Implementation and Evaluation of a Course-Embedded Faculty Advising Model

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Abstract

• This study investigated the development, implementation and review of a course-embedded advising model within a mid-sized University that emphasizes the preparation of socially responsible practitioners.
• Structured, individual synchronous faculty advising sessions were built into 4 courses of an online MA degree program.
• A sample of 13 students participating in 1 or more sessions completed a Student Experience Survey.
• The results are discussed in the context of relevant theories.
Introduction I

• Major retention issues in conjunction with low graduation rates and budget cuts place increasing pressure on universities to generate performance outcomes (Mino, 2012).

• Universities that offer online programs have added challenges, as online learners have been shown to have unique needs that respond to specific skills for continued motivation and academic success (Brown, 2016; Haydaraw, Moxley, & Anderson, 2013).

• For example, factors related to high attrition rates among online learners include; motivation, self-determination, and student misconceptions concerning expectation (Bawa, 2016), which further highlights the need to evaluate services offered.

• Increase in online enrollments demands an effective framework of support which is based on best practices for supporting distance learners (e.g., academic, technical, relational).
• Faculty advising contributes to student completion of degree programs and successful entry into their fields of study (Augustine-Shaw, Fairbanks, & Adams-Wright, 2016).

• Instructor presence, community, the incorporation of synchronous sessions and the use of web-conferencing software have been shown to raise student engagement, leading to increased student satisfaction and retention (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bailey & Brown, 2016; King & Alperstein, 2015; Stewart, Harlow & DeBacco, 2011; Richardson et al., 2016).

• There has been limited investigation of the perceptions of online graduate students concerning the impact and utility of Course-embedded Advising.

• This study investigates the development, implementation and review of a course-embedded advising model delivered to students in an online program at a mid-sized University that emphasizes the preparation of socially responsible practitioners.
Course-embedded Advising Model: Development

- Structured, individual synchronous faculty advising sessions were built into 4 select courses of an online MA degree program.
- Students meet with faculty via web-conferencing software for sessions that are approximately 15 to 20 minutes in duration.
- Synchronous session instructions and prompts are provided to students at the beginning of each course.
- Following the completion of each appointment, students are asked to prepare and submit a reflection, which is graded as pass/fail. While participation in course-embedded advising sessions is required, it does not impact the formal grade received for the course.
Course-embedded Advising Model: Aims

- Maximize meaningful interaction between students and faculty in a synchronous environment, thereby increasing instructor presence.
- Evaluate opportunities for increasing individual relevance in online courses, thereby contributing to increased levels of engagement.
- Provide faculty with guidelines for directing students to engage in specific activities, followed by prompted dialogue, thereby contributing to career preparation.
- Engage students outside of the online course room in meaningful ways, thereby contributing to the development of an online community of learners.
- Contribute to the preparation of socially responsible practitioners by modeling dedication to social justice principles.
Student Experience Survey Development

- The development of a student experience survey was informed by a review of literature on academic advising outcomes, strategies for improving retention, community building, and the benefits of synchronous learning among students enrolled in online undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Two dominate themes identified were **instructor presence** and **student engagement**.
- The student experience survey explores student perceptions on the impact and contribution of the Course-embedded Advising Model in:
  1. Contributing to community in online courses
  2. Impacting student perceptions of faculty presence
  3. Impacting perceived engagement
  4. Preparing students to serve as socially responsible practitioners
  5. Contributing to greater networking opportunities with faculty
Research Questions

1. Does course-embedded advising contribute to community in online courses?
2. Does course-embedded advising impact student perceptions of faculty presence?
3. Does course-embedded advising impact perceived engagement?
4. Does course-embedded advising prepare students to serve as socially responsible practitioners?
5. Does course-embedded advising contribute to greater networking opportunities with faculty?
6. Does course-embedded advising model contribute to enhanced student-faculty relationships?
7. Does course-embedded advising impact perceptions of career-readiness?
8. What improvements to the model do students recommend?
Method I: Participants

- All participants (n = 13) in this study were MA level students enrolled in an online program and who had (a) already completed or (b) were currently enrolled in one or more of the four courses which included course-embedded advising during the summer and fall terms of 2019.
  - All thirteen students, 100%, participated in session one.
  - Seventy-seven percent of participants (n = 10) participated in session two.
  - Sixty-two percent of students (n = 8) participated in session three.
  - Fifteen percent of students (n = 2) participated in the fourth and final session.
Method II: Materials

- **Student Experience Survey**: used to examine student perceptions of the impact and utility of the Course-embedded Advising Model.
  - Survey question design was informed by research on the construct of engagement in online courses (Banna, Lin, Stewart, & Fialkowski, 2015) and faculty presence as a predictor of student perceptions of community (O’Malley, 2017).
  - The survey contained 16 items.
  - 5-point likert scale.
  - Final two questions were open-ended.
Study Model

Course Embedded-Advising

- Community in Online Courses
- Faculty Presence
- Perceived Engagement
- Networking Opportunities
- Student-Faculty Relationships
- Career Readiness
- Preparation to Serve as Socially Responsible Practitioners
Figure 1. Percentage of students indicating positive perceptions.
Does course-embedded advising contribute to enhancing community, and perceived engagement in online course environments?

Yes

• Majority reported course-embedded advising: (a) enhanced overall program experience, (b) increased their overall connection to university, and (c) positively impacted their commitment to remain at Adler.
Does course-embedded advising positively impact student perceptions of faculty presence?

Yes

• Majority of students indicated their advisor was approachable, and that faculty leading the course-embedded advising session positively impacted their learning.

• Promising for course-embedded advising model, as faculty presence is a predictor of student perceptions of community (O’Malley, 2017).
Does course-embedded advising contribute to enhanced student-faculty relationships?

Yes

• Majority indicated that the faculty members leading course-embedded advising sessions were approachable and positively impacted their learning.
• Majority indicated course-embedded advising experience enabled them to develop a deeper, more meaningful relationship with the instructor.
• Findings support previous research that demonstrated the benefit that synchronous sessions had been shown to have on creating community in online courses (Granda, Garcia, Nuno & Suarez, 2010).
Does course-embedded advising positively impact perceptions of career-readiness and grade point average?

Partially

- Based on research that demonstrated the contribution of faculty advising to student completion of degree programs and successful entry into their fields of study (Augustine-Shaw, Fairbanks & Adams-Wright, 2016).
- Although more than 50% indicated that course-embedded advising had neither a positive nor negative impact on their GPA, majority did indicate that it provided them with practical, relevant guidance, and that because of the course-embedded advising experience, they are now more prepared for their future career.
H5: Course-embedded advising will contribute to the development of socially responsible practitioners.

No

- More than 50% indicated they neither agree/disagree that course-embedded advising helped them become more socially responsible.
- Given limited number of participants (n=2) who reported attending session four, where socially responsible practice is addressed, findings should be further explored.
- Future iterations of course-embedded advising model could more clearly address socially responsible practice in sessions one, two and three.
Open-ended Questions

Response rate to open-ended questions was 54%

Positive Aspect of Process for Students

• Career preparation
• Ability to talk, connect with, and relate to instructor

Recommended Improvements for Course-Embedded Advising

• Schedule sessions for week two vs. week four
• Greater emphasis on career readiness & networking would be useful
• Provide additional information on advising model aims at start of program
## Limitations

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<td>Small sample size</td>
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<td>Low response rate for open-ended questions</td>
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### Threats to internal validity

- Threat of history (i.e., change in student resulting from external or historical event)

### Threats to external validity

- Cannot generalize findings due to the use of nonprobability sampling (i.e., convenience sampling, purposive sampling)

Psychometric properties of Student Satisfaction Survey not assessed prior to use
Future Directions

| Advising models critical for student success |
| Future research could address consistency in advising experiences. |
| Today’s cloud-based learning environment, educational delivery systems must evolve with the times. |
| Because embedded-advising closes gap between academics and advising, future studies should focus on embedded-advising models. Potential questions to explore include: |

- Is there a significant difference in responses or response rates from students from different courses or instructors? If so, which variables are responsible for the statistically significant difference in response?
- What other strategies could be introduced to help better engage students besides course-embedded advising within the degree programs?
- What is the reliability and validity of the Student Satisfaction Survey?
Key References


Questions