

Impact of Counseling and Educational Plan Services
on Persistence and Grade Point Average
Among New and Returning Students, Beginning Fall 2004

BACKGROUND:

The study was requested by Ms. Pat Koester, VP of Student Services, to evaluate the impact of counseling services on the academic performance of new and returning students. Initially, the study was to compare the performance of students who received counseling services with students who received no counseling services. After the study began, it was found that the vast majority of new and returning students who were directed by a counselor to counseling services received such services. Of 259 new and returning students in Fall 2004 directed to counseling, only 6 did not receive counseling. Students receiving counseling received either counseling services only or counseling together with educational plan assistance.

The study, therefore, compared the academic performance of students receiving: 1) counseling services only, 2) counseling together with educational plan assistance, and 3) no counseling at all.

Two indicators of student academic performance were examined: persistence and grade point average (GPA). As defined in this study, persistence is the number of consecutive terms a student completed with a grade of at least D or CR in at least one class, beginning Fall 2004. GPA is defined as career quality points divided by career hours GPA, as presented in students' grade and schedule records.

Students who received counseling services only generally met with a counselor or advisor to register for classes and to receive signed approval of their current course list.

Students who received counseling services and educational plan assistance met with a counselor or advisor to register for classes, discuss their current course list and receive advice on preparing an educational plan. An educational plan is a list of courses in a particular degree or certificate program, with projected dates by which the student is expected to complete the program. Both the student and counselor or advisor sign the educational plan, and copies are kept by the student and by the counselor or advisor for future reference.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Students fare better academically when they receive some form of counseling services, especially if such services include assistance in preparing an educational plan. Students who received counseling services completed an average of 2.11 consecutive terms, while

those who received counseling and educational plan help averaged 2.69 consecutive terms. Students receiving no counseling completed 2.0 consecutive terms.

Students who received counseling services earned a grade point average of 2.8786, while students who received both counseling and educational plan assistance earned a grade point average of 2.9930. Students receiving no counseling earned a grade point average of 2.8140.

Summary of findings on the impact of counseling on persistence:

Number of new and returning credit students directed to counseling services	259
Less: New and returning credit students directed to counseling services who failed to complete the Fall 2004 term with a grade of D or CR or better in at least one class	-78
New and returning credit students directed to counseling services who completed the Fall 2004 term with a grade of D or CR or better in at least one class	181

Number of students directed to receive counseling who did receive counseling only	116
Number of consecutive terms completed with a grade of D or CR or better in one class	245
Average consecutive semesters per student completed by students directed to receive counseling who received counseling only	2.11

Number of students directed to receive counseling who received counseling and educational plan assistance	59
Number of consecutive terms completed with a grade of D or CR or better in one class	159
Average consecutive semesters per student completed by students who received counseling and educational plan assistance	2.69

Number of students directed to receive counseling who received no counseling services	6
Number of consecutive terms completed with a grade of D or CR or better in one class	12
Average consecutive semesters per student completed by students who received no counseling services	2.00

Summary of findings on the impact of counseling on GPA:

New and returning credit students directed to counseling services who completed the Fall 2004 term with a grade of D or CR or better in at least one class	181
Less: Returning students with course GPA completion prior to Fall 2004	-53
New credit students directed to counseling services who completed the Fall 2004 term with a grade of D or CR or better in at least one class	128

Number of new students directed to receive counseling who did receive counseling only	79
3866 career quality points divided by 1343 career hours GPA	2.8786

Number of new students directed to receive counseling who received counseling and educational plan assistance	45
3400 career quality points divided by 1136 career hours GPA	2.9930

Number of new students directed to receive counseling who received no counseling services	4
121 career quality points divided by 43 career hours GPA	2.8140

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Counselors and advisors should continue to assist students in the preparation of educational plans, as they are currently doing. Moreover, counselors and advisors should encourage students who seek only general counseling and advisement to accept assistance in the preparation of educational plans in order to increase persistence and thereby help bring about the timely achievement of their educational goals.
2. Teaching faculty, while they do not play a direct role in counseling or educational plan assistance, nonetheless can be helpful in enhancing student persistence by encouraging students not only to complete current courses, but to pursue certificate and degree programs and to seek guidance from counselors and advisors in the preparation of educational plans.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Counselors and advisors should examine policies governing the conditions under which students are directed to, or exempted from, counseling. For example, the current Admissions Application form (Revised March 8, 1999), item 25, lists five conditions under which students are exempted from “matriculation,” a term that encompasses counseling and educational plan help, among other services.

Exemptions include previous attendance at another college or university and enrollment for high school credit only. Since the Admissions Application offers no indication as to the quality or timeliness of counseling services a student may have received at a previous institution, it would seem prudent for Palo Verde College counselors and advisors to direct students in this group to counseling services upon their enrollment here.

Furthermore, many students began their career at Palo Verde College by taking courses for high school credit and subsequently enrolled as undergraduates after high school graduation. However, many other students enrolled for high school credit, but chose not to continue at Palo Verde College after graduation. Counselors and advisors should reconsider whether potential undergraduate enrollments might be lost as a result of this exemption.

2. Where feasible, provide educational plan assistance to noncredit students. Because educational plans have been shown to enhance student academic performance among students enrolled in credit programs, it seems reasonable to presume that educational plans would help encourage noncredit students to enroll in credit courses as part of an educational program.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Continue the present research project into future semesters.
2. Evaluate the impact of intervention services, such as tutoring and specialized counseling, on the subsequent academic performance of students placed on academic probation.

METHODOLOGY:

Persistence

As defined in this study, persistence is the number of consecutive terms a student completed with a grade of at least D or CR in at least one class, beginning Fall 2004. This measure of student performance, while potentially influenced by factors unrelated to counseling, is nonetheless a valid indicator of the efficacy of the counseling function. As counseling helps students establish educational goals, persistence measures students' tendency to stay on track to achieve them. The three levels of counseling services examined—counseling services only, counseling together with educational plan assistance, and no counseling—represent three distinct levels of assistance in future planning and goal setting.

Here is the method by which academic terms (i.e., semesters and summer session) were included, or excluded, in the count: Students completing Fall 2004 who subsequently enrolled in Spring 2005 were, for this study, determined to have completed 2 consecutive terms. Students who continued on to complete Summer Session 2005 and Fall 2005 completed 4 consecutive terms. However, students who completed Fall 2004 and Spring 2005, who then skipped Summer 2005 but who completed Fall 2005 were determined to have completed 3 consecutive terms. Students who completed Fall 2004 and who did not complete Spring 2005 term completed 1 term only, regardless of whether they completed a subsequent term. Students failing to complete Fall 2004 were not considered in the study.

The maximum number of consecutive terms a student could achieve within the scope of the study was 4; the minimum was 1.

GPA:

GPA performance is subject to many influences outside the counseling function and therefore may not be as reliable an indicator of the impact of counseling services as persistence. Such influences might include student motivation, ability, varying grading standards among faculty, and others. The inclusion of all new students in this part of the study—representing students with varying levels of motivation and ability who take classes from a various faculty members—offers some usefulness as an indicator of student academic performance vis-à-vis counseling.

GPA was included in the study, moreover, to provide a specific indicator of student grade achievement, particularly in light of the low threshold (grade of D or better) used to measure of student persistence.

SOURCES OF DATA:

Information to calculate persistence was obtained from student grade and class schedule records. Information to examine the types of counseling received was obtained from the management information system registration module

DATA EXCLUDED:

Of the 259 new and returning students who were referred to counseling, 78 were of students who received grades of NC (no credit earned for a credit course) or F, or who dropped or withdrew from their courses, or a combination of these. In this study, persistence is a measure of students who successfully complete one or more subsequent

semesters after completing successfully a first semester; therefore, these records were eliminated from the study.

Of the 181 new and returning students whose records were evaluated for persistence, 53 were returning and 128 were new. In researching student records, it was not feasible to separate pre-Fall 2004 GPA information from GPA information in Fall 2004 and subsequent terms. Because the study was to evaluate the impact of counseling services on student academic performance in Fall 2004 and thereafter, to include GPA information from previous semesters would have produced misleading results. Therefore, in the examination of GPA, the records of the 53 returning students were eliminated from the study, leaving 128 new students whose records were examined.