

PANEL DISCUSSION ON GLOBAL ISSUES IN ACADEMIC ADVISING (Session 154)

Friday, 7 October, 2016, 10-11, Atrium 701

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Panel Members

Saltanat Beisembina, Kazakhstan
David Currell, Lebanon
Thea De Kluijver, The Netherlands
Shea Ellingham, Canada
Efrosini Hortis, Greece
Sonia Mahon (The West Indies)
Yoshinobu Onishi, Japan
Penny Robinson, The UK
Daniel Ugwuode, Nigeria

Structure of the Session

- 1) Panel members introduce themselves
- 2) Discussion in small groups
- 3) Groups report back on their discussions and put questions to panel members
- 4) Conclusion

Panel members have submitted the following information in order to help attenders to prepare for the session and formulate their questions:-

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of the dynamically developing countries located in Central Asia. Together with economic growth, the government is putting a great deal of effort into the development of education in the country. The credit system is used in a similar way to how it is in western universities. Advising is considered a relatively new trend. Based on the Nazarbayev University experience, the following issues have been identified:-

- 1) No centralized advising centres;
- 2) Lack of professional/experienced advisers for each student;
- 3) Influence of parents on students' decision-making processes.

One of the most important opportunities for the country is to use best-case practices from all over the world and adapt them to the reality in Kazakhstan.

Japan

There is both good and bad news about academic advisers in Japanese universities. The bad news is that, according to the Ministry of Education in 2015, only 25.5% of Japanese universities have academic advisers. In the same research, the Ministry also asked the remaining 74.5% of universities if they needed academic advisers, and only 7.6% said yes.

The good news, however, is that the Ministry of Education has just begun a project to nurture more professional university staff members who have higher expertise than ever and can be a bridge between teachers and administrators or between students and administrators. Academic advisers are one of these types of staff member, and their use will be similar to the position in most American universities, which have three layers of employees, namely, teachers, professional staff and administrators.

In 2015, the Japanese Ministry of Education established a joint usage learning center in Chiba University to implement the Professional Staff Development Program for Educational and Learning Support, which provides prospective academic advisers with a graduate-level curriculum. Furthermore, Chiba University itself established its Office of Academic Advising, with two staff members, this year.

One of the largest obstacles we are now facing is staff allocation, which is a more serious problem at private universities than at public ones in Japan, because the former have much larger student populations than the latter. According to the latest statistics from the *Times Higher*, UK, the student-staff ratio at Harvard is 8.9, while the ratio at Waseda University – one of the top private universities in Japan – is 16.9. Therefore, many private universities in Japan currently tend to allocate more staff members to career guidance offices than to academic advising offices, for example.

Lebanon

Improving academic advising has become a key goal within the last five years at AUB (American University of Beirut), but focussed efforts within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to raise its quality and value face several challenges, some rooted in institutional inertias and some in cultural issues that affect the university sector in Lebanon as a whole. Examples of the former include the complexity of the registration system, degree requirements and mechanisms for creating exceptions; examples of the latter include an overwhelming societal and parental privileging of only a few areas of study, namely medicine, engineering and business. The most traction and improvement in satisfaction (on the part of students and advisers alike) has been in freshman advising, yet, due to a peculiarity of the Lebanese education system, only a minority of students enter AUB through the freshman program, making 'scaling up' these improvements anything but straightforward. A key question I hope to address in the context of these various factors is how to optimize the distribution of advising roles among faculty advisers and professional staff.

Canada

The challenges for advisers and advising in Canada are about as broad and diverse as the country itself. Not only are there challenges on a national scale, but regional challenges are also a factor. Speaking in the most general terms, the challenges for advising in Canada are identity, research and professional development. Should we align ourselves with NACADA or with CACUSS (the Canadian counterpart to NASPA) or both? Where do we fit within our own institutions; are we student affairs professionals or academic professionals? Generally, we feel that advising is different in Canada from in the US, but there is very little Canadian research to illustrate those differences, nor are there many Canadian voices speaking up about them, resulting in our own identity crisis within the advising profession. We need to acknowledge the aspects of advising that are distinctly Canadian, but in order to do that we need to actively and broadly promote the profession to our national audience. Finally, without a national benchmark against which to measure the value of advisers and academic advising, some advisers are feeling as though they need to pursue higher education in order to gain credibility in their roles. But is this really worth the time, money and effort, as gaining a credential does not guarantee promotion nor even establish a pathway into the profession itself?

The West Indies

The University of the West Indies (UWI) is the largest and longest standing higher education provider in the English-speaking Caribbean. The UWI offers quality higher education mainly to countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean. Additionally, the UWI is an international accredited university, in every respect, with links extending beyond the Caribbean to well over 100 universities worldwide. Its mission is: to advance education and create knowledge through excellence in teaching, research, innovation, public service, intellectual leadership and outreach in order to support the inclusive (social, economic, political, cultural, environmental) development of the Caribbean region and beyond. As one of the four campuses of the UWI, the Cave Hill Campus, located in Barbados, has the most diverse student population, with a capacity of just over 9,000 students.

Regarding our service to students, we share common challenges with regional universities. These challenges may include:-

- **Financial** – the UWI is still largely dependent (though decreasingly so) on the financial commitments of the member governments who each provide financial support to the students from the respective territories. As governments gradually decrease their portion of payment, students are required to face loans and debt for the first time, often in unmanageable amounts;
- **Health and emotional wellbeing** – for various reasons, students may become depressed or homesick, may not eat nutritious food, may become sleep deprived and will need mechanisms for coping;
- **Transition** – students find it a challenge when they are suddenly faced with the requirements of tertiary study, especially where the student is the first person in the household to pursue a degree. They also have difficulty in choosing a Major that matches a career choice;
- **Time management** – students find difficulty in balancing credits and study schedules, work, social life and home;
- **Formalized structures** – for many years academic advising has been viewed as an orientation which provides students with the courses to be selected, etc. Therefore, the implementation of formal structures for developmental academic advising has been neglected. This includes reluctance by some to become advisers;
- **Formalized training** – given the absence of formal structures for academic advising, there has been little to no training for academic advisers.

Greece

In the American College of Greece the advising office is responsible for the following categories of student:-

- **New students** meet with an academic adviser as soon as they send their tuition deposit and have an English assessment on file. The academic advisers work with the new student to select the first semester's courses. Once the courses are selected, the student may officially register for classes;
- **Continuing students** with fewer than **51 credits** are required to visit their academic adviser prior to registration and whenever they are in need of assistance or advice. Once the student has earned 51 or more credit hours, he or she will be assigned to a faculty adviser in his/her chosen academic department. However, **students with 50 credits and above but CI<2 (probation)** are also required to meet with an academic adviser.

Our main advising issues are:-

- **First-year students:** (mostly from Greek high schools) and their adjustment to campus and the new American educational system in co-ordination with the British educational system. The American College of Greece is an American NEASC accredited institution, but at the same time since 2010 it has been validated by the Open University of the UK, and offers simultaneously two degrees, one American and one British, while using one curriculum;
- **Probation students:** students not in good academic standing GPA<2. We work with these students closely and try to find ways to help them use the resources and facilities that the University offers (tutoring center, educational psychologist, career services, student affairs);

- **Honors students:** high-achieving students, 3.5 and above;
- **Parallel students:** students who are studying in Greek public universities are eligible to parallel study in the American College of Greece;
- **Study abroad students,** mainly from the United States, work with their home institution adviser and with us in order to find the appropriate courses to transfer back home;
- **Transfer students** from around the world; we need to pre-evaluate their transcripts and advise them properly in order to make the best use of the courses they have up to now and avoid mistakes in the selection of courses.

A key function of our office is to provide personal academic advising from a professional adviser or faculty member to every student, in order to aid students to develop the maturity required to make their own choices and realize the importance of education.

The United Kingdom

‘Academic advising’ is a term not widely used in the UK; both academic and pastoral support for students have traditionally been provided by personal tutors, who are academic members of staff. Those who support this method argue that it is not possible to separate the academic from the pastoral, and that tutorials should be approached in an holistic way. Frequently academic difficulties may be caused by personal problems, and a good tutor will be able to encourage the tutee to discuss them. Ideally, the student should retain the same personal tutor for the full duration of the programme, although circumstances (staff leaving the institution, sabbatical leave, etc) do not always permit this.

Some institutions are now exploring alternative models, such as that more common in the USA, where professional academic advisers support students. Others are pursuing an integrated approach, with academic advisers working in co-operation with academic personal tutors.

Some current issues include:-

- The perceived lack of value attached by institutions to student support delivered by academics, who feel they are encouraged, in descending order of importance, to research, teach and carry out administrative tasks, with personal tutoring coming in as a poor fourth. Institutions’ funding depends largely on the results of research assessment exercises; a similar review of teaching excellence is now being established;
- Not all institutions have a clearly defined and documented policy on personal tutoring;
- Not all students understand the rationale behind personal tutoring and its aid to academic and personal development, some believing that the tutor is there only for problems. Some universities have developed programmes such as the University of Leeds *Leeds for Life*, aimed at encouraging students to use tutorials effectively;
- Some universities (or departments within universities) require all members of academic staff to be personal tutors, while in others this role is allocated only to some. If all academics are required to do this, the sub-text is that it is not a task which requires any particular qualities, skills or training;
- The training offered to personal tutors varies considerably between institutions, and is rarely compulsory (in 2007 the National Audit Office recommended further training, but this has not happened consistently across the sector). Tutors who avail themselves of the training offered tend to be those who would be excellent in the role anyway;
- There is variation between institutions, and departments within institutions, about the extent to which personal tutoring is reflected in the workload model;
- The widening of access to higher education, with an increasing number of first-generation students, has meant greater pressure on student support systems generally;
- ‘Helicopter’ or ‘submarine’ parents, who are frequently seen as failing to encourage students’ progress towards independence;
- Academics who were personal tutors, but whose institutions have changed to a professionalized model, regret the loss of a close relationship with their tutees and feel that those who believe that academic and pastoral issues can be separated are misguided.

The situation in the UK is fluid and systems are changing, with increasing pressure on academics and a growing feeling that advising needs to be more professionalized. There are those who consider that a version of the US model, adapted to suit the UK degree structure, could be the way forward; others are looking to a model where professional advisers work closely with academics to provide integrated support (some universities which moved to a professionalized model are now considering returning to one where academics are more involved). Despite the issues outlined above, the majority of personal tutors take their role seriously and are dedicated to the welfare and academic success of their tutees.

The Netherlands

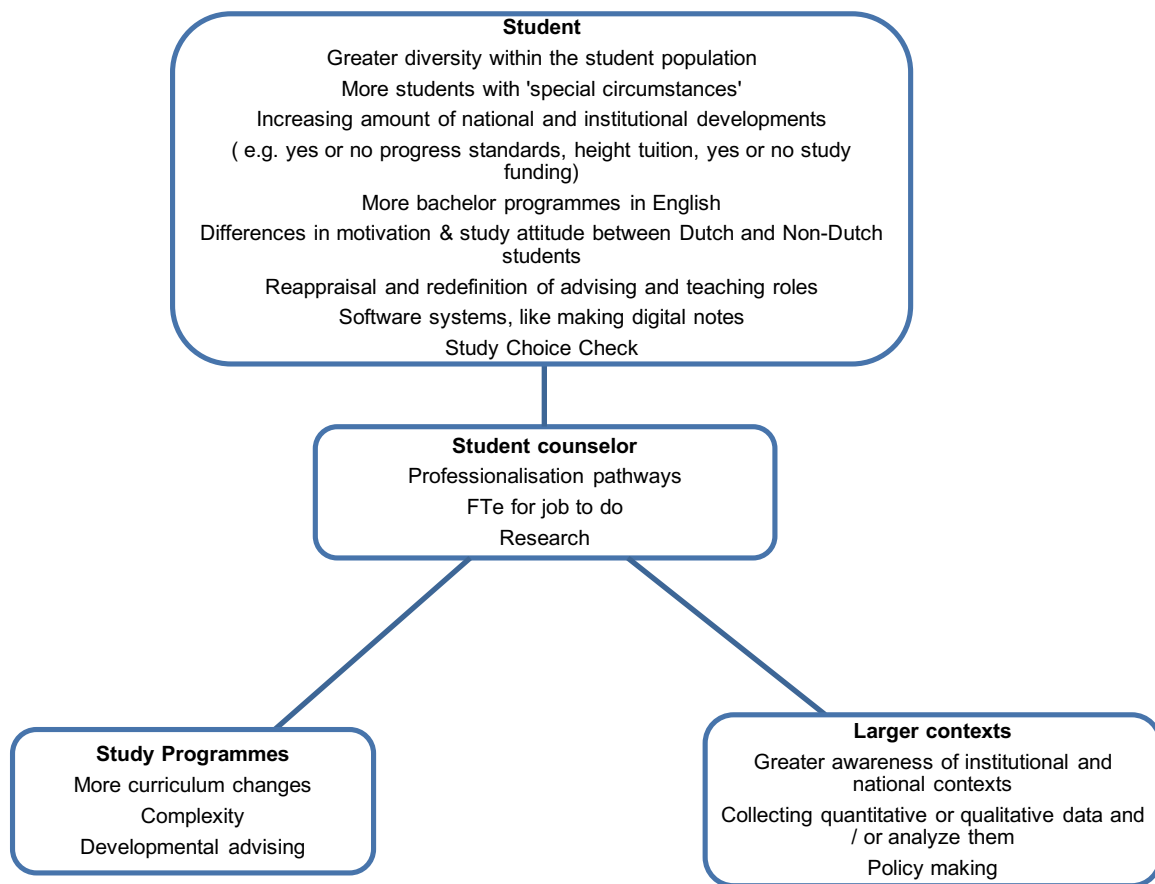
The main advising and tutoring issues at this moment in The Netherlands are:-

- To give more attention to advising as teaching, and focus more on sparring/coaching/etc, as well as informative tasks and relief;
- To be more involved in policy making;
- To make our anecdotal knowledge more robust and generalizable by using data and research.

It is exciting to be engaged with the above mentioned issues, especially within the context of the Bachelor-Master structure in The Netherlands, financial systems for students and educational institutions, and limited resources for academic counselors.

Two years ago the *landelijke vereniging van studieadviseurs* (LVSA), the Dutch national association of student counselors, launched a new website, <http://lvsa.nl/> (in Dutch). Besides our vision, mission and other items we published the focus areas of our occupation in a kind of triangle.

I will use this shape to point out below, in more detail, the major issues in The Netherlands. The 'triangle' is also used for the curriculum mind-map, determination of courses offered by the LVSA.



Nigeria

- Academic advising is a new concept – students do not know how best to use advising or make use of services and resources;
- The American University of Nigeria is the only university in the country with an academic advising office and services;
- Dynamics between family, students and the American style of education;
- Students do not reach out to the advising office for help early enough;
- Cultural issues;
- Poor readiness of students to learn and adapt to the high standard of university education;
- Family expectations;
- Family interference in students' interests and career choice;
- Advising undeclared and undecided students;
- Inability of students to understand the rationale and importance of a liberal arts education;
- Students, parents and the institution drawing the line;
- Students' slow response to information.