

Criterion IX.C

There shall be available a clearly explained and accessible academic advising system for students, as well as readily available career and placement advice.

Expected Documentation

1. Description of the advising and counseling services, including sample orientation materials such as student handbooks.
2. Information about student satisfaction with advising and counseling services.
3. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.

Criterion IX.C – Student Advising and Counseling

1. Advising and Counseling Services

The student's faculty academic advisor plays a key role in assisting the student through the academic program. The advisor works with the student in developing and approving his/her course of study in a program proposal. For the MPH student, the advisor assists the student in finding his/her field placement and most often serves as the primary reviewer of the essay. For the other degree programs, in addition to the above assistance, the advisor assists the student in forming his/her thesis or dissertation committee and the preliminary examination committee (where required). In many cases, the faculty academic advisor serves as the research advisor and chairs these committees.

All students also are able to obtain assistance from their respective division's academic coordinator in addition to the dean's office of student academic services. The division faculty use advising materials provided by the dean's office of student academic services to guide in the advising process. The school's Student Handbook (see Appendix IX.C.1.1) is an excellent resource to guide the student through his/her degree program. The community health sciences division prepares its own student handbook (see Appendix IX.C.1.2) annually and distributes it to new students during the fall orientation. Self-help tips to facilitate the students' progress through the academic program are included also. All divisions provide specific program materials at orientation that clearly outline the division and schoolwide requirements for each degree program.

The school, through funding from HCOP, provides study review sessions for some of the core courses, in particular Epidemiology and Biostatistics. These sessions supplement the regular course instructional support.

If specialized counseling needs are identified for a student, there are several resources available. First, a student can meet with his/her faculty advisor or division director. In many cases the student will be referred to the associate dean for student affairs, who then advises students and faculty of the campus services that may be appropriate to the given situation. Students can use all of the counseling services available throughout the university. This includes the Academic Center for Excellence, which provides courses, workshops, academic advising and counseling to help students improve their academic performance. Additionally, there is the University Counseling Service, which provides staff psychologists who are experts in either clinical or counseling psychology and academic learning skills. Other services available to the student include the office of disability services and the Student Health Service.

Career placement services are available at the campus level in the career placement office. Multiple services are available, including employment counseling, on-campus interviewing, employment listings and a career resource center. The SPH office of career placement and counseling was disbanded in 1993.

2. Student Satisfaction With Services

The Accreditation Evaluation Survey of Students (see Appendix IX.C.2.1) included four questions regarding student satisfaction with advising (Questions 9, 10, 11 and 12). The questions ascertained information regarding the number of times the student met with the

advisor, the accessibility of that advisor to the student, and specific needs the student had with respect to his/her interactions with that advisor. As the results of the survey indicate (see Appendix IX.C.2.2), about 90% of the students met more than once with the advisor (doctoral students met more frequently with their advisors than did master's students) and students rated accessibility of their advisor as high (4.2 out of 5.0). Table 6 of Appendix IX.C.2.2 indicates that students' ratings of their academic advisor were positive on almost all of the aspects measured. The lowest score (3.6 out of 5.0) was for applying for awards. The Accreditation Survey of Alumni (see Appendix IX.C.2.3) included questions on satisfaction with advising (Questions 7, 8, 9 and 10) that mirrored the questions asked in the student survey. As the results of the survey indicate (see Appendix IX.C.2.2), all alumni met more than once with their advisors (see page 7 of survey results). Alumni in doctoral programs met more frequently with their advisors than did master's alumni (approximately 90% of alumni in doctoral programs met with their advisors five times or more, compared with approximately 60% of alumni in master's programs). As was true with current students, alumni rated accessibility of their advisor as high (4.1 out of 5.0). Table 24 of Appendix IX.C.2.2 indicates that alumni ratings of their academic advisor were positive on almost all of the aspects measured. The lowest scores (3.7 out of 5.0) were for identifying award opportunities, applying for awards, and preparing to publish their work.

As of the fall 1998 term (as indicated in the response to Criterion VIII.B.4), students who are filing an Intent to Graduate Form also will complete the Student Evaluation of Academic Advising (all students) and the Student Evaluation of Research Advising (MS, PhD and DrPH students) (see Appendix VIII.B.4). These forms will be distributed to the division directors and once the student has graduated will be shared with the faculty member. An evaluation of faculty advising is part of the review of faculty performance and the advising evaluation documents become part of the faculty teaching portfolio.

Finally, another opportunity for the student to evaluate the advising received while a matriculant is at the exit interview. As of the writing of this self-study report, the exit interview is undergoing revision. Analysis of the open-ended responses from 215 exit interviews conducted over the last three years showed that approximately 80% of students had a very favorable opinion of their academic advisors. For students who viewed advising as "acceptable but could have been better" (7%), the chief complaint was accessibility. However, even among students who complained about accessibility, comments such as "gave excellent advice when available but very difficult to reach" were evident. Fourteen percent of the responses about advising indicated that the academic advising they had received was unacceptable. In order to improve faculty advising, the dean's office developed, in fall 1996, "Advising Checklists" for the academic advisor to use (see Appendix IX.C.2.4).

The Accreditation Evaluation Survey of Students (see Appendix IX.C.2.1) included questionnaire items on career counseling (Questions 37 a and b). These questions were introduced by the statement "The following is a list of sources from whom you may have sought help with career counseling while you were a student at SPH. For each one, first please indicate if you asked about career counseling from that source. Second, for each one to whom you asked about career counseling, please indicate how helpful the source was to you." Results indicate that students were very positive regarding the helpfulness of career counseling sources. Students also reported receiving helpful counseling from a variety of sources (see Table 18 in Appendix IX.C.2.2). The alumni survey ascertained comparable information regarding career counseling (Questions 17 a and b in Appendix IX.C.2.3).

Results of the analysis of this information show that the alumni ratings of the helpfulness of career counseling services were moderately positive (Table 35 in Appendix IX.C.2.2). As was true for students, alumni reported receiving helpful career counseling from a variety of sources. Both students and alumni were least positive about the helpfulness of the dean's office in career counseling. This may indicate the impact of the 1993 decision (based primarily on lack of resources and secondarily on the belief that a division-specific approach to career counseling and job placement might be more appropriate) to disband the SPH office of career placement and counseling. As part of the dean's office reorganization and the evaluation of that reorganization, the Administrative Council is reconsidering whether the dean's office should provide a centralized component of career counseling and job placement. It is noteworthy, however, that we do provide job postings online through our internal listserv system as well as through a databank in the Reference Center. Additionally, alumni networking has increased substantially in the last few years and alumni are quite active in job and practicum placement for our students.

3. Assessment

The school has placed emphasis on the improvement of academic advising over the last few years. The development of the advising checklists and the student evaluation of advising forms are evidence of this. Decentralized career counseling and job placement is offered at SPH and centralized career counseling and job placement is offered at the campus level. This criterion is met.

