



Comparative Analysis of Qualitative Academic Advising at the University of Ghana and Ohio University

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ABSTRACT

Students around the globe face challenges during their academic journey which jeopardize their academic, personal, as well as professional success. Some of these challenges may include wrong course registration, parental problems, financial breakdown, career misinformation and lots more. This has necessitated the establishment of academic advising in higher education institutions. In this study, comparative analysis on the influence of academic advising and the best method of its effective handling was conducted between students in University of Ghana and Ohio University. Semi-structured interviews were adopted to dig deep into participants' lives and gather in-depth information about academic advising. The interview schedule was strictly followed, and each interview lasted for 20-30 minutes. The research occurred at the University of Ghana and Ohio University and occurred between July 2023 and September 2023. In analyzing the centrality of student advising comparatively, this study uses Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. The study revealed that academic advising existed at the University of Ghana and Ohio University, but the extent and effectiveness of practice varies between the two.

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Ohio University has a structured advising system unlike the University of Ghana. Also, it was revealed that advisors at the University of Ghana were faculty members and staff of the career center while there were professional advisors at Ohio University who were basically employed to handle student affairs. I concluded that universities should have a centralized office for student advising while each department should establish a committee accessible to all students and that would be responsible for assisting and guiding students throughout their academic journey at the university. Also, the university should also make it mandatory for students to attend advising sessions and more staff members at the Counseling and Career Center should be employed and adequately trained. Nonetheless, the advisor-to-student ratio should be maintained to ensure advisors are not overwhelmed by the number of students they have to advise. In conclusion, majority of the participants asserted that academic advising was beneficial to their academic, professional, and personal lives.

Keywords: Academic advising; university of Ghana; Ohio university; Astin's theory; Tinto's theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students around the globe face challenges during their academic journey such as inability to fund college or university education; family issues; poor grades; psychological issues; and failure to transition and adapt to their post-secondary institutions. These challenges prevent students from reaching academic, personal, as well as professional success. To help alleviate this issue, universities have put measures in place to cater to the varying needs of post-secondary students. One such measure is the presence of academic advisors with the key role of advising and guiding the students to the right path [1]. Advising is a method of teaching that is resourceful, regular and ongoing. Academic advising can be defined as a systematic or committed program in higher education facilities or community colleges to offer guidance and advice to undergraduate students regarding their major and courses [2]. It is integral part of teaching such that the Academic Advisor plays a key role in assisting students learn to become independent thinkers and capable of self-determination through their exploration of the liberal arts. The chief role of a faculty advisor is to assist students in thinking through their undergraduate liberal arts experience and their educational goals so that they may take full advantage of the resources available at their University [3].

Academic advisors have the goal and objective of providing holistic academic-oriented support services to college and university students [4]. The advising relationship develops and changes over the duration of staying on campus, as student needs and concerns evolve. Advisors encourage students to think critically about the benefits of a liberal education. They also assist students in understanding the University's academic regulations as well as the educational

resources available at the university [5]. Advisors have an essential role in directing students to additional advising and mentorship resources from across campus. Academic advisors assist students with course registration, career goals, majors, and any academic-related issue [6]. There are other positive benefits attached to academic advising which indirectly may improve student persistence and retention in tertiary education.

These include (but not limited to) increase utilization of campus resources, increasing students' overall satisfaction with their tertiary experience, facilitating more frequent student-staff contact outside of the classroom and developing educational and career decision-making skills [7]. It has also been found that interaction with a concerned, caring staff member from one's tertiary institution plays a substantial role in student retention and academic achievement by increasing students' engagement, development, and cognitive growth [8]. Different aspects of advising such as advisor empowerment, advisor accountability, student responsibility, student study skills, student self-efficacy, and perceived support have all significantly connected academic advising to student success. Finally, academic advising has also been positively associated with students' sense of satisfaction and development with the university and it can have an impact on all facets of a student's academic experience—ranging from development to practical application of study skills [9].

Higher education facilities should provide students with the essential knowledge in numerous fields and play a vital role in the process of comprehensive development over several aspects of a person's life [10]. Most students enroll with little or no knowledge about

Table 1. Previous studies on academic advising in some universities

Study	Study Area	Findings	Recommendations	Reference
The effect of academic advising on academic performance of university students in Kenyan Universities	Kenya	Academic performance in university is more likely to be affected by other factors other than academic mentorship. Students' need for academic advising varies with the year of study with students being more likely to seek academic advising during their first and second year of study. The need for academic mentorship does not seem to be influenced by gender.	There is need for universities in Kenya to device methods of actively involving as many students in academic advising as possible. Academic advising should be intensified at the time of registration when students are making decisions on subject and career options and in second year when students are stabilizing in their academic and career decisions. Universities should establish comprehensive academic advising programmes. There is need to improve on the student-mentor ratios for effective academic advising. Academic mentorship could be introduced in high school to ensure smooth transition to university education and career life. Further research is necessary in this area to provide more conclusive evidence.	[14]
University academic advising practices as panacea to educational transformation by universities in Cross River State, Nigeria	Nigeria	Academic advising has value when it leads to an improvement in student learning and achievement and when it supports institutional accountability. In spite of individual differences, students share a unifying desire to make sufficient academic progress towards an educational goal. Very often these students encounter barriers in pursuit of these goals.	Managers of institutions should urgently address the need to increase capacity to intervene and ideally engage in academic advising as well strengthen academic advising units so as to assist students with current information about academic programmes, prerequisites, requirements, policies and procedures.	[15]
The relationship between academic advising and student success in Canadian Colleges: A review of the literature	Canada	There is very little research showing the direct effect of academic advising on student success, and that only on rare occasion does this research employ rigorous analytical and design methods. It is also argued that the organization and practice of academic advising in	There is need for more rigorous analytical and design methods to bridge the critical gap in the literature that college administrators need to be more effectively focus on their student support programs.	[16]

Study	Study Area	Findings	Recommendations	Reference
Academic advising problems at Al-Quds University as perceived by students, and its relationship with student's academic performance	Palestine	Canada is still in its infancy. The findings of the study provide support that shows the importance and impact advising problems has on students in general, and their academic achievement in particular. Academic advising emerged as a significant predictor of academic achievement. A lot needs to be done in the area of academic advising in terms of student needs, expectations, and success rather than through the traditional lens of student satisfaction with the process. This can be done through an effective collaboration amongst the university, advisors, and students, which would lead them to a feeling of stability.	Offer enough time for interaction and contact between the student and his academic advisor, and give advisors more authorities and flexibility in dealing with rules and regulations of both electronic and paper academic advising. Concentrate on students as the core of the advising process, and encourage them to exercise more responsibility in the process of academic advising. A need to establish an advanced psycho-educational advising center at the university and activate its activities to offer advising, developmental, and remedial services focusing on the development of the bright and optimist sides of university students' personalities.	[17]
Academic advising and its relation to nursing students' self-efficacy	-	The study revealed (43.5%) of the nursing students were satisfied with academic advising. While, (71.5%) of nursing students having high level of self-efficacy. The prescriptive academic advising mode is the most prevailing mode in the study setting. However, students' satisfaction and self-efficacy are higher with the developmental mode.	Staff development programs are strongly recommended to train academic advisors in the modes of advising, with emphasis on the merits of the developmental mode. Academic advisors should be provided with sufficient time for advising sessions to be able to provide their students with all their academic needs.	[18]
The development of academic advising to enable student success in South Africa	South Africa	International and national research indicates that academic advising plays a vital role in improving student engagement and success by facilitating better coordination and integration of support. Academic advising provides students with relevant information, facilitates their conceptual understanding	Quality advising in a post-Covid blended future needs to be an integration of high-tech and high-touch initiatives; that is, technology can enhance efficiency and the early identification of students in need of support.	[19]

Study	Study Area	Findings	Recommendations	Reference
		of the university, and allows students the opportunity to form a meaningful relationship with the institution through an advisor and by means of various advising initiatives.		
Management of academic advising in higher educational institutions during COVID-19 pandemic	Saudi Arabia	Students need to enhance their communication skills in the English language. This can be achieved by implementing positive interaction methods. Most of the non-English college students consider English as a language for studying courses only. Despite the long time they spend studying their courses in the English language, their aim is limited primarily to passing their courses.	Encourage academic advisors to build a strong relationship with the students. Encourage the academic advisors to provide the students with IAU regulations and bylaws. Clarify the information about courses and their requirements for academic advisors. Clarify the information about graduation requirements for academic advisors.	[20]
The importance of academic advising during COVID-19	-	There is no way students will be successful without the extra assistance of an advisor to help them along their way academically. Noticing how crucial an academic advisor truly is will not only help the student, but it will allow for the academic programs overall to be better. It is so important for the foundation of an academic advising program to be ready and willing to cater to every student they may meet in their journey.	Look through this research and see what other information is missing about the field of academic advising. Research on academic advising should be more accessible to students on the college campus.	[21]
Navigating the path to academic success: The impact of student academic advising at a university of technology	South Africa	The concept of academic advising mentioned above could be a useful intervention in assisting struggling students to navigate their academic paths. However, there is also a challenge associated with an inadequate understanding of the academic advising	Emphasis must be on improving advisors' abilities to ensure they are equipped and competent enough to deal with diverse students to ensure a positive impact on the university.	[22]

Study	Study Area	Findings	Recommendations	Reference
		concept and its importance towards contributing to students' academic success. This challenge is attributed to the limited number of students that attend academic advising. The implication for this is a serious hindrance in enabling the success of academic advising initiatives.		

the major they have chosen as a practical track for their future careers. Some might face some challenges with their peers or their instructors. These are some of the reasons most, if not all, educational facilities provide academic advising. This advising has been so helpful and supportive throughout their period of pursuing their degree program [11]. The idea of Academic advising has advanced over the years by several researchers, some stated that it represents many activities along a prescriptive developmental continuum. This prescriptive development that is accomplished via advising can be described to be directive, informational, and unidirectional [12]. From a different perspective, It was viewed as an international connection between the enrolled students (advisees) and higher education institutions' workers (named advisors). This is in addition to the procedure via which these advisors follow to offer support and guidance to those advisees in numerous aspects like career choices, ambition, personality development, courses and academic path [13]. Table 1 presents previous studies conducted on academic advising in some universities by researchers stating the location, results obtained, conclusion and recommendation.

Students in colleges and universities without the necessary assistance take courses that do not align with their areas of study. Some students also do not get the attention and access to student services such as academic advising and end up dropping out of school. Much has been written on this topic in Western universities [23-27]. However, there has been limited literature and little research done on academic advising in Africa. Also, comparative analysis between Universities on the adopted methodologies of advising and their influence on students' performance is still rare. In this study, comparative analysis of academic advising between University of Ghana and Ohio University was conducted, in terms of its nature and perceptions, to bridge the gap between advising in the U.S. and Ghana. The findings of this research can inform student affairs practice in Ghana and the U.S. It would also add and expand the literature base in academic advising in this area because little research has been done especially in the Ghanaian context.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In analyzing the centrality of student advising comparatively, this study uses Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto's Theory of

Student Departure. Astin's Theory of Student Involvement states that students are more likely to succeed if they are actively involved in activities in school. He asserts that active participation includes "those who participate actively in student organizations, spend considerable time on campus, interact often with faculty outside of the classroom, and devote considerable time to studying" [28]. Students who are actively involved in campus activities tend to enjoy the environment and this creates a positive correlation between the environment and student, and this is where academic advisors come in. Advisors provide students with access to these resources to enable them to succeed and adjust well to campus.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure explains student retention. Tinto attributes student drop-out to "academic problems, failure to integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of the college or university, or a low level of commitment to the college or university" [23]. He states that students enter college from different socio-economic backgrounds and if these students have difficulty adjusting to their environment, they are forced to withdraw or transfer to another institution. Higher education institutions need to provide opportunities and resources for students to ease their transition and assist them to adjust to their new environment. Colleges, through advisors, have a huge role to play here by checking up on students, especially those at-risk of dropping out and providing them with resources such as tutoring, study coaching, supplemental sessions, and information about student organizations. If detected early, students having a hard time adjusting to campus are assisted with the proper resources. It is important to note that the move to campus is sometimes a big change in students' lives and creating a community and family for these students is necessary, so they feel welcomed in their new environment.

2.2 Study Area

The University of Ghana was used as a case study for a university located in Ghana. The University of Ghana was formerly known as the University College of Gold Coast and was the first university established in 1948. Ghana is a country found in the western part of Africa. It is bordered by Togo, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. Although English is the official language, Ghana is a multilingual country with Twi being the dominant language spoken. Ohio University

was used as a case study for a University in the United States of America. The United States of America is a former British colony known for being the home of diverse languages and ethnicities. The U.S. has English as its official language and is made up of fifty states. The American educational system was modeled after the British although the U.S. has changed certain aspects and adapted it to their system. Higher education in the U.S. dates back to the 17th century with the establishment of Harvard College in 1636 and College of William and Mary in 1693, which were modeled after Oxford and Cambridge universities in the UK.

2.3 Sampling and Interview Method

Three Ghanaian undergraduate students at the University of Ghana and three American students at Ohio University were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews was adopted to dig deep into participants' lives and gather in-depth information about academic advising. The interview schedule was strictly followed and each interview lasted for 20-30 minutes. Purposeful sampling method was used in the study and selection criteria were being a student at the University of Ghana and Ohio University. The year of study in school was not a criterion for selection and the study was based on constructivism and phenomenology.

Coded transcripts was opened using Microsoft Word to analyze the interview data. Coded from the open codes was focused and compared the codes across the participants. Seven major themes emerged: 'Definition of Academic Advising', 'Presence of Advising at the University of Ghana and Ohio University', 'Sources of Information about Advising', 'Student and Campus Involvement', 'Personal, Academic, and Professional Development', 'Challenges', and 'Suggestions'.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For the University of Ghana, Ruby, Tilly and Lizzy were interviewed. Ruby is a second-year Economics and Information Studies student who resides on campus. Tilly is a third-year student majoring in Geography and Economics and commutes to campus. Lizzy is also a third-year Education and Information Studies student. While Tilly and Lizzy are commuters, Ruby is a resident on campus. For Ohio University, Christina, Jackie and Sophie were interviewed who are all first-year undergraduate students.

Christina and Sophie are currently undecided, and Jackie is a Pharmacy student. All three participants are residents on campus.

3.1 Definition of Academic Advising

When asked what the participants understood by "academic advising", Ruby stated that, "when you're in school, like, in your course of studies, if you need any form of advice, be it academic, or any other thing like that's related to schoolwork you like, you can get some tips or get someone to talk to". In the same vein, Tilly said that advising meant having someone guide you in your academic journey, especially in majoring and minoring courses. Lizzy also describes advising as: "We have personnel, who encourage students in the courses they have to offer, like, whether it matches with their dreams and goals. And also like, the resource persons that are set for basically university students to help them achieve their aim in the university, the courses they're supposed to take, and then the majors and also how they can help to financially be stable in order for them to accomplish their four years in the university".

Comparing the response of Christina (from Ohio University) with the previous respondents (from University of Ghana), She stated thus: "academic advising would just be a one-on-one meeting, to help a student with a transition or help a student get resources and just talk about classes and how they're doing". Similarly, Jackie described advising as guiding students in their academic journey. Sophie also suggested that academic advising involved assisting students in college. It is clear from the above that the participants had an idea of what advising was and one theme in all these descriptions was academic assistance.

3.2 Presence of Advising at the University of Ghana and Ohio University

Two out of the three Ghanaian students asserted that academic advising was present at the University of Ghana. On the one hand, Tilly and Lizzy mentioned the presence of course advisors, faculty members, and the Counseling and Career Center. Tilly mentioned course advisors – instructors and professors in every department on campus, who assisted students struggling in their classes and who were figuring out their majors and minors. It is worth noting that students at the University of Ghana gain admission with a combination of three programs.

And as they proceed to their second year, they drop a program. In their fourth year, they decide to do major, minor, or combine major in the two programs. Let me give an example: a first-year student enters the university with a Political Science, French, and Linguistics combination. They take classes in each of the programs and drop Linguistics in their second year. They continue to take classes in Political Science and French and decide to either major in Political Science or minor in French or do a combined major in Political Science and French. Consequently, the course advisors (faculty) help students determine their strengths and courses to drop and major.

Additionally, Tilly mentioned the Career and Counseling Center which complements the work of course advisors. Tilly said:

“For the Career and Counseling Center, that is a very broad place, they deal with a whole range of issues, a whole lot of things. So, they guide in your career path, your personal life. So generally, the center is actually like, the go-to-place for most students, but the course advisor is the closest, so you get to meet the person in class right after class you can talk to him or you can go for his break sessions or his recess session, you can go to him. But the career center is a major place where you can go for every other issue concerning your life on campus”.

Tilly, however, stated that she never used the course advisors. Furthermore, Lizzy indicated the use of faculty members in her department – Department of Education and Humanities and the career center, who serve as advisors. Faculty members help students facing challenges with their classes. Just like Tilly pointed out, the Career and Counseling Center is another advising office used by students. The center assists students with their majors, minors, and classes to add and drop. Lizzy further delineated the roles of faculty members as advisors and the career office. She said:

“We also have an office for lecturers may be if you are having difficulty in the course you're studying, you can seek an advice from a lecturer, depending on the course you are studying. But then if you want to may be any advice on...may be you're traumatized, or you have some psychological problems in the course you are studying, for that, you can go to the Career and Counseling office”.

Lizzy used the career center once but said she usually met with her professor because she was

a course representative for the class and hence, had direct contact with the professor. Lizzy also called staff at the career office academic advisors. Tilly and Lizzy both posited that sessions at the career center were free.

Ruby, on the other hand, asserted that there were no academic advisors at the University of Ghana. She, however, stated that she spoke to her peers whenever she had any questions. Ruby also mentioned that she was sometimes referred to Teaching Assistants and “if she was lucky, maybe a lecturer”. She alluded to the fact that her peers and sometimes Teaching Assistants were very helpful in answering her academic questions.

All the three participants at Ohio University revealed that academic advising existed in their university which they used and continue to use. While Christina meets with her advisor about five or six times, Jackie has monthly meetings with hers every semester. Sophie attends advising meetings every two months. Christina took me through a typical advising session:

Yeah, so it just kind of depends on what I want to talk about. But I'm, usually I'll send an email asking the question, and if they respond and answer the question in my email, then usually I'm good. But if I want more clarification and want to talk about a topic, then I'll schedule a meeting. And then from there, we'll usually meet on teams and just talk about, I've had meetings about schedule changes about joining organizations, tutoring, stuff like that. So, it just kind of depends on what I want to talk about.

On comparison, Christina mentioned that anytime she had a question, she emailed her advisor to schedule a meeting. Her meetings also included professional and personal issues. Jackie delineated the scope of advising and stated that there are staff members who serve as advisors; thus, advising was not done by faculty members. Jackie detailed her advising session:

“Usually, in my advising sessions, I go to the emails that an academic advisor might send me, and then I'll click the scheduled appointment, logo, and schedule your appointment. And then teams will or outlook and teams will notify you when your meeting is coming. And you can slowly join into the meeting from the app, then we usually ask me, how's my day? How am I doing? And then it's usually like casual talk. And then eventually, soon after we start talking about like class, classes grades, how do I feel about

classes, and then my three goals for the semester, or just in general? And if I need to improve anything, and if I'm doing good or anything talk about that and why. And then we go into like just you know, a conclusion and then the session is over”.

Jackie continued by pointing out that she used advising because it helped her create and achieve goals. And she also felt good using this resource.

Like Jackie, Sophie also mentioned that advisors were not faculty members. Moreover, she attended advising sessions with staff from a centralized advising office and not a departmental advisor. Sophie's advisor used the developmental advising style where the advisor and advisee co-construct goals together and the advisee plays a major role in the decision-making process. Sophie added that she met with her advisor when she had questions about her classes.

3.3 Sources of Information about Advising

Tilly got information about the career center in her first year through a staff member who attended the same church as she did. The staff member told Tilly about an upcoming career fair at the center and encouraged her to attend. Tilly said she went to the center and out of curiosity, read posters about the center. She became interested in the activities of the career center and decided to volunteer. Tilly indicated that she loved volunteering and working with NGOs so having the opportunity at the career center was not new to her. Meanwhile, Lizzy detailed how she got to know about the center. She revealed that the university creates email addresses for students in their first year. She received an email with resources students could use to help them transition and adjust to the university. Lizzy saw the Counseling and Career Center as one resource and went ahead to ask other students for the location of the center because she figured staff at the center could assist her with her academic needs.

In contrary, Christina revealed that she met her advisor during orientation in her first semester, who also introduced her to another advisor. Christina, again, mentioned that she preferred meeting with the second advisor because the second advisor was younger and was more relatable. Both Jackie and Sophie stated that they received emails from their advisors at the

beginning of the first semester as first-year students.

3.4 Student and Campus Involvement

On student and campus involvement, Ruby mentioned she was not involved in campus activities because there was a lack of information about clubs and organizations on campus. While Tilly was involved in church activities and volunteered at the career center performing clerical jobs, Lizzy was a course representative, Deputy Chairperson of a financial committee, and the second deputy Counseling Director.

Similarly, Christina is a member and Technology Chair of Chi Omega, a sorority. She is also a member of Phi Chi Theta, a business fraternity. Jackie belongs to CRU – a religious organization and AWLC – an organization at the Women's Center. Sophie was not able to join a club or organization because of the pandemic but she wishes to join one when the school begins in-person classes and activities.

3.5 Personal, Academic and Professional Development

Ruby stated that the interactions with her peers and sometimes Teaching Assistants helped in her academic journey. However, it was not the case for her professional life. Furthermore, Tilly spoke about an experience with a session at the career center where a staff member discussed the 'add and drop' process at the university as Tilly was not cognizant of it. She also mentioned another experience when she was struggling with her Economics class and was given some resources – group study – by another staff. It is important to note that these meetings at the center were usually informal.

In the same vein, Lizzy said that these meetings:

Taught me a lot professionally and the use of Excel, PowerPoint, like really polished me in those areas. So, with a number of skills and training, I think it really helped me shape me personally and boost my self-confidence totally – yes. So right now, I get into, I get to volunteer with other startup businesses and other NGOs, because of the skills that I have; sometimes they go like they want a volunteer who knows how to do this or that. I just apply for it, I get it.

Lizzy also recounted an experience at the career center in her first year when she wanted to

change her major to Fashion Designing. Staff at the center told her there was no such course at the University of Ghana and since she wanted to be a lecturer and fashion designer, it was better she maintained her major in Education and Information Studies and advised she could later do a Master's in Fashion Designing and Ph.D. in whatever program she was interested in. She pointed out that but for the staff at the center, she would have wasted money to transfer to another university.

Christina pointed out that her advising sessions had been helpful. She stated that it was a good thing to have someone to discuss her issues with. Her advisor gave her resources such as tutoring for classes she struggled with. Moreover, her advisor supported and encouraged her to push through her challenges. Through advising sessions, Christina had her future aspirations mapped out.

Meanwhile, Jackie posited that the meetings with her advisor had been effective because they helped her mental health by creating and achieving personal and healthy goals. The meetings also made her prioritize her goals and stay organized. Academically, Jackie and her advisor discussed her classes and grades and if she needed assistance in any of her classes. Again, Jackie met with a career coach who helped figure out her career path as a Pharmacist and any other profession aligned with her course of study.

Like Christina and Jackie, Sophie also admitted that her advising sessions were useful. Her advisor provided her with information about her classes and what they entailed. She said:

Yeah, so last semester, I was having trouble with like, figuring out what I wanted to do. And so, my advisor helped me and like, guided me through what some of the classes might look like that I might like, because I don't know exactly what I wanted to do. So that's why I'm taking like different classes this semester because she told me some of the classes that I might like, and she just explained what they would involve those classes, which helped.

The advisor helped her determine classes she could take to figure out her major since she was undecided in Health Sciences. Again, Sophie was interested in Physical Therapy and discussed her career aspirations with her advisor. Her advisor recommended some

classes she could take that aligned with her goals, which she took.

3.6 Challenges

According to Ruby, one major challenge for first-year students was the lack of information on resources for student success. She lamented that the university was not regulated although the university organized matriculation ceremonies every year to welcome first-year students. Ruby asserted that these ceremonies were not compulsory; as such, students did not usually attend. Ruby again pointed out that she preferred interacting with her peers instead of faculty because she was more comfortable with her peers. She also said that faculty members were not always available to assist students, and some did not have the answers to students' questions. Ruby mentioned, "But for the University of Ghana, I don't know what because I just don't know what the issue is, like, you can just go, you won't even meet your lecturer the whole four years, you just go sit in class, no one will even know you're present to you just do your thing and leave". This lack of relationship between students and faculty members is present in most Ghanaian universities where there is a traditional top-down leadership style and students are supposed to respect their professors creating a fearful environment.

Moreover, Tilly mentioned course advisors – faculty members – being unavailable and having limited time to answer students' questions. She indicated that was the reason she used the career center because the staff at the center were always available to help. Tilly also mentioned she had no issues or challenges using the center's resources. However, a challenge first-year students face was difficulty in navigating their academic life on campus. She mentioned that the orientation or matriculation the university organized to welcome first-year students was not helpful. She said to bolster this point: there's orientation, but the orientation doesn't cover much and we're many – everyone from different faculties come, sit at the same place. And they only talk about how the university is, give you brochures, how beautiful the university is. Like they don't really give us like anything, they just give you like the tip of the iceberg like nothing.

Lizzy had little to say about the challenges she faced. The only challenge she mentioned was

being shy in her meetings. Christina asserted that she did not always get answers from her advisor. Christina detailed an experience with a career coach,

I met with a career coach. And I was asking her about my major, and for next semester and internships that I could get, potentially, and it wasn't the most helpful just because she basically told me to do a Google search on internships near me. And I had already been doing that. And I had kind of gone into the meeting, hoping that she would give me more than just that. So probably just not really getting full information.

Christina understood the lack of information because there could have not been much information on that particular topic or question. Jackie mentioned that she did not have any issues but then she found herself rescheduling her meetings because sometimes things just come at her at once. Sophie also posited there were no challenges.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

It is evident from the above that academic advising is practiced at the University of Ghana and Ohio University. However, the extent of its practice varies between these universities. While the Ohio University has a structured advising system, the University of Ghana does not. It is also important to mention the role of students in being proactive and seeking information on advising and other resources. Sometimes, universities do their job in making advising resources available, students, however, do not utilize these resources. This research is just the beginning of future research that would be conducted in this area of advising to expand our knowledge about this resource across universities and countries. In conclusion, the respondents understood the definition of academic advising. Only one Ghanaian respondent did not ascertain the presence academic advising at the University of Ghana. Sources of Information about advising were relevant. Also, respondents revealed lack of information on resources for student success as a major challenge during their first academic year.

4.2 Recommendations from the Study Participants

Ruby proposed that universities should have a centralized office for student advising. She indicated that the academic advisors should not be faculty members because students usually do not feel comfortable meeting with their instructors. To explain this point, Ruby stated:

Like maybe the way the lecturer teaches, are you going back to that same lecture to complain that you don't like the way he teaches, no, you can't do that! So, it should be like totally different people, people who actually understand like, maybe counselors – people who are able to relate with students, because the way lecturers relate to students are not the same as the way counselors relate to students, you know, so they should be different people who are experienced, like who know what they are doing. Not lecturers? Lecturers? No, no, no, no!. This forms a major challenge earlier stated by the respondent having issues in their first year of academic studies.

In the same vein, Tilly suggested that every department should establish a committee accessible to all students and that would be responsible for assisting and guiding students throughout their academic journey at the university. Lizzy, however, stated that the university has done its part in establishing the career center and sending emails to students. The responsibility to succeed falls on students to be proactive in using the center as well as other resources.

Christina indicated that there should be compulsory monthly advising meetings. She noted that students do not always need to have a problem to meet with their advisors. Students could have their monthly meetings to discuss anything, and this would also serve as a platform for advisors to provide more resources to students. Also, she stated that enforcing the monthly meetings would encourage students to use the resource. Christina concluded by encouraging students to use campus resources. Additionally, Jackie posited that students need to regularly check their emails because the university usually sends out emails about resources to boost student and campus involvement. Jackie cautioned students not to be scared to ask for assistance. Sophie also encourages advisors to reach out to

students more to provide the resources they need.

4.3 Recommendations for the Institutions in the Two Countries

Academic advising has a major role in student persistence, success, and retention. And as seen from above, advising is beneficial to students' personal, academic, and professional growth. The University of Ghana should employ staff members who would serve as advisors and go-to people for questions students have about their academic, professional, and personal lives. The university should also make it mandatory for students to attend advising sessions. Because the University of Ghana is large and has a huge student population, academic advising can be decentralized so that in each department and college, there is a group of student affairs professionals who would serve as academic advisors. The university can also employ and train more staff members at the Counseling and Career Center. Similarly, the Ghanaian government should liaise with the Ministry of Education and university stakeholders on ways to becoming student-centered and establish student affairs as a profession at the University of Ghana.

The Ohio University should enforce mandatory meetings with academic advisors and decrease the advisor-to-student ratio to ensure advisors are not overwhelmed by the number of students they have to advise. Reducing the advisor-to-student ratio also leads to advisors paying more attention to their students. Questionnaires and interviews should be conducted in each department and college at both universities to determine what students need and what can be done to reach and encourage the student population to utilize resources on campus.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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