

Again, by making both groups aware of differences in their values, emphasis is placed on the need to communicate openly with each other.

Discussing the results of the survey resulted in many laughs, some surprises, and some concern. However, in both the parents' and students' groups, the results served as an initial ice-breaker. Students had very open and candid discussions with their student orientation counselors. Parents shared their experiences and concerns readily with each other and with the student services staff session leaders. One interesting side note was the observation that students were more interested in the content of specific items but parents were interested in overall, general concepts, looking more at the broad implications of the results than did the students.

In summary, using an opinionnaire survey was found to be an extremely beneficial tool during orientation programs, for both parents' and students' sessions. Some of the results were anticipated; others were not. The primary goal to establish an awareness of the need for open communication between parents and students was easily accomplished.

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A Peer Advising Training Program

I. Rationale:

Dominican College is a small, private liberal arts college located in Rockland County, New York. Its population is 1600 (including full-time, part-time, evening and weekend students), but it is a totally commuter college with no dormitories. In 1977, when the college was attempting to discover why its attrition rate was high, the advisement system was expanded to assure that students withdrawing from the college would be required to complete an "Exit Interview," before a transcript would be released. The exit interview is conducted by the Director of Student Development and then a questionnaire is completed by the student.

Semester by semester, statistics were gathered and analyzed. Some reasons cited for withdrawing were addressed and at least partially resolved: e.g., the parking situation (a van has been rendered for shuttle service). There are always items which cannot be resolved, such as dorms to live in. However, after studying some of these reasons, such as "couldn't find a group to belong to," "disliked snobbishness of campus social groups," and "disappointed with extracurricular activities" for examples, it seemed to the Freshman Directorate (the group of academic advisers to the Freshmen) that there was a further need to initiate a Peer Advising Program where interaction among peers would be assured and that "significant other" might be identified on campus.

Because there are no residence facilities on campus, it is harder for new students at DC to make friends (unless they come with some peers from high school). Search of the literature told us that peer-to-peer involvement had high credibility and, in some situations, can aid in retention of students. Also, the needs of the present student body were not adequately being met through the existing programs. This is why an attempt was made to establish a Peer Advising Program.

Some assumptions that were made were: since peer advisers are themselves involved in the college experience, they can better understand the pressures and problems of this situation than members of the staff. Peer advisers and students share a far more similar frame of reference. Student advisers do not represent "the establishment," authority or discipline. They do not appear guilty by association. According to research by Brown at Southwest Texas State, it was concluded that with careful selection and appropriate training, students can function effectively as advisers to their peers.

II. Purpose/Goals:

The goals of the "Peer Advising Program" are: to provide a learning ex-

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perience for the new student which will encourage him/her to assume responsibilities and make informed decisions in a college environment; to provide accurate and complete information as to student services, co-curricular programs and facilities.

These goals are broad and general, and it is under this setting that peer advisers are to be trained. The first step is the selection of a peer adviser. Some of the criteria used are as follows: 1) completion of an application form; 2) academic index of at least 3.0 (on a scale of 4.0); 3) co-curricular involvement in the college community but not over-extended; 4) need of adviser in certain areas of curriculum. Depending on the projected size of the Freshman class for September, the number of peer advisers needed is chosen in early May. A pool of twenty to twenty-five advisers has been sufficient thus far, each peer dealing with ten or less Freshmen. A summary sheet has also been given to interested applicants so that they may begin to learn what is expected of them.

III. Objectives:

"A behavioral objective is a statement of what the trainee will be able to do at the end of a given segment of training."² The aspects of the role of the peer adviser can be divided into three main categories: 1) interpersonal, 2) academic, 3) social. A look at these objectives follows:

1. Interpersonal Objectives:

to keep the lines of communication open between the advisee and peer adviser, between advisee and academic adviser, between peer adviser and academic adviser.

A. to be a good listener

B. to serve as liaison between academic adviser and student

2. Academic Objectives:

to interpret college policy to new students

A. to list and explain college wide regulations and requirements

B. to point out specific items in college literature (Student Handbook and Catalog)

C. to provide accurate information about course scheduling and registration

D. to identify sources of skills building, e.g. workshops

3. Social Objectives:

to help the new student make an initial adjustment to college life

A. to call/write to advisee before arrival on campus

B. to take advisees on tour of physical facilities

C. to identify key people and offices on campus

D. to help student meet new people and get involved in extra-curricular activities

I believe that these objectives set the framework for the Peer Advisers within which they will see the fruits of their training. Stephen Confer states (Grabowski, 1981) that there is a need for volunteers to see an immediate application of their training.³ These objectives can be correlated closely to the training plan.

IV. Method/Content/Techniques

The general format for training will include a one-day training session in May to develop some interpersonal skills; listening group dynamics; and also to experience those social skills necessary for contact with new students before September.

The format for the day will look something like the following:

Objective Being Satisfied		Training Day in May
	9:30-10:00	Introduction (Presentation by Trainer) Overview of Program Objectives and Responsibilities
	10:00-10:30	Expectations of Group Why they volunteered Projections
Objectives 3B, 3C, 3D	10:30-11:00	College Knowledge Test
Object 3A	11:00	Group Dynamic Exercises Peer Adviser Inventory Answer items and discussion in large groups
	Lunch	
Objective 1A	1:00	Small Group Exercise "Attending"—role playing Exercises taken from A Training Manual to Accompany The Skilled Helper
Interpersonal Objective 1B Academic Objective 2	2:00	Film on "Techniques of Good Advisers" (ACT Video Cassette)
Objective 3 Objective 2	2:30	Distributive booklet: "Resource Material for Advisers" Presentation on 30 Reminders for Effective Advising—correlation to film
Objective 2D	3:30	Reflection on Freshman year Peer Advisers Discussion on Study Skills
Objectives 1 and 3	4:00	Solicit volunteers for Orientation sessions on: Study Skills Time Management Stress Pressure
Objectives 3B, 3C, 3D	4:30	Feedback on Test taken in A.M. Correct responses

As can be seen, methods vary as to short lecture, group discussion, written test, answering of handout (job-aid), discussion in large as well as small groups, role playing, film, reflection and answering questions. This is a combination of using "experience" and combining it with "content input" as suggested by Michalak and Yager in their Experimental Learning Model.⁴

The training process is not finished, for peer advisers are expected to be part of the September Orientation Process, two days of acclimation. On the first day, meetings with the President and Dean of the College, take place; some vocational surveys are taken; informational academic meetings with peer and academic advisers take the Freshmen off campus for some socialization and leadership activities. Therefore, the peer advisers will meet for one week prior to orientation for about two hours each day. The following would be somewhat of the format for this phase in their training:

Week of Training Prior to Orientation (August):

Day 1	2	3	4	5
1-3 P.M.	1-3 P.M.	1-3 P.M.	1-3 P.M.	1-3 P.M.
Academic Requirements	Orientation Workshops			Orientation Schedule
1. Use of Catalog	1. Dry run by volunteers	1. Meet with Academic Advisers	1. Post test on college	1. Presentation of time and activities
2. Marking of certain sections	2. Participation and feedback from others	2. Discuss plans for Orientation	2. Quiz on Academic Requirements	2. Expectations
3. Handout on Academics to be used on Orientation Day	3. Group Dynamics Session	3. Input to Orientation meeting	3. Social	3. Go on a model campus tour
Presentation and discussion				

It will be necessary to have a meeting of all involved in Orientation directly after the two days to evaluate procedures, etc. and make recommendations for the following year. Peers can elicit verbal feedback from freshmen at the end of the two days perhaps on the bus ride back to campus, and bring it to group meeting.

In order to keep peer advising running smoothly during the semester, the trainer will meet with the advisers every two weeks for at least one hour. Mid-semester there will be a need to train peer advisers in the procedures of: how to help freshmen plan a schedule, how to register, and when to declare a major. This can be done in two one-hour sessions where knowledge of academic information from the catalog is re-tested. Reminders regarding specific courses and trends can be distributed in a handout.

Sheets on which peer advisers keep track of interviews with Freshmen will

be used by advisers and collected by trainer after interview sessions. Here an immediate evaluation can be determined by the information listed on these papers.

VI. Evaluation

Immediate evaluation can also be gained from some of the testing that occurs within the training process. This is valuable to show that actual learning has taken place. Observation of the behavior of the peer adviser can be done by both the faculty adviser when they and peers meet the freshmen, and by the trainer who will be able to evaluate whether items have been performed to satisfaction. A formal evaluation of the process will need to be done by the peer advisers themselves. This data can be collected and analyzed and improvements made in the program. The long term evaluation will consist of "how effective is peer advising as a factor in retention?" Do the exit interview statistics change? This will have to be performed for a few semesters in order to collect sufficient data.

VII. Other Factors to be Considered

One of the factors that needs to be considered is the reward system for these volunteer peer advisers. Monies have not been budgeted so as to pay them but this is done in many schools. This would have an impact on the budget. However, some colleges give their peer advisers academic credit because of the training and service they perform. This might be used as a training incentive to the superior student. This latter procedure I would recommend.

Another consideration would have to be the trainer and the time element involved. Right now, because of other commitments, the trainer has some released time in order to work with Freshmen, but if someone else was doing the training, this administrative task would need to be addressed by the college. (Released time, compensation, etc.?)

As far as cost, the one item involved is duplicating materials. The film used has been purchased for the advisement process as a whole.

Another factor that may be of use to the institution is the consideration of an external evaluator, who with objective training, might be able to say whether this type of training has made an impact on 1) peer advisers themselves, 2) freshmen (students) they advise, 3) faculty with whom they collaborate, 4) the retention statistics of the institution, and 5) whether peer advising has any impact on the collegial environment of Dominican College. This may also be determined by the College/University Environment Scale which the College administers every two years.

"Training, despite its shortcomings as a field of study, holds out a challenge and an adventure to those who understand its value and importance. Together with the problems and headaches, training brings a certain degree of satisfaction unmatched by many other kinds of work. Both current practitioners and individuals now entering this field can rest assured that they will not exhaust the many opportunities of developing and refining their chosen field of work."⁵

Copies of materials referred to in the text may be obtained by writing to the author.

FOOTNOTES

1. Donald Michalak and Edwin Yager, *Making the Training Process Work* (New York, 1979), p. 75.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
3. Stanley Grabowski and Associates, *Preparing Educators of Adults* (San Francisco, 1981), p. 73.
4. Michalak, pp. 75-81.
5. Grabowski, p. 137.

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