

The role of academic advising in higher education

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Abstract: Academic advising plays a crucial role in higher education, particularly in supporting students' comprehensive development in academics, soft skills, and career orientation. However, the academic advising system in Vietnam still faces significant challenges. This article analyzes the role of academic advising, evaluates existing limitations and proposes solutions to enhance the effectiveness of academic advising in the near future.

Keywords: Academic advising, academic support, career orientation, higher education, student development

1. Introduction

In the context of increasingly innovative higher education, emphasizing autonomy and student-centered approaches, the role of academic advising has become a critical link in the training system. Terms such as “academic advisor”, “homeroom teacher” or “study counselor” all refer to individuals assigned to support students throughout their academic journey. Academic advisors not only provide academic guidance but also help students develop personal skills, explore career paths, and connect with the institution [2]. They assist students in planning their studies, selecting appropriate courses, monitoring academic progress, and making timely adjustments when necessary. Furthermore, advisors support students in course registration, address inquiries regarding academic programs, and ensure that students fulfill their rights and responsibilities.

It can be said that academic advisors are not just educators but also mentors who inspire potential and help students enhance their self-learning and decision-making capabilities. In a credit-based education system, faculty members who take on the role of academic advisors must be equipped with advisory skills to guide students in self-direction and effective problem-solving. This highlights that the role of academic advisors extends far beyond the traditional scope of teaching, becoming a pivotal factor in improving the quality of higher education [3].

2. The role of academic advisors in higher education

First, academic support and progress management. Academic advisors accompany students in creating study plans aligned with academic programs and

personal goals. They provide guidance on selecting courses suited to students' capabilities, interests, and graduation requirements. Additionally, they monitor and track students' academic progress, identifying issues such as insufficient credits, low grades, or potential suspension risks to offer timely assistance. This ensures that students maintain a stable and effective learning trajectory.

Second, career orientation and future development. One of the essential tasks of academic advisors is to assist students in career planning. Based on students' abilities and personal aspirations, advisors provide recommendations on majors, internship opportunities, and career development pathways. They connect students with resources such as career workshops, businesses, or real-world projects, helping students better prepare for the job market.

Third, promoting scientific research. Academic advisors play a crucial role in inspiring passion and encouraging students to engage in scientific research activities. They help students shape research ideas, choose suitable fields, and guide them through research methodologies [1]. Advisors connect students with specialized faculty or research groups and assist in accessing resources, applying for funding, or participating in academic conferences. These activities not only enhance critical thinking skills but also help students develop teamwork, problem-solving, and academic presentation abilities important factors for success in both academic and professional environments.

Fourth, soft skills development. Beyond academic support, academic advisors play a role

in cultivating soft skills such as time management, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. These skills not only aid students in their studies but also enable them to integrate more effectively into the workplace. Advisors often encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities, internships, or competitions to develop skills and gain practical experience.

Fifth, psychological support and personal problem-solving. Academic advisors also act as companions in addressing students' personal challenges. They listen and provide helpful advice when students face psychological difficulties or personal issues, guiding them to professional support services when necessary. This role helps students feel safe and comfortable in their learning environment.

Sixth, a bridge between students and the institution. Academic advisors are an important link between students and institutional departments. They receive and convey student feedback on academic issues, facilities, or policies to the school administration. Conversely, they communicate information from the institution to students, ensuring a strong connection between the two sides.

Seventh, inspiring potential and motivation. Academic advisors are key in uncovering potential and motivating students. Through academic guidance, career counseling, and research support, they help students explore their abilities and maximize their potential. Advisors are not just guides but also sources of encouragement, helping students overcome difficulties, build self-confidence, and remain determined to achieve their personal goals.

Eighth, adapting to the credit-based training system. In a credit-based education system, academic advisors guide students in navigating course registration, optimizing study plans, and managing graduation requirements. This role requires advisors to have a deep understanding of the curriculum and stay updated on changes to provide effective support to students.

3. Challenges and limitations in academic advising in higher education today

First, workload overload for academic advisors. Many universities assign a large number of students to a single academic advisor, making it difficult to monitor and provide timely support to each individual. At *Đông Tháp University*, for example, an advisor may be responsible for managing 50 to 100 students, which hinders the ability to ensure

quality advising and support [2].

Second, lack of skills and professional training for advisors. Many lecturers assigned to academic advising roles are not adequately equipped with counseling, student management, or problem-solving skills. This affects the effectiveness of their support for students in learning and personal development. The lack of specialized training for advisors limits their ability to provide effective assistance [4].

Third, insufficient tools and support systems. Many universities lack effective student information management systems, making it challenging for advisors to track academic progress and identify student issues early. The absence of support tools such as management software or updated databases reduces the efficiency of academic advising.

Fourth, inadequate awareness of the role of academic advisors. Both students and institutions sometimes fail to recognize the importance of academic advisors. Students may feel hesitant or unsure of how to approach their advisors when encountering difficulties, while institutions may not provide adequate resources or opportunities for advisors to fulfill their roles effectively.

Fifth, lack of coordination among departments within the institution. Effective academic advising requires close collaboration between departments such as academic affairs, student services, and specialized faculties. However, insufficient communication and information-sharing among these departments can lead to fragmented and inefficient support for students.

4. Proposed Solutions

First, reduce workload and allocate a reasonable number of students per academic advisor. One major issue is the excessive number of students assigned to each academic advisor, making it difficult to provide timely and effective individual support. To address this, universities should adjust the student-to-advisor ratio to a more reasonable level, with each advisor handling 20-30 students, depending on the institution's and academic discipline's characteristics. Additionally, building a support team of academic assistants or specialized staff can help alleviate administrative tasks. This allows academic advisors to focus on core responsibilities such as academic counseling, career orientation, and personalized support for students. This adjustment not only enhances the quality of advising but also ensures that students receive adequate attention from

their institutions.

Second, provide training and capacity building for academic advisors. Another limitation is that many advisors lack comprehensive training in counseling, student management, and problem-solving skills. To address this, universities should organize regular training programs for advisors, focusing on skills such as academic counseling, student progress management, and psychological support. Advisors should also be updated on curriculum changes, credit requirements, and institutional policies to offer accurate and effective guidance. Furthermore, universities could create forums for advisors to share experiences and learn from successful advising models both domestically and internationally. This not only enhances skills but also fosters a supportive network among advisors.

Third, integrate technology and tools to support academic advising. The lack of tools is a significant barrier that makes it challenging for advisors to monitor student progress and manage student information. To address this, universities should invest in modern learning management systems (LMS). These systems enable advisors to easily and quickly track students' academic performance, grades, and personal issues. Additionally, institutions could develop online advising platforms to facilitate communication between advisors and students. For example, students could schedule meetings or receive feedback through these platforms without delays. Building a smart database that integrates all student information into a centralized system would also provide advisors with the necessary data to deliver accurate and prompt guidance.

Fourth, raise awareness and cultivate a culture of academic advising. Another critical issue is that both students and institutions often underestimate the role of academic advisors. This can make students hesitant or unaware of how to approach advisors when they face challenges. To address this, universities should organize orientation sessions at the beginning of the academic term to help students understand the role of academic advisors and encourage them to seek support when needed. At the same time, university leaders and management departments should recognize the importance of academic advising in improving education quality. Policies should be implemented to encourage and support advisors, such as performance-based rewards or reducing unnecessary administrative tasks.

Fifth, promote scientific research initiatives among students. A weakness in current advising practices is that advisors do not sufficiently encourage students to engage in scientific research activities. To address this, advisors should actively guide students in developing research proposals and selecting topics aligned with their abilities and interests. Universities can facilitate this by organizing workshops, research fairs, or innovation competitions to motivate student participation. Advisors should also help students access resources, learn research methodologies, and connect with specialized faculty or research groups [5]. These efforts not only enhance critical thinking and creativity but also prepare students with essential skills for entering the workforce.

5. Conclusion

This article has discussed the vital role of academic advisors in higher education, focusing on academic support, career guidance, soft skills development, and promoting scientific research. It also examined the current state of academic advising in Vietnam, highlighting challenges such as advisor workload, insufficient professional training, limited resources, and low awareness. Solutions were proposed, including specialized training, technology integration, workload reduction, and cultivating a university-wide advising culture. Academic advisors are crucial in shaping high-quality human resources and improving education quality.

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