Retention, Grade Point Average & Client Satisfaction of Professionally Counseled Freshmen & Peer Counseled Freshmen

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1986
RETENTION, GRADE POINT AVERAGE, 
AND CLIENT SATISFACTION OF PROFESSIONALLY COUNSELED 
FRESHMEN AND PEER COUNSELED FRESHMEN 

A Thesis 
Presented to 
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Western Kentucky University 
Bowling Green, Kentucky 

In Partial Fulfillment 
of the Requirements for the Degree 
Master of Arts 

by 
Anne Coop Murray 
July, 1986
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF RETENTION, GRADE POINT AVERAGE, AND CLIENT SATISFACTION OF PROFESSIONALLY COUNSELED FRESHMEN AND PEER COUNSELED FRESHMEN

Anne C. Murray  July, 1986  54 pages
Directed by: Randall Capps, Larry Caillouet, and Larry Winn
Department of Communication and Theatre  Western Kentucky University

Samples from two populations, entering freshmen at Western Kentucky University who were either peer counseled/advised or professionally counseled/advised, were compared on three variables: (1) retention rate as sophomores, (2) freshman grade point averages earned, and (3) client satisfaction with counseling/advisement services.

The variance between the means of the two freshmen groups was analyzed using a two tailed t test. There was no significant difference between groups in retention or grade point average. There was, however, significant difference in client satisfaction between the peer counseled/advised freshmen and the professionally counseled/advised freshmen. Freshmen receiving peer counseling/advisement rated their helpers at a higher level of effectiveness than did the professionally counseled/advised group of freshmen.
Student Attrition and Communication

University Student Attrition

University officials across the country are engaged in battle with a common opponent: student attrition. Nationally, only 58% of entering college freshmen persist to graduation (Beal and Noel, 1980). The most dramatic loss of students occurs between the freshman and the sophomore year. The attrition percentage for freshmen ranges from a low of 10% for highly selective private schools to a high of 48% for open admissions institutions (Beal and Noel, 1980).

In addition to the enrollment problem posed by attrition, the number of high school graduates available for college admission is shrinking. The 18-year-old population in the United States is projected to drop from 4,200,000 in 1980 to 3,400,000 in 1990 (Frances, 1980), a 19% decline over a ten year period.

The loss of college freshmen on both the front end and the back end has forced universities to consider the importance of student retention. Unless alternative pools from which to draw students are found, decreased enrollment will be accompanied by decreased financial resources. Current
state funding formulas for public colleges and universities are enrollment driven. Additionally, both public and private institutions would also lose that percentage of income which is derived from tuition and other fees.

Davis (1962) estimated the average cost per student lost to the institution. He found that, on the average, recruiting, screening, accepting, orienting, advising, registering, and beginning the college experience cost over $500 per student. In addition, each student loss (at that time) incurred a net tuition income loss of another $500. Therefore, the cost of "losing" a student was $1,000 each almost twenty-five years ago.

At Western Kentucky University the number of non-returning freshmen who would have been sophomores for the year 1985-86 "cost" the university $344,000 in lost tuition alone (Murray, 1985). In addition to this obvious cost, the university suffered a loss of $1,680,000 from state appropriations, which are based on numbers of students enrolled full time at the institution (Cook, 1985). Hidden costs associated with food service, housing, the bookstore, laundry, and other sources of income would increase this figure considerably. This figure does not include the one time start-up fee mentioned by Davis, nor does it include the "psychological" costs to the institution.

When students become dropouts from an institution of higher education, they often experience negative feelings or ambivalence toward the institution. They may perceive themselves as victims of a hostile, unyielding environment, or they may simply view themselves as unsuccessful, as losers. Whether or not they made a prudent choice in terms of matching their needs to the reality of the institutional
experience appears unimportant. When former students view the institution negatively, they tend to discourage others from making the same choice. Thus, retention of students directly affects recruitment of students.

Students and employers affiliated with the institution are also adversely affected by declining enrollment. They tend to view a decline in incoming or returning students as a negative factor for the institutional image. Conversely, increasing enrollments are publicized and discussed with pride, as if one's own institutional preference is being validated.

Even popular magazines are extolling the buyer’s market in college recruitment. A November article in *Glamour* (Hechinger, 1985) reports that some colleges are spending up to $3,000 for every freshman recruited. One school, Knox College, is personalizing recruitment communications by sending a five minute audiotape of students discussing the merits of the school to prospective students. The recording is called, appropriately, the Knox Box.

**Factors in Student Retention**

Once admitted, the student faces many decisions, performance expectations, and personal adjustments. The performance expectation most visible is the grade point average earned. Before publication of student retention studies, most faculty and administrators assumed that students who became dropouts were simply unable to make the grade academically. Astin (1975) studied over 100,000 students nationwide and reported the following findings: (1) Academic performance is a major factor in college attrition. (2) Practically every student with an average grade
of C- or lower drops out. (3) However, the dropout rate for students with B averages is nearly twice that for students with A averages. (4) Even among students with A or A+ averages, nearly one in five drops out. It appears that high grades are not the only condition for remaining in college.

Higher education retention research (Astin, 1975; Beal and Noel, 1980; Bean, 1980; Cope and Hannah, 1975; Noel, 1978; Pantages and Creedon, 1978; Spady, 1971; Terenzini et. al., 1981; and Tinto, 1975) suggests that institutions must start paying greater attention to student concerns. Freshmen feel there is little concern for them as individuals by those representing the institution. Students complain of encountering bureaucratic red tape and impersonal treatment from faculty and staff. They suffer from loneliness and social isolation. Anderson (1979) tells of the surprising lack of connection to campus life of one of his students, an ex-cheerleader from a large high school.

She remarked that before finding herself through an interpersonal communication course, she was ready to quit school. Having been on campus for a quarter, she was amazed at how disconnected she felt. She experienced difficulty in starting relationships and in maintaining the friendships carried over from high school. It seemed to her that people began to change in college, becoming less interested in each other while emphasizing private goals. They seemed, she said, to take isolation as the normal state of affairs on campus. She felt that her choice was either to conform to the norm of loneliness or to leave.

Anderson emphasized that self-doubt and self-rejection are part of the collegiate culture although they may be obscured by a veneer of poise and sophistication.

Students often need counseling for financial or personal adjustment problems. They need frequent and personalized academic
advisement. Generally, they need to feel a "fit" between themselves and the institution they have chosen to attend (Robinson, 1983).

Beal and Noel (1980) identified the most important positive factors influencing student retention. In priority order, the five include (1) a caring attitude by faculty and staff; (2) high quality teaching; (3) adequate financial aid; (4) student involvement in campus life, and (5) high quality academic advisement.

In their 1980 report, Lenning, Beal, and Sauer recommended six strategies for institutions to improve student retention: (1) improve faculty-student interaction; (2) improve peer interactions; (3) be responsive to student complaints and expressed needs; (4) increase opportunities for on-campus, part-time employment; (5) present a meaningful and accurate picture of the institution; and (6) improve instruction and academic programs.

Institutional Responses to Student Retention

Some institutions are responding to the challenge of freshman retention with innovative and creative plans (Wilson, 1983; Smith, Lippitt, Noel, and Sprandel, 1981; Beal and Noel, 1980). In a study of approximately 1,000 diverse colleges and universities, Beal and Noel reported that 83% claimed to have some action program designed to reduce attrition (1980). The program most commonly used was a variation of improved academic advising. Other important activities include special orientation, exit interviews, special counseling programs, early warning systems for possible academic trouble, and new academic support/learning services.
Problems with Traditional Communication in Universities

Unfortunately, many institutions of higher education persist in communicating policy and procedures to students along traditional lines. They continue to rely on the printed word (catalogs and class schedule bulletins) and charge faculty with the responsibility of academic advisement. At a large regional university a comparison was made of faculty advisor attitudes and department head attitudes toward faculty academic advisement (Owen, 1985). Two revealing discrepancies in perceptions emerged between faculty advisors and their department heads: (1) 43% of the department heads indicated that advising is a consideration in promotion/tenure decisions (a reward); while 81% of the faculty advisors indicated that they receive no reward or recognition for advisement. (2) When asked how important they consider advising of students to be, only 36% of the department heads selected the highest ranking, very important. Sixty-four percent of faculty performing the advisement rated student advisement at the highest level of importance.

Two significant agreements between faculty and department heads emerged from this study: (1) 71% of the department heads and 90% of the faculty advisors agreed that advising was not discussed in the job interview; (2) 93% of the department heads and 92% of the faculty advisors agreed that advisement was not included in the annual performance appraisals. Is it surprising that faculty often advise poorly, reluctantly, or not at all? Faculty who are not rewarded for effective advisement (and few are) become indifferent, inaccessible, and ineffective in their communications with students concerning their academic planning.
In the 1960's, students became increasingly hostile toward their educational institutions. This hostility is described by D'Aprix (1982) in the organizational context, and it is easily transferred to the collegiate scenario. There are two basic changes in society since the last generation. One of these is the increased dependence on large organizations for one's existence and welfare. These institutional organizations are larger and more powerful than the individual. It is only natural that the individual develops suspicions about the organization. The second change is the expectations of the American people for the organization. Today’s college students are better educated, more sophisticated, and more demanding of the institution than their parents before them. They are living in the video age of communication expectations: interactive video, multimedia presentations, and MTV in every residence hall lobby.

**Preferred Communication Sources**

In receiving information from the organization, people prefer delivery from flesh and blood messengers (D'Aprix, 1982). These messengers are "real" and can be asked questions. The great credibility of the grapevine in organizations is that messages are always delivered by someone the recipient knows. University management, fearing filtering or distortion of The Message, avoids entrusting human messengers. Instead, management relies on the edited and polished written word.

One of the most promising delivery systems of student communication is the utilization of paraprofessionals, or peer counselors (Brown, 1977;
Conroy, 1978; Habley, 1979, Layman, 1982). Using peer counselors as retention agents for the institution is a logical outcome of the student development movement. An early champion of student development theory, Arthur Chickering (1971), suggests that the students' most important teacher is another student. He writes:

Friends and reference groups filter and modulate the messages from the larger student culture. They amplify or attenuate the force of curriculum, faculty, pariental rules, and institutional regulations. They can trump the best teacher's ace and stalemate the most thoughtful or agile dean.

Four comprehensive studies of institutional utilization of peer counselors or paraprofessionals appear in the literature (Brown and Zunker, 1966; Zunker, 1975; Ender and Winston, 1984; Salovey and D'Andrea, 1984). These studies illustrate the growing acceptance and reliance on peer counselors by colleges and universities.

Institutional Communication Through Peer Counselors

Institutional Utilization of Peer Counselors

Zunker (1975) structured his survey to allow for comparisons with the survey results of the 1966 Brown and Zunker study. Zunker surveyed a 20 percent stratified random sample of four-year institutions of higher education in this country. Of those 220 institutions responding (87% response rate), 76% of them reported using peer counselors in student personnel functions. While most peer paraprofessionals are used in
residence halls, there are two significant areas of growth: (1) peer academic advising (from 9% in 1963 to 24% in 1974) and (2) peer counseling (from 4% in 1963 to 29% in 1974).

Salovey and D’Andrea (1984) documented peer counseling activities at colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. Their questionnaire, addressed to directors of counseling centers, netted a return response of 78%. They found that 122 of the 156 counseling directors (78%) indicated active peer counseling programs on their campuses. The number of peer counselors per campus ranged from 2 to 450, with the campus average being 107. They also found that on the average campus, approximately one-fourth of the student body makes use of a peer counselor in a typical academic year. On some campuses almost every student deals with a peer counselor. Like Zunker’s (1975), this survey revealed that most (79%) peer counselors are used in the residence hall setting. Sixty-two percent engaged in academic services and 34% provided general psychological counseling. (These percentages reflect frequency of mention and indicate some overlap of function.)

While Salovey and D’Andrea (1984) surveyed directors of campus counseling centers, Ender and Winston (1984) polled chief student affairs administrators. Comparing results from these two studies, it appears that between 72% and 78% of all student affairs divisions in higher education use undergraduate students as paraprofessional counselors. These figures indicate no substantial shift from the 76% figure of the Zunker (1975) study.

The dramatic change since 1975 involves expanded use of paraprofessionals in new and varied settings. By 1984, paraprofessionals in student affairs were utilized in the following areas: residence halls;
orientation; student judiciary; student union activities; counseling centers; career planning/placement; academic advising; religious centers; crisis intervention; financial aid; study skills/tutorials; international student programs; and research and evaluation. Clearly, universities are not only expanding the support given to established peer paraprofessional activities, they are also identifying new areas for expansion of peer helping roles.

Paraprofessionals in student affairs programs are here to stay. Standards have been formulated (Ender and others, 1981) to define minimal expectations of a student paraprofessional program. The Council for Advancement of Standards for the Student Services/Development Programs (CAS) has not endorsed separate standards for paraprofessional programs but has included a statement on the use of paraprofessionals in the general student affairs guidelines. Given that three-fourths of all student affairs divisions utilize paraprofessionals, it seems that separate standards are needed to address the scale of practice and the need for consistency across broad program areas.

Delworth (1974) suggests two conditions that must be met if we are to fully utilize paraprofessionals in the future: (1) the agency or institution must provide genuine options for advancement or education; (2) the professional staff must be willing partners to the paraprofessionals. Threatened professionals who are unsure of their own skills or afraid of new directions may need retraining. Organizational and reward structures may need adjustment so that professionals will feel free to "let in" their paraprofessional colleagues.
Institutional Benefits from Peer Counseling

Why are universities recognizing peer counseling/advising as a legitimate vehicle for the delivery of student services? William Brown, a pioneer in peer counseling development during the sixties, predicted this direction (Brown, 1977):

As universities have grown in size, the problems of communication have tended to impersonalize student-faculty relationships. Consequently, the students themselves are the only readily available and largely unused human resource ... on the typical college campus.

A review of the literature of college student personnel (Brown, 1977; Habley, 1979; Layman, 1982;) reveals numerous and sometimes unexpected reasons for the existence of peer counseling/advising programs. Identified below are six of these reasons:

1. Institutions are seeking to "legitimate" the exchange of information among peers. Peer communication is a "given" in college life. If unstructured, it may be inaccurate, biased, or superficial. If peer counselors are selected, trained, and supervised, they can convey institutional information in an accurate, effective, and systematic way.

2. Paraprofessional counselors/advisors deliver student services economically. Whether the paraprofessionals are paid by salary or academic credit, the institutional resources required will be less than for a comparable effort utilizing professional faculty and staff.

3. Peer counselors/advisors are more available and accessible than professionals. Residence hall programs utilize peer counselors on a 24 hour a day basis. Peer counseling services do not shut down at five o'clock and clients often need services in informal ways and at unofficial
locations.

(4) Delivery of certain services by trained paraprofessionals frees professionals for more demanding or more scholarly endeavors in student development.

(5) While paraprofessionals release faculty and staff time, they also challenge the performance standards of faculty and staff. Peer counselors/advisors, with their empathic orientation to students, deliver services with robust enthusiasm. This enthusiastic performance provides a stimulus for improvement among weary or indifferent faculty/staff advisors and counselors.

(6) Peer counselors themselves benefit in three distinct ways: (a) satisfaction of helping others and providing service to the institution; (b) source of employment, and (c) development of interpersonal skills through experiential learning opportunities.

There are some disadvantages to reliance on peer counselors. Some of these include (1) lack of continuity; (2) need for frequent supervision; (3) recognition of personal limitations by peer counselors; (4) perception by faculty that peer counselors are biased or unqualified; (5) lack of thorough knowledge regarding the institution; and (6) lack of accountability for advising errors or misinformation (Habley, 1979). Aside from continuity and accountability, the disadvantages of utilizing peer counselors can be controlled with proper selection, training, supervision, and evaluation. It appears that the advantages of utilizing peer counselors to deliver student services far outweigh any disadvantages.
Effectiveness of Paraprofessional Counseling

In spite of the institutional incentives already mentioned, there is a critical issue that must be scrutinized. Is peer counseling or advising effective? Some answers to the general question of paraprofessional versus professional effectiveness emerged in the psychology journals as early as 1968 (Carkhuff, 1968).

Carkhuff (1968) described three findings which support the effectiveness of the lay counselor: (1) Lay persons effected significant changes in hospitalized neuropsychiatric patients, outpatient neuropsychiatric patients, situationally distressed normals, and children; (2) Constructive change occurred in both treatment and control groups of professionally counseled persons (Carkhuff suggests that control group members may have found non-professional counselors); and (3) Lay counselors effected change on all indexes assessed as great as, or even greater (never less) than professional counselors.

Carkhuff lists six distinct abilities that the lay counselor brings to treatment: (1) to enter the milieu of the distressed; (2) to establish peer-like relationships with the needy; (3) to take an active part in the client's total life situation; (4) to empathize more effectively with the client's style of life; (5) to teach the client, from the client's frame of reference, more successful actions; (6) to provide clients with a more effective transition to more effective levels of functioning within the social system. These same abilities describing the psychological or therapeutic setting are apparent in the successful campus peer counseling relationship.
In 1979, Durlak published his analysis of comparative effectiveness of paraprofessional and professional helpers based on forty-two studies. He judged the experimental quality of the studies to be adequate for his purpose. He found that the results reported were consistent regardless of the research sophistication of the study. He further discovered that seven of the forty-two studies contained biases against paraprofessional treatment. Of the 42 studies examined, 15 utilized college students as the paraprofessionals. Durlak’s findings indicated in every case but two that paraprofessionals achieved clinical outcomes equal to or significantly better than those obtained by professionals. Results from 12 of the 42 studies significantly favored the paraprofessionals.

Durlak speculates on reasons for effectiveness of the paraprofessional. Perhaps the paraprofessional uses natural helping skills that are part of the interpersonal style. Maybe paraprofessionals naturally adopt intervention techniques used by professionals. Paraprofessionals are consistently rated higher than professionals in empathy, warmth, and genuineness. The level of interest and enthusiasm of paraprofessionals is higher than that of the professional.

The most plausible explanation offered by Durlak suggests that activities involving standardized and systematic treatment programs supervised by professionals allow the paraprofessionals to be at their best. This premise stimulates speculation that professionals have carefully selected those situations where paraprofessional skills can best be utilized. The professional is, in effect, programming the paraprofessional for success. The professional, as a result of training and expectations, may be forced to work "where angels fear to tread."
Nietzel and Fisher (1981) challenge Durlak’s conclusions regarding paraprofessional effectiveness. They question the assumption that "professional training has presumably bleached ... spontaneity, savvy, and earthiness ... from its initiates." Durlak’s study is criticized for problems in interval validity, questionable designation of professional/paraprofessional status, and his interpretation of the null hypothesis. According to the authors, Durlak implied that failure to reject the null hypothesis is tantamount to its affirmation.

After taking into account "problems of internal validity, unsatisfactory designation of professional/paraprofessional status, and inadequately evaluated or reported outcomes," Nietzel and Fisher eliminated all but five of Durlak’s forty-two studies. Of the five studies accepted by Nietzel and Fisher, two favored effectiveness of paraprofessionals while three showed no significant difference.

Durlak (1981) in his reply to Nietzel and Fisher emphasizes that the three researchers are in substantial agreement regarding the conclusion that is supported by comparative research. The results of his research have failed to demonstrate significant differences in the outcomes obtained by paraprofessionals and professionals.

Durlak defends his definition of certain professionals being classified as nonprofessionals in terms of mental health. His definition (and the customary mental health definition) of para-professionals in persons who have not received postbaccalaureate formal clinical training in professional programs of psychology, psychiatry, social work, or psychiatric nursing.

In terms of internal validity, Durlak challenges the four point scheme of criteria proposed by Nietzel and Fisher. Durlak asserts that rigid adherence to a four point internal validity criteria may serve to
compromise the external validity of a particular study.

When opposing authors reach similar conclusions, such conclusions are particularly meaningful. Evidence is lacking that professional training, education, and experience account for much of the variance in clinical outcomes of these studies.

Effectiveness of Campus Peer Counselors

While evidence from the psychology studies suggests that paraprofessionals are as effective as professionals, it is important to examine studies of paraprofessional effectiveness on the college campus. Studies comparing peer counselor effectiveness with that of professional counselors on the college campus are limited. The earliest and most critically acclaimed were Brown's studies of peer academic advising/tutoring beginning in the sixties (Brown, 1965; Zunker and Brown, 1966; Brown, Zunker, and Maslom, 1971). These studies utilized random selection, experimental versus control groups, and matched demographics between professionally and para-professionally counseled subjects. Findings from the Brown studies include the following:

(1) Professional and paraprofessional counselors did not differ significantly in their ability to communicate study skills information.

(2) Student counseled freshmen evaluated the counseling program significantly higher than did professionally counseled freshmen.

(3) Female freshmen advised by peers made significantly better use of information while there was no significant difference in knowledge use of males whether counseled by a professional or a peer.

(4) Student counseled freshmen retained significantly more information communicated about topics other than study skills.
(5) Combining male and female advisees, a significant improvement in grade point average and semester hours earned is obtained in favor of student to student counseling.

Several researchers (Upcraft, 1971; Murry, 1972; C. Brown and Myers, 1975; McKinney and Hartwig, 1981; and Rabiecki and Brabeck, 1985) have studied effectiveness of peer academic advisors on college campuses. Upcraft's work (1971) involved evaluation of peer advisement by faculty, freshmen, and peer advisors. Freshmen receiving advisement from peers indicated high levels of satisfaction with this help. They also indicated a rank order of most preferred help from available resources: other students, 91.7%; parents, 75.8%; peer advisors, 75.3%; residence hall assistants, 71.7%; faculty, 63.3%; counseling services, 19.1%; and other. It is interesting to note that three of the top four preferred sources of help are peers. The fourth, parents, are more preferred than college faculty or official campus counseling services. Upcraft also found agreement between faculty and peer advisors supporting the effectiveness of peer advising. In essence, Upcraft's study challenged the traditional notion that faculty or professional advisors must carry on academic advisement. His study indicates that students, properly trained and supervised, can effectively supervise other students.

Two studies which compare effectiveness of peer advising with faculty advising are C. Brown and Myers (1975) and Murry (1972). The results of these two studies follow:

(1) Neither study found any difference in grade point average or semester hours completed between peer advised or faculty advised freshmen. This result conflicts with earlier findings of Brown (1965, 1966, 1971). This difference may be attributed to the structure of the advising
activities. Brown utilized study skills teaching as part of his peer advising activities while C. Brown and Myers (1975) and Murry (1972) did not.

(2) Although C. Brown and Myers did not find significant grade point differences, they did discover a lowered student attrition rate in favor of peer advised freshmen. Professionally advised freshmen had a drop out rate of 11.6% while peer advised freshmen had a dropout rate of 5.2% (p<.05).

(3) Both C. Brown and Myers and Murry found that students responded more favorably to peer advisors than to faculty advisors. Also, the level of advisee satisfaction was higher for peer advised freshmen than for professionally advised freshmen.

(4) Both studies found that peer advisors spent significantly more time in advising contacts than did professional advisors.

(5) Both C. Brown and Myers and Murry found peer advisement effective in providing help to students making the transition to college. Murry (1972) writes:

The overall results of the study suggest that the level of competence needed for advising is not beyond the capacity of most upper division students. Given the minimal training and supervision provided to this largely unselected group of seniors, advising outcomes appear to be at least equal, and frequently superior, to those for faculty advisors (p. 566).

Recent studies, such as McKinney and Hartwig (1981) have demonstrated that students place significantly more trust in peers than faculty advisors in terms of accuracy of information communicated. Students in this study found peer advising preferable to faculty advising in part because removing faculty-student interaction removed the intimidation factor inherent in the superior/subordinate relationship.
Rabiecki and Brabeck (1985) surveyed 146 freshmen receiving peer advisement. In terms of student satisfaction, they all expressed positive responses. Ninety-two per cent of these freshmen reported favorably on assistance in adjusting to campus life and 91% reported a decrease in their need to seek other campus services. Although these freshmen reported satisfaction with faculty help in academic and career related issues, they rated peer advisement as being more helpful in social and personal adjustment areas.

Other campus studies (Cook et. al., 1984; Salovey and D’Andrea, 1984) have documented student preference for peer counseling for specific kinds of problems. Salovey and D’Andrea (1984) found that academic difficulties were most often mentioned to peer counselors, with friendship relationships ranking a close second. In third and fourth place were romantic relationships and anxieties about career/future. In fifth place was the problem of depression, a surprisingly common occurrence on the college campus. Students typically did not present more serious or sensitive problem areas like suicide or sexual dysfunction to peer counselors.

Cook et. al. (1984) presented students with 23 problem areas and asked the respondents to choose the preferred source of help from among the following categories: (1) themselves; (2) a friend or relative; (3) a trained peer; (4) a trained counselor; (5) a group of others with similar problems; (6) a class or a workshop; or (7) a tape. Overall, students preferred to rely on themselves to solve problems. They preferred the help of friends and relatives second. They favored self-help for problems of friendship, self-control, and physical well-being. They favored friends and relatives for help with problems of beliefs and values, life changes, and career choices. Counselors
represented the third most preferred source of help, but the most preferred for career choices. The authors found only one area (career choice) where trained peer counselors were perceived as helpful.

It is interesting to note, however, that of the fourteen problems reported in the study, friend-relative emerged as the most preferred source of help in six areas, self-help emerged as most preferred in seven areas, and counselor help was chosen first in only one area. While the university in the study is described only as urban, it would appear that these preferred sources of help might have included trained peer counselors if the campus were largely residential or if it were less urban. The study did not describe the extent of the peer counseling services available to students. The important observation is the tendency to prefer help from a friend or relative before seeking professional counseling services.

Freshman client preferences for counselors were studied by Getz and Miles (1978). Within the four counselor types studied, (male professional, female professional, male paraprofessional, female paraprofessional) there was strong preference (p<.01) for same sex counselors. Preference for professional counselors compared with the paraprofessional counselors was expressed by both males and females. This finding does not support other research in the counseling field and suggests that while students sometimes seek help from friends similar in age and experience, they may prefer knowledge and expertise above shared experiences.

In examining problem types, Getz and Miles (1978) found that students' preferences for counselors were influenced by the type of problem they presented. As in the Cook et. al. study (1984), this study
includes documentation of the preference for professional counselors in the area of vocational choice. There was a slight preference for peer counselors in the area of adjustment to self and others, while there was a strong preference for peer counselors with drug related concerns.

Further evidence of peer counseling effectiveness was documented through the study of social-anxiety management groups on campus (Barrow and Hetherington, 1981). Groups of college students were led by professional counselors and trained peer counselors. There were no significant differences \((p<.05)\) between outcomes of the two groups. Further, there were no major differences in rates of participation and attrition.

In an attempt to isolate factors related to paraprofessional effectiveness, Creaser and Carselelo (1979) compared freshman responses to professional and paraprofessional early career planning counseling sessions. The paraprofessionals earned a significantly higher overall rating than the professionals. The paraprofessionals were rated as more sensitive to client needs. There was no significance in ratings according to sex of client and counselor.

The authors suggest that the common experience of being a student caused the higher ratings for paraprofessionals on sensitivity to client needs. Professional counselors may seem "removed" from the collegiate experience by time and freshmen may perceive them as less sensitive to concerns about the college experience that is just beginning for them.

William Brown’s special interest in the academic setting (1974) led him to offer this plausible explanation for peer effectiveness in higher education settings. Selection criteria for paraprofessionals includes empathy, warmth, sensitivity in interpersonal relations, high self-confidence, high self-regard, and the ability to accept people with
values different from their own. In contrast, professional selection is dominated by highly intellective indexes, primarily the grade point average and the score on the Graduate Record Examination. The two approaches to selection have one major difference. Paraprofessional training programs select psychologically healthy persons, while professional training programs select intellects who may or may not function effectively interpersonally.

In summarizing research on paraprofessional effectiveness, William Brown (1974) laments the lack of well controlled studies in the area. However, he states, "...the number and variety of studies reported provide compelling evidence as to the effectiveness of paraprofessional counseling."

Research Question

While studies document paraprofessional effectiveness in academic advising and in counseling programs, few studies deal with programs that combine the two functions and utilize peers as combination academic advisors/personal counselors. Given the mixed preferences of college student clients for professional versus paraprofessional advisement/counseling, what outcomes might one find if college freshmen who are professionally advised/counseled are compared with college freshmen who are peer advised/counseled within the same program?
Given a program of academic advisement/personal counseling staffed by professionals and peers, one could compare differences in outcomes for each freshman population according to the following three measures: (1) retention rate of freshmen; (2) grade point averages earned by freshmen; and (3) client satisfaction of freshmen.
CHAPTER TWO
PROCEDURES

Definitions

Freshman Assistance

Assignment of mentors to entering freshmen began at Western Kentucky University in the fall semester of 1979. These mentors, either professional student affairs staff or upperclass peers, provided academic advisement and personal counseling on an individual basis to freshmen assigned to them.

The objectives of Freshman Assistance were dual: (1) to increase retention of freshmen at the university and (2) to provide the perception of caring for the freshman on the part of the university.

In order to reach these objectives, five communication action strategies were implemented: (1) intrusive counseling; (2) taking the service to the students where they live; (3) initiating conferences with freshmen one to one; (4) providing continuity of communication throughout the freshman year; and (5) offering a comprehensive package of services based on knowledge of student development.
The first strategy, intrusive counseling, involved initiating contact with the freshman to discuss personal/academic adjustment. In an experiment in 1982 on the Austin campus of the University of Texas, a speech teacher and a student affairs administrator collaborated to place unsolicited telephone calls to freshmen (Ragle and Krone, 1985). Peer counselors were trained in telephone interview skills and contacted first semester freshmen to discuss areas of concern to new students. Follow-up mailings verified that most of the freshmen (N= 70%) perceived the call as helpful and not as an intrusion. In addition, 68% of the freshmen reported that the call made the university seem less impersonal.

The second strategy, meeting with the students "on their turf" was designed to alleviate the anxiety that many freshmen experience in being "called in" to an administrator's office. In addition to the safe and relaxed atmosphere of the residence hall, the student's artifacts (the bulletin board, photographs, books, decorations, clothing, etc.) were studied for nonverbal clues to the personality.

The third strategy, meeting one to one, was necessary for dealing with confidential information and for establishing trust. ACT scores, high school grades, activities, roommate adjustments, and current academic performance were all discussed in the private conferences. Being given exclusive attention reinforced the institution's caring message to the student.

Providing continuity of service throughout the freshman year, the
fourth strategy was built into the program through conferences scheduled around academic events. For example, the first conference was held before the last date to withdraw from a semester course with the grade of W. Other important events were deficiency notices, pre-registration conferences, and end of semester conferences.

The comprehensive services offered to the freshmen in the fifth strategy address the total needs of the student. Past Freshman Assistants have found that the A students may experience debilitating homesickness while the F students may need to limit some of their co-curricular options. Most students had questions from time to time requiring information or referral. Occasionally, freshmen related serious problems which required the services of others on campus. If the Freshman Assistance program was limited to addressing only academic concerns it would surely fail.

In 1981 the number of peer counselors in the Freshman Assistance program was expanded through collaboration with academic departments of the university. The psychology department began placing students in Freshman Assistance for academic credit in 1980. By 1983, speech communication, educational leadership, military science, sociology, and social work joined the psychology department in awarding academic credit for practicum experience. In 1984 Ender and Winston (1984) reported that the number of peer counseling programs integrated with the academic curriculum numbered only 22% nationally. Ender and Winston see this symbiotic relationship as valuable in establishing the professional
interests and aptitudes of students; they predict that many more colleges will follow this example of collaboration.

The decision to expand the number of peer counselors in Freshman Assistance was based on logistics and the obvious effectiveness of their work. Pantages and Creedon (1978) forecast the increasing importance of peer counselors in their comprehensive review of studies of college attrition. They found peer group influence to be second only to the personal characteristics of the student in determining college persistence. Peer group influence is the most significant external influence on the college student.

In summarizing studies of student decision making about withdrawal, Pantages and Creedon (1978) identified a predictable pattern of communication common to potential dropouts.

Discussion of the student’s plans take place almost exclusively with the student’s friends and parents. First discussions of the idea were with the student’s friends of the same sex, then with parents, and finally with friends of the opposite sex. Any communication with faculty or college personnel occurred much later in the process, generally when the student began to go through the official steps of withdrawing from the college. By this time the decision has crystallized and very little can be done to change it.

Pantages and Creedon (1978) recommended that colleges shift attention from prediction of attrition to the prevention of attrition. Three of their specific suggestions relate directly to the communication strategies of the Freshman Assistance program. They recommended that universities focus attrition measures primarily on freshmen since they are the students most likely to withdraw. Moving away from one-shot orientation programs and moving toward programs scheduled at critical
points throughout the academic year was a second suggestion. They also emphasized that a successful program should focus on attitudinal and motivational variables that contribute to attrition.

Pascarella (1985) emphasized the importance of peer influence for those who plan student personnel programs. He found that student interaction with peers was significantly and positively associated with student measures of self-concept. Interaction with faculty also had a significant, direct effect on the student self-concept. The potential importance to student development of student social integration with peers and faculty has implications for student affairs. These findings underscore the importance of programs that foster significant student involvement with peers and faculty.

The success of Freshman Assistance in meeting both objectives of student retention and attitude change has been documented in news sources and student affairs publications (Barrett, 1983; Janensch 1983; Wilson 1983; Wood, 1984). Presentations describing Freshman Assistance have been given at national conferences of student personnel associations. "Peer Counselors in Student Retention: Freshman Assistance" was selected in a national competition as one of six Showcase Programs to be featured at the annual convention of the American College Personnel Association in April, 1986 (Caple and Remley, 1986).

In 1979 when the program began at Western Kentucky University, there was no control group for comparison with the experimental group. The treatment condition of caring through Freshman Assistance was offered to
all freshmen in halls. Therefore, the only comparison that can be made is of the attrition rate of all freshmen in halls since 1979. The attrition rate of 42% in 1979 has declined to 30.6% in 1985. The current rate of improvement in retention is 11.4%.

Having documented the significance of peer relationships in program planning in student affairs, it is important to consider the role of communication skills in implementing such programs of peer counseling. University administrators, in order to utilize peer counseling strategies, need to understand the relationship between effective peer counseling and communication skills. D'Andrea and Salovey (1983) identified the three major communication skills that enable peer counselors to assist others as (1) listening, (2) clarifying, and (3) providing information. James W. Lyons, (D'Andrea and Salovey, 1983) Dean of Student Affairs at Stanford University, listed the following as necessary peer counseling interpersonal skills: (1) listening attentively, (2) understanding others, (3) recognizing and dealing with feeling, (4) suspending judgement, (5) sensitivity to nonverbal communication, (6) the ability to paraphrase, and (7) the ability to recognize what is important and relevant in personal dialogue.

These same skills were included in Miller and Eich's (1975) conceptual paradigm of interpersonal and organizational communication training for university paraprofessionals. Their model included interviewing skills, cross-cultural sensitivity, interpersonal and organizational communication competencies, strategies and tactics for conflict resolution, public relations awareness, and human relations practices.
Newton (1974) developed a training model for peer counselors around four dimensions of interpersonal communication: (1) feeling reactivity, (2) empathic understanding, (3) respect, and (4) communicative accuracy. He demonstrated that the three factors which could be measured - empathy, respect, and communication accuracy - improved significantly for the treatment group of paraprofessionals over the control group, which received no training.

The quality of interpersonal relations is associated with the use of specific communication skills. This assumption is supported by Waldo’s research (1984) with college students which found that higher quality peer relationships were associated with lower levels of personal maladjustment. Interpersonal communication, the medium through which relationships are conducted, was linked to the quality of students’ relationships.

**Communication Requirements of Freshman Assistant**

Freshman Assistants (professionals and peers) were required to meet with each freshman assigned to them before the last date to drop a full semester course with a grade of W. In addition, each Freshman Assistant (FA) met with each freshman recieving a deficiency at mid-term to counsel and to provide advisement for advance registration. After all freshmen receiving deficiencies were seen, the FA’s were required to offer advance registration advisement to freshmen who were not deficient. In summary, each FA was expected to meet with each freshman a minimum of two times each semester, fall and spring.
In addition, FA’s were encouraged to maintain frequent and informal communication with their freshmen. Examples of these activities included notes, telephone calls, going to dinner, attending programs and athletic events, studying together, going to campus offices, providing emotional support, and simply listening to problems or concerns. There was no attempt to regulate or measure these informal communication activities.

Professional Freshman Assistants

Durlak’s (1979) definition of professional includes those helping persons with a baccalaureate or higher degree. That criterion was applied to each residence hall director or assistant director employed by Western Kentucky University during the 1984-85 school year (N=24). These 22 staff members having baccalaureate or post baccalaureate degrees comprise the professional counselors/advisors for this study. Demographic information concerning professional Freshman Assistants is listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Position Description</th>
<th>Sex Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.A. Degree</td>
<td>B.A. Degree</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All professional staff except one provided advisement/counseling in same sex buildings. One female served as assistant director of a male hall and provided Freshman Assistance to male freshmen.

Peer Freshman Assistants

Peer counselors/advisors included undergraduate students receiving academic credit for providing Freshman Assistance to freshmen in residence halls during the 1984-85 school year. These peer counselors received interpersonal skills training from supervising faculty during class meetings.

Classification by academic departments follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number of Peer Counselors/Advisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Communication</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of Peer Counselors/Advisors</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All females were assigned to female freshmen. Two males were assigned to female freshmen while the remaining males were assigned to male freshmen.
**Freshman Subjects**

Freshmen are defined as first-time, full-time students living in residence halls at Western Kentucky University (N=1405) during the 1984-85 school year. Freshmen selected for this study numbered 621.

**Assignment of Freshmen**

Residence hall directors randomly assigned freshmen to the peer counselors working in their buildings. Freshmen were assigned to peer counselors living in the same hall for convenience and to provide better opportunity for frequent and informal contacts. Directors assigned freshmen to peer counselors in this study (and other peer counselors) in one of two ways: (1) in alphabetical order, taken from a printout of all freshmen to be assigned; or (2) according to the floor number where freshmen had been assigned by the Housing Office. In both cases, freshmen were assigned before they arrived on campus. There was no attempt to control for ACT scores or high school GPA's.

The hall directors assigned freshmen to both themselves and their assistants in the same manner as they assigned freshmen to peer counselors. The mean number of freshmen carried by peer counselors was 13 freshmen. A total of 18 peer counselors were assigned 286 freshmen.

Professional staff carried between 10 and 23 freshmen. Most professional staff (N=16) carried 12-18 freshmen. A total of 22 professional staff carried 335 freshmen for a mean number of 15. The total number of freshmen studied are listed by assignment category:
Assignment of Freshmen to Freshman Assistants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman Assistants</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 professional counselors</td>
<td>335 freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 peer counselors</td>
<td>286 freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>40 Freshman Assistants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variables

Retention

Freshmen selected for this study (N=621) were defined as retained if they returned to this institution for the fall semester of the sophomore year. They are defined as dropouts if attrition occurred at any point between fall fee payment of the freshman year (1984) and fall fee payment of the sophomore year (1985).

Grade Point Average

The cumulative grade point average (GPA) combining the first and second semesters of the freshman year 1984-85 served as the measure of the GPA. Those freshmen not enrolled at Western Kentucky University for spring 1985 were not included in the GPA report.

Client Satisfaction

Each freshman in Freshman Assistance who was enrolled spring semester 1985 (N=1265) was mailed an evaluation in April to complete anonymously and return to the Office of Student Affairs. They were asked to rate the
effectiveness of their Freshman Assistant on a 5 point scale. If the freshman could not provide the name of the Freshman Assistant, the evaluation was disregarded.

The rating item instructed the respondent: Please rate the overall effectiveness of your Freshman Assistant using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very ineffective</td>
<td>ineffective</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>effective</td>
<td>very effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These effectiveness ratings served as the measure of freshman client satisfaction with the service provided by the Freshman Assistant. The return rate of evaluations is illustrated below:

Forty percent of the ratings for professional Freshman Assistants were returned. Thirty-nine and 1/10 percent of the peer counselor Freshman Assistant ratings were returned. The overall return rate was 39.6%.

Return Rate of Freshman Assistant Effectiveness Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>Return Rate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional FA ratings received</td>
<td>134 of 335</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer FA ratings received</td>
<td>112 of 286</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ratings received</td>
<td>246 of 621</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statistical Analysis

Summary data for freshmen on the three dependent variables (g.p.a., retention, and effectiveness ratings) were measured for both treatment conditions: professionally counseled freshmen and peer counseled freshmen. A two tailed t test was run to determine any statistically significant difference between the means of the two freshman conditions.
CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Retention

Those professionally counseled freshmen who registered for the fall 1984 semester but failed to return to the university in the fall of 1985 (N=94) account for a 28.5% attrition rate. Peer counseled freshmen who entered fall '84 but failed to return to the university fall '85 (N=75) account for an attrition rate of 26.4%. Although peer counseled freshmen were retained at a rate 2% higher than professionally counseled freshmen, the probability of variance (p<.566) shows no significant difference between the two groups.

Attrition Rate of Freshmen in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Returned to WKU '85</th>
<th>Did Not Return '85</th>
<th>Attrition Percentage</th>
<th>Level of Significance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Professional FA's</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Peer FA's</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two Tailed t test

Both groups were retained at a higher level than the total population of freshmen in Freshman Assistance (30.6%). Both groups were retained at a higher level than the total population of freshmen at WKU (33.0%).
These measures are illustrated as follows:

**Percentage Attrition for Freshmen at WKU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Freshmen</th>
<th>Freshmen in Freshman Assistance</th>
<th>Professionally Counseled Freshmen in Study</th>
<th>Peer Counseled Freshmen in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sex Differences in Retention**

There were no significant differences in retention rate by sex of freshmen (p<.248).

**Grade Point Average**

The following table illustrates the cumulative grade point averages earned by the freshmen in this study receiving grades for fall '84 and spring '85 semesters.

**Freshmen GPA's**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman Condition</th>
<th>Number of Freshmen</th>
<th>1984-85 Mean GPA of Freshmen</th>
<th>Level of Significance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Prof-</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2.4013</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essional FA's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Peer</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>2.3839</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*two tailed t test

Professionally counseled freshmen receiving cumulative GPA's for 1984-85 (N=300) earned a mean GPA of 2.4013. Peer counseled freshmen receiving
cumulative GPA's for 1984-85 (N=264) earned a mean gpa of 2.3839. The variance in mean GPA's earned by professionally counseled freshmen shows no statistical significance.

Sex Differences in GPA

Sex Differences in GPA of Freshmen in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>1984-85 Mean GPA of Freshmen in Study</th>
<th>Level of Significance*</th>
<th>1984-85 Mean GPA of all Freshmen at WKU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Freshmen</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>2.2407</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>2.0635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Freshmen</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>2.4688</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.3967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two tailed t test

Male freshmen in this study (in both treatment conditions) earned a cumulative gpa of 2.2407 for fall '84 and spring '85. Female freshmen in this study (in both treatment conditions) earned a cumulative mean GPA of 2.4688 for fall '84 and spring '85. The probability of variance indicates a level of significance at .001 (p<.001). There is significant difference between gpa's earned by the sexes. This difference is even greater between sexes in the total population of freshmen earning GPA’s for 1984-85.

Client Satisfaction

(Effectiveness Ratings)

On a scale of one to five, with one representing the lowest rating and five representing the highest rating, professionally counseled freshmen (N=134) rated their Freshmen Assistants at a mean score of 3.4925.
Peer counseled freshmen (N=113) rated their Freshmen Assistants at a mean score of 3.8053.

The level of significance (p<.027) indicates statistically significant differences between the mean ratings of the two groups. The peer counseled freshmen rated their Freshman Assistants at a significantly higher level of effectiveness.

Effectiveness Ratings Given by Freshmen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman Condition</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean Effectiveness Ratings</th>
<th>Level of Significance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Professional FA's</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>3.4925</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned to Peer FA's</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.8053</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effectiveness Ratings by Sex of Rater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of Freshmen</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean Rating of FA</th>
<th>Level of Significance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Freshmen</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.3585</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Freshmen</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>3.7113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male freshmen in this study (N=53) rated the effectiveness of their FA's at a mean score of 3.3585 while female freshmen in this study (N=194) rated the effectiveness of their FA's at a mean score of 3.7113. The level of statistical significance of the variance is (p<.046). Female freshmen rated the effectiveness of their Freshman Assistants significantly higher than did male freshmen.
CHAPTER FOUR
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Retention

Peer counseled freshmen were retained at 73.6% (N=209) which is two percentage points better than the professionally counseled freshmen retention rate of 71.5% (N=236). The t test revealed no statistical significance in the differences of the two means. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that find no statistical significance in differences or suggest that differences in the rate of retention between peer counseled and professionally counseled freshmen favor the peer counseling condition. Sex differences in retention are not apparent between peer counseled and professionally counseled freshmen.

When comparing the attrition rates for groups of freshmen, the findings suggest that additional study focus on differences between peer counseled freshmen and the total population of freshmen. Peer counseled freshmen experienced attrition of 26.4% while all freshmen at the university experienced an attrition rate of 33%. The peer counseled attrition rate of 26.4% suggests there might be statistical significance when it is compared with the 30.6% attrition rate of all freshmen in the Freshman Assistance program. The total population of freshmen includes 2/3 residential freshmen in the Freshman Assistance program plus 1/3 off
campus freshmen. These retention statistics support previous research finding a higher retention rate for on campus freshmen. These figures also reinforce the mandatory housing policy in effect on many campuses.

Grade Point Average

The finding of no statistically significant difference in means between the GPA's earned by peer counseled and professionally counseled freshmen supports the work of C. Brown and Myers (1975) and Murry (1972). William Brown's (1965, 1971) studies, finding improved GPA in the peer counseling condition, were based on teaching study skills as well as academic advisement. The peer counselors in this study were not required to teach study skills.

As with the retention variable, further studies should compare the GPA's earned by peer counseled freshmen with GPA's earned by all freshmen. Where the peer counseled freshman mean GPA was 2.3839, the mean GPA for all freshmen was 2.2301.

Sex differences in GPA's earned are pronounced. Females in both treatment conditions earned significantly (p<.001) higher GPA's than males. When examining the mean GPA for all freshmen, one finds the disparity between male freshmen GPA's (mean 2.0635) and female freshmen GPA's (mean 2.3967) even greater.

The sex differences in GPA may be the direct result of Brown's finding (Brown, 1965) that freshman males made less use of knowledge and information presented during advisement than did freshman females. While
females in Brown's study receiving peer advisement made better use of their information than did females receiving professional advisement. Males in both conditions showed no significant difference and apparently didn't utilize advisement well, regardless of the source. The male freshmen at Western Kentucky University consistently scored lower GPA's than female freshmen, both in the Freshman Assistance program and in the overall population.

Client Satisfaction

The expected preference for peer counselors/advisors over professional counselors/advisors was confirmed. The mean effectiveness rating attributed peers was 3.8053, while the mean effectiveness rating ascribed to professionals was 3.4925. The significance of this difference appears to be particularly important in this study because the professional advisors/counselors evidenced effective work with their freshmen in ways that can neither be documented nor measured. Many meaningful relationships grew from their contacts with freshmen. The freshmen themselves rated their professional counselors/advisors at a level of positive perception. They, however, as a group, rated their peer counselors/advisors at a higher level. The level of statistical significance between the two ratings was (p<.027).

There are several factors which may have influenced these ratings. The most important factor is the administrative/disciplinary role of the residence hall director and assistant. Room assignments, privileges, sanctions, and penalties are controlled by these staff members. They frequently are called on to accompany the university police when arrest is a consideration. They may be viewed by some students as inappropriately acting "in loco parentis."
The demographics of the hall staff may serve to distance them psychologically from the students they serve. All professionals in this study live in private apartments in the residence hall. Some are married; some have pets. Both of these privileges are not permitted hall residents in their rooms.

Being available for counseling 24 hours a day exerts pressure for the hall staff and creates high levels of stress. Feeling pressure from above (student affairs) and from below (students), while being fairly powerless to effect change, the residence hall staff experience frustration. It is common to observe the burn-out syndrome in a new staff member before the end of the first semester. It is possible that, while caring deeply for the students, this sense of helplessness is communicated to them consciously or unconsciously. This frustration on the part of the professional may be perceived by the students as sarcasm or cynicism. The students may sense that their problems are much too small to impose on the time of an already burdened professional.

Conversely, there are numerous reasons why peer counselors/advisors may have emerged with high effectiveness ratings. In this study, the most motivated and capable peer counselors were selected while virtually all residence hall professional staff were studied. The peer counselors/advisors were motivated by virtue of enrolling for academic credit for Freshman Assistance. They can be described as capable because each department selected participants based on grades, achievements, behavior, and faculty references.

Numerous benefits were afforded to peer counselors through their weekly class meetings. The five benefits that might have influenced
effectiveness ratings are as follow: (1) clarification of goals, procedures, and function as a Freshman Assistant; (2) mutual reinforcement from class members for prescribed communication strategies; (3) a strong sense of group identity; (4) intellectual stimulation and greater knowledge of self through activities provided by the faculty; and (5) feelings of self-worth and importance.

While the professionals experienced occasional staff development sessions, their multifaceted employment functions prevented their crystallizing an identity as a group of Freshman Assistants. They perceived themselves instead as professional residence hall staff who perform Freshman Assistance as one of their functions.

In summary, it is likely that the peer counselors were seen by their freshmen as voluntary participants; motivated, caring, energetic, action-oriented, accessible, and committed. It also appears likely that the peer counselors saw themselves in exactly the same way.

A significant (p<.046) sex difference appeared between females and males in their ratings of their Freshman Assistants. The mean effectiveness rating given by females, 3.7113, was significantly higher (p<.046) than the 3.3585 rating given by male freshmen. This finding is suggested by the work of Brown (1965) who found that freshman females utilized advisement services more effectively than males. It appears reasonable to assume that females who actively use the advisement/counseling will rate it higher than males who may or may not use it.
Implications for Further Study

If peer counselors/advisors are rated at a higher level of effectiveness than professionals, what are the important variables or characteristics that account for this phenomenon? Would untrained and unsupervised peers be rated the same as the ones in the study? Is the important factor the quality of communication between student and Freshman Assistant? Is the frequency of communication an important variable?

What kinds of training programs would enhance desired outcomes based on the studies suggested above? Perhaps campus peer counseling units across the country could be organized into an ambitious experimental design to test differences in training. What rewards or incentives work best for peer counselors? Should we pay $1 for each face to face visit, $.50 per phone call, and $.25 for each written communique? Should we dismiss this reward system as foolish until we try it?

Is it important to match freshmen with their helping persons? Should we assign freshmen according to certain shared experiences with the helper, such as choice of major, size of hometown, activities, high school, GPA, fraternity, living unit, etc.? Increasing homophily might increase effectiveness.

Implications for Program Planning in Student Affairs

This study and previous literature demonstrated the effectiveness of peer counselors on college campuses. College administrators must now consider more selective use of professional skills and availability. If we are to utilize our professional staff more efficiently, we must use peer skills more comprehensively.
Colleges must take stock of the past, present, and future of peer counseling. The past may reveal the mystery of why peer counselors are not being fully utilized. The present gives us the opportunity to examine more effective use of the peer counselors in action. The future provides the challenge of expanding use of peer counselors in new, creative, and exciting ways.

Implications for Faculty in Higher Education

The effectiveness of peer counseling suggests further development of the curriculum by university faculty in areas offering practicum opportunities for students. Academic areas such as speech communication, psychology, sociology, social work, family living, and leadership development, offer opportunities for initiating or expanding peer counseling activities for academic credit.

Faculty participating in peer counseling courses may find the following benefits for themselves and their departments: (1) rewards of directly impacting student retention (a top priority of most college presidents); (2) status of developing and/or teaching a unique course; (3) status of teaching selected upperclass "superstars"; (4) showcase setting for demonstrating student skills; and (5) intrinsic rewards and motivation associated with the stimulating teaching experience.

While undergraduate faculty are planning peer counseling practicum courses, faculty in student personnel services must plan for curriculum innovation at the graduate level to accommodate the increasing numbers of peer counselors on college campuses. A course dealing with the
utilization and supervision of peer counselors would have relevance for graduate students. Course content could include a review of the literature; utilization of peer counselors presently; selections, training, placement, and supervision of peer counselors; establishing academic credit for peer counseling; providing monetary status or academic incentives for peer counselors; and evaluation of peer counselors and peer counseling programs.

Implications for Institutional Planning

Listed below are some ideas for creative utilization of peer counselors that have been generated by this study and the review of literature. Some institutions may already be engaged in these activities.

"Recruitment and Orientation"

Assign each incoming freshman a peer counselor during the spring of the senior year in high school.
Use telephone contacts between the high school senior and the university peer.
Provide ballgame tickets, free meals, special events, etc. for peer counselors and freshmen during the first few weeks of school.

The early contact with the peer counselor would present the institution in a friendly, personal, easily negotiated posture. The safety needs of the entering freshman would be addressed by the early attachment of the freshman to a significant other, the peer counselor.
The crucial beginning days of the semester would be eased by having someone to eat with, to go and do with, and most importantly, someone to answer all the freshman’s "dumb questions."

"Advisement and Registration"

During registration, peer counselors could provide general information about course descriptions, scheduling, and drop/add procedure.

During the drop/add period, peer counselors could work on the Registrar’s staff as troubleshooters, information providers, and support givers.

Professional faculty and staff will continue to be needed to provide career planning, advisement for degree programs, and course suggestions. Peers can provide routine information regarding institutional policy and scheduling tips.

"Financial Aid"

During Orientation the peer counselor could explain the application process for financial aid, including work opportunities. The peer counselor could meet with the parents to help complete the financial aid application documents and explain the next step.

Using peer counselors to work with parents would result in a savings of professional staff time. This plan could also result in positive reactions from parents as the peer would be perceived as less intimidating than the professional.
*Student Life*

Peer counselors could provide anonymous "hot line" telephone service for student questions/concerns.

Peer counselors as resident assistants should be considered an integral part of the hall staff.

The literature reveals that peer counselors are capable, effective, and available. We also know that freshmen are willing to share their most personal information (intimate problems, consideration of dropping out, etc.) with peer counselors. We must correct our attitudes of referring to resident assistants as "only" students. We must confront the reality of higher wages or better incentives for those peer counselors who are expected to represent the institution around the clock.

Conclusion

The results of this study bear strong implications for universities desiring to improve student life and student retention. Tapping into the peer communication network in a positive, structured manner can deter the negative influence of the rampant grapevine. The institutional messages exchanged among peers can be tempered and personalized in the best interests of the students and the institution.


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