approximately six times more often than with undergraduates ( $M = 11.9$  and  $1.9$ , meetings per semester, respectively), and for longer periods of time ( $M = 43.3$  vs.  $29.6$  minutes, respectively). This totaled 14 hours per month for graduate students compared to 18.8 hours advising undergraduates.

The first objective sought to describe the value that faculty placed upon advising, as determined by responses to selected items. Statements pertaining to the value of advising were posed for both individual student advising and also for advising student organizations.

Most respondents indicated that advising students should be a component of promotion and tenure (91.3%), carry a teaching FTE (91.3%), and be compensated (90.3%). However, only 36.4% of the respondents indicated that advising is currently valued in promotion and tenure decisions (Table 1), and only 41.3% of the respondents indicated that faculty are

provided enough time to adequately advise students. Slightly over 64% indicated that advising student organizations should be a

factor in promotion and tenure, whereas only 21% reported that it is currently considered.

Table 1  
*Faculty Attitudes Toward the Value of Advising*

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
The number of students advised should be a component of teaching FTE.	199	91.3	19	8.7
Student advising should be a component of promotion and tenure review.	198	91.2	19	8.8
Student advising should be a component of faculty compensation.	195	90.3	21	9.7
Quality advising is valued in my department.	173	79.7	44	20.3
The advising of student organizations should be a component of teaching FTE.	162	74.0	57	26.0
The quality of student advising, as determined by student advising evaluations, should be a component of faculty pay scale.	153	72.2	59	27.8
Advising student organizations should be a component of promotion and tenure review.	140	64.5	76	35.0
Faculty are provided enough time to adequately advise students.	90	41.3	128	58.7
Student advising is currently a valued component of promotion and tenure review.	79	36.4	138	63.6
Advising student organizations is currently a valued component of promotion and tenure review.	45	21.0	169	79.0

*Note.*  $N = 222$ ; Responses were collapsed and dichotomized into Disagree and Agree for simplicity in data presentation and understanding.

The second objective of the study sought to describe the attitudes of faculty toward advising. All respondents (100%) indicated that advising graduate students was a good use of faculty time, with 95% of the respondents agreeing that advising undergraduate students was also time well spent (Table 2). Likewise, almost all faculty respondents agreed that advising is an effective way to build rapport (99.1%), retain students (98.6%), and recruit students (90.8%). Most respondents also agreed that faculty should

advise students regardless of the level of compensation (71.5%), and that advising (either graduate or undergraduate students) should be an expectation of all faculty (67.1%).

Advising graduate students was perceived to be more scholarly than advising undergraduate students. A majority of respondents (60.6%) agreed that advising undergraduate students was a scholarly activity. However, 91.2% viewed advising graduate students as scholarly. Likewise, respondents indicated that only faculty with

teaching appointments should advise undergraduate students (56.4%), as

compared to 10.6% in agreement for graduate students.

Table 2  
*Attitudes of Faculty Toward Advising*

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Advising graduate students is a good use of faculty time.	218	100.0	0	0.0
Advising students is an effective way to build rapport.	214	99.1	2	0.9
Advising plays an important role in retaining students.	214	98.6	3	1.4
Advising undergraduate students is a good use of faculty time.	204	95.0	11	5.0
Advising graduate students is a scholarly activity.	197	91.2	19	8.8
Advising plays an important role in recruiting students.	197	90.8	20	9.2
Advising student organizations is a good use of faculty time.	189	87.9	26	12.1
Faculty should be responsible for advising students regardless of pay.	153	71.5	61	28.5
Advising students should be an expectation of all faculty.	147	67.1	72	32.9
Advising undergraduate students is a scholarly activity.	131	60.6	85	39.4
Only faculty with teaching appointments should advise undergraduates.	123	56.4	95	43.6
Students should utilize advising sessions with faculty on a walk-in basis.	80	37.7	132	62.3
Only faculty with teaching appointments should advise student organizations.	41	18.7	178	81.3
Only faculty with teaching appointments should advise graduate students.	23	10.6	195	89.4

*Note.*  $N = 222$ ; Responses were collapsed and dichotomized into Disagree and Agree for simplicity in data presentation and understanding.

The third objective sought to describe faculty preparation to advise students (Table 3). Over 98% of the respondents indicated that they felt comfortable communicating with students one-on-one (98.1%), in assisting students in planning schedules (97.2%), in finding information on academic policies (93.5%), in locating campus resources to assist students with academic

difficulties (86.6%), and in helping students make career choices (94%). However, only 58.3% reported that they felt comfortable counseling students on personal matters, while only 41% indicated that they felt competent in their knowledge of legal issues concerning advising. However, 83.3% of respondents agreed that their expertise in advising was adequate.

Table 3  
*Perceived Knowledge and Preparation of Faculty for Advising*

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I feel comfortable in communicating one-on-one with students.	212	98.1	4	1.9
I feel competent in assisting students in planning schedules.	210	97.2	6	2.8
I feel competent in counseling students on making career choices.	202	94.0	13	6.0
I know where to find information on academic policies.	202	93.5	14	6.5
I am aware of campus resources to assist students who are in academic difficulty.	187	86.6	29	13.4
My current level of expertise in advising students is adequate.	180	83.3	36	16.7
I feel competent in advising student organizations.	169	79.0	45	21.0
I feel competent in using on-line advising tools.	156	72.9	58	27.1
I feel competent in counseling students on personal matters.	123	58.3	88	41.7
I feel competent in my knowledge of legal issues concerning advising.	86	41.0	124	59.0

*Note:*  $N = 222$ ; Responses were collapsed and dichotomized into Disagree and Agree for simplicity in data presentation and understanding.

Only slightly over half of the respondents (57.9%) indicated that they had received any type of assistance in learning how to advise students on academic and professional matters (Table 4). Likewise,

only 18% of respondents reported having received training on counseling students on personal matters, with only 12.8% reporting they had received training on how to advise student organizations.

Table 4  
*Professional Preparation for Advising Students*

Statement	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I have received training in how to advise students on academic and professional matters.	125	57.9	97	42.1
I have received training on how to counsel students on personal matters.	39	18.0	178	82.0
I have received training on how to advise student organizations.	28	12.8	189	87.1

*Note:*  $N = 222$ .

Respondents generally perceived themselves to be competent in advising students, although some areas of concern were expressed (Table 5). Faculty reported they were either “Competent” or “Very Competent” in advising students concerning degree and program requirements (96.3%), course scheduling (94.4%), career counseling

(82.1%), industry/job market demands (82.4%), student organization advising (61.5%), and activities/competitions (55.1%). However, a majority of the respondents considered themselves “Not at All Competent” or only “Somewhat Competent” in dealing with personal issues (65%) or financial assistance opportunities (59.9%).

Table 5  
*Perceived Advising Competence Levels of University Faculty*

Area of Advising	Not at all Competent		Somewhat Competent		Competent		Very Competent	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Degree / Program Requirements	0	0.0	8	3.7	51	23.5	158	72.8
Course Scheduling	1	0.5	11	5.1	61	28.2	143	66.2
Career Counseling	1	0.5	38	17.5	121	55.8	57	26.3
Industry / Job Market Demands	0	0.0	38	17.6	127	58.8	51	23.6
Student Organization Advising	23	10.6	60	27.8	91	42.1	42	19.4
Activities / Competitions	17	7.9	80	37.0	88	40.7	31	14.4
Financial Assistance Opportunities	29	13.4	101	46.5	64	29.5	23	10.6
Personal Issues	38	17.8	101	47.2	62	29.0	13	6.1

Note: *N* = 222.

**Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations**

The first objective of this study was to identify the perceived value of advising. Faculty and administrators in this study agreed that there is value in advising, but expressed opinions that it is not valued in promotion and tenure decisions. This finding concurred with that of Boyer (1990) from a decade earlier. According to Boyer, “...the degree to which...better education is achieved will be determined, in large measure, by the way scholarship is defined and, ultimately, rewarded” (p. xiii). Following the work of Tien and Blackburn (1996), it is to be expected that the lack of importance given to advising activities in promotion and tenure decisions would have a negative effect on motivation toward advising. However, further study is

needed to determine if this relationship exists.

The second objective sought to identify attitudes and perceptions of faculty and administrators toward undergraduate and graduate student advising. It was found that advising both undergraduate and graduate students was viewed as a good use of time. However, advising graduate students was perceived to be more scholarly than advising undergraduate students. Further research is needed to identify ways to increase the scholarly perception of undergraduate advising.

Almost 99% of the respondents indicated that advising plays an important role in retaining students. Recruitment and retention problems could be minimized if these faculty perceptions of the value of advising in recruiting, retaining, and building rapport with students are

accurate. Additional research into this phenomenon is warranted, however, to determine the relationship between advising proficiency and student recruitment and/or retention.

The third and final objective of the study was to identify the perceived competence and preparation level of faculty to advise students. Faculty in this study perceived themselves to be competent and prepared to advise students on academic and career decisions, but need assistance in advising student organizations, using advising technology, advising on personal matters, and in legal issues concerning advising. Though beyond the scope of this study, a perceived relationship may exist between respondents' perceived competence in an advising area and the perceived value of that area. Further research is needed to determine if this relationship exists and to determine if remedial action is warranted.

Many of the advisors in this study had little or no professional preparation to advise students or student organizations. Although faculty and administrators generally perceived their level of knowledge to be adequate to advise, most of that knowledge is experiential. Only 42% of respondents indicated they had received any type of assistance in advising students on academic matters. Only 18% had received help on advising students on personal matters, and only about 13% had received training on how to effectively work with student organizations. These findings compare similarly to those of Habley and Morales (Gordon & Habley, 2000).

Selke and Wong (1993) stated that faculty are mistaken to believe that they can learn all that is needed for quality advising through experience only. Petress (1996) also noted that professional development is needed to prepare advisors for the important task of advising undergraduate and graduate students as well as student organizations. This lack of professional development in advising may call into question the quality of advising that students are receiving. However, further research is needed to assess this quality. This information would be key to either support or reject the finding of Selke and Wong, and Petress on the need of professional development for advisors.

Also, further research is needed to identify strategies used by faculty who are successful in advising. This information could be very beneficial in developing successful faculty advisors. In addition, research is warranted to identify the type of professional development opportunities needed by advisors and to identify the most effective methods for delivering that professional development.

Professional development opportunities in advising are often not available to faculty, and some faculty would not take advantage of them if they were available (Selke & Wong, 1993). Selke and Wong noted that many faculty members mistakenly believe they know all there is to know about advising because of their own experiences as a student. Habley and Morales (Gordon & Habley, 2000) reported that only about one-third of colleges and universities provide any type of professional development activities for advisors. Of those that do provide assistance, less than one-fourth required faculty who were involved in advising to participate in the activities. In addition, Habley and Morales noted that most of the professional development assistance provided to faculty focused solely on the communication of factual information from advisor to student. Little time was devoted to development of advising concepts and relationship skills, which have been found to be critical in developmental advising (Crookston, 1972; Frost, 1993; Gordon, 1992).

These findings, although limited by the purposive nature of the sample used, are important to the agricultural education profession as many of the faculty in this profession are called upon by college administrators to design, deliver, and evaluate professional development programs for advising students and student organizations. An understanding of the current perceptions of faculty towards advising should assist agricultural educators in providing effective formal and informal professional development.

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