TEACHERS' TOPIC

Development and Implementation of an Advising Program's Meet-and-Greet Session

Lucio R. Volino, PharmD, Danielle M. Candelario, PharmD, Mary Barna Bridgeman, PharmD

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy, Piscataway, New Jersey

Objective. To describe the implementation and perceptions of an advising program's meet-and-greet session on student/faculty interactions.

Design. Student advisees and faculty advisors attended a meet-and-greet program designed to facilitate introductions. Two online surveys evaluating program perceptions were electronically distributed to participants.

Assessment. Twenty-eight advisors and 226 students attended; 17 faculty members and 42% (n=95) of students completed the survey. Advisors and advisees found the program valuable (100%, 85%) and recommended holding it again (100%, 93%), respectively. Most advisors agreed that the event improved success in meeting advisees while reducing time needed to schedule and meet with advisees. Students felt more comfortable contacting advisors after participating, with 83% agreeing it was more convenient than scheduling separate meeting times.

Conclusion. An advising meet-and-greet program facilitated initial advisee/advisor meetings while reducing self-reported faculty time/resources. This activity could be implemented by other institutions seeking to promote student advising relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Among the responsibilities of the pharmacy faculty member, student mentorship and advising are paramount to the success of the faculty member's school. Student advising is demonstrative of the institution's commitment to the professional success of its students. There are specific services a school of pharmacy is expected to provide, including ensuring student access to resources necessary for success, such as academic support personnel.[1] The role of the faculty mentor in building student self-confidence, inculcating an attitude of service, and supporting the establishment of habits of a successful professional is significant.[2,3] Intensive faculty mentorship and professional socialization early in the professional program can facilitate self-assessment skills and promote life-long learning and professional development in students, beyond the effects on academic and social support.[3] Although the criticality and benefit of a successful relationship between faculty advisors and student advisees are established, faculty members can be unsuccessful at providing advice to students of the health professions.[4,5] Students of the health professions face academic and professional issues that may differ from students in other degree programs.[6-8] In evaluating the literature on medical and nursing students, satisfaction with faculty mentorship and advising seems to be dependent on meeting at least once with a faculty advisor.[6,7] There is a deficit, however, in the literature regarding best practices for facilitating an introduction between faculty advisors and students.

Student advising services are a requirement from the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) 2016 Accreditation Standards and Key Elements for the Professional Program in Pharmacy Leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree. The standards require that pharmacy programs provide "academic advising and career-pathway counseling adequate to the needs of students" but do not prescribe the approach to advising.[9] Thus, advising practices vary. For example, a face-to-face meeting with a faculty advisor is a requirement by some schools but not all. In some cases, student pharmacists choose which faculty members they would like to consult for advising, while other programs may assign students to faculty advisors. In an attempt to understand best practices in student pharmacist advising services and structures of advising programs at other pharmacy schools, a review was performed of pharmacy school programs comparable to our institution. The advising programs of public and

Corresponding Author: Lucio R. Volino, Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 160 Frelinghuysen Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Tel: 848-445-6484. Fax: 732-445-2533. E-mail: volinol@pharmacy.rutgers.edu

private schools with large entering class sizes (> 200 students) and a 0-6 program construct were scrutinized.[10] While broad descriptions of advising practices were available on pharmacy school websites, comprehensive descriptions of activities to foster initial interactions between students and advisors were unavailable.

The ACPE guidelines recommend pharmacy faculty members' time in providing these value-added services be recognized in the evaluation process.[9] Unfortunately, there are numerous constraints on faculty time, including obligations to clinical practice, teaching, research, and scholarship. The need to enhance the value of the faculty-student experience was the inspiration for the design and implementation of the advising meet-and-greet program described in this manuscript.

In an advising program evaluation conducted in 2012, students and faculty members identified barriers and opportunities to improve advising interactions. Barriers to establishing successful advising relationships identified by advisors included scheduling conflicts with student availability and clinical site-related obligations, issues in connecting for an initial meeting, and limitations of time and resources. The majority of students never met their advisor. The most common reasons provided by students were not having advising needs, not feeling their advisor would be able to assist, and feeling intimidated by the advising process. Based on this assessment and feedback from students and faculty members, a formal meet-and-greet program was scheduled in for first professional year (P1) doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) students in fall 2013. The program was intended to facilitate introductions, overcome previously identified barriers, and promote advising interaction. While hosting a meet-and-greet program is not necessarily a novel concept, based on a survey of published literature on academic advising in the health professions, this is the first example of both the execution and evaluation of such a session on initial advising interactions.

DESIGN

All students entering the P1 year (third-year of a 0-6 year PharmD program) are assigned a faculty advisor for assistance with academic, social, and other needs. The 2013 P1 student body was largely comprised of students directly admitted from high school (81.4%), as well as internal and external transfers (17.2%). The school defines advising as an intentional interaction designed to facilitate information exchange between the advisor and advisee based on student self-identified need(s). Potential advising services provided by faculty members include academic support, career services (eg, internship, postgraduate, and dual degree programs), leadership development, research opportunities, and referral for other

services (eg, financial aid, counseling and health, housing, and disability services).

The school's advising committee comprises approximately 15 members including the associate deans of student services, academic services, and assessment, the senior program coordinator for academic services, faculty members from the departments of pharmacy practice and administration, pharmaceutics, and pharmacology and toxicology, and student representatives from each professional year (P1-P4). The committee reports to the dean of the school of pharmacy and is charged with establishing and maintaining an advising system at the school that develops and guides students throughout the program.

Faculty advisors interested in student advising are identified on a voluntary basis from the pharmacy practice and administration, chemical biology, medicinal chemistry, pharmaceutics, and pharmacology and toxicology departments. Advisors follow students longitudinally throughout their professional coursework. Of note, a majority of faculty advisors are clinical faculty members with practice sites located a significant distance from the school, which limits the accessibility of these faculty advisors.

In fall 2013, the advising committee organized a formal meet-and-greet program intended to introduce P1 student pharmacists to their faculty advisors. The event was scheduled in conjunction with the P1 White Coat Ceremony to maximize participation by students and faculty members. This was a closed ceremony in which all incoming P1 students were encouraged to participate. Family members and friends were not invited to attend because of space limitations.

Approximately 2 months prior to the meet-and-greet, the advising committee established objectives for the event and discussed program design, promotion, implementation, and assessment. A meet-and-greet planning task force consisting of 3 faculty members, the associate dean of student services, and a third professional year (P3) student was identified. The task force was charged with developing, implementing, and assessing the program.

The event was promoted to students and faculty members on multiple occasions and via various forms of communication (Figure 1). One month prior to the meet-and-greet event, an electronic invitation to the White Coat Ceremony was sent to advisors. In coordination with this invitation, the advising committee chairman posted a save-the-date announcement on the university course management system, which alerted advisors to the electronic invitation and event. Approximately 2 weeks prior to the event, information regarding the meet-and-greet and its value was included in an e-mail from the associate dean of academic services, which
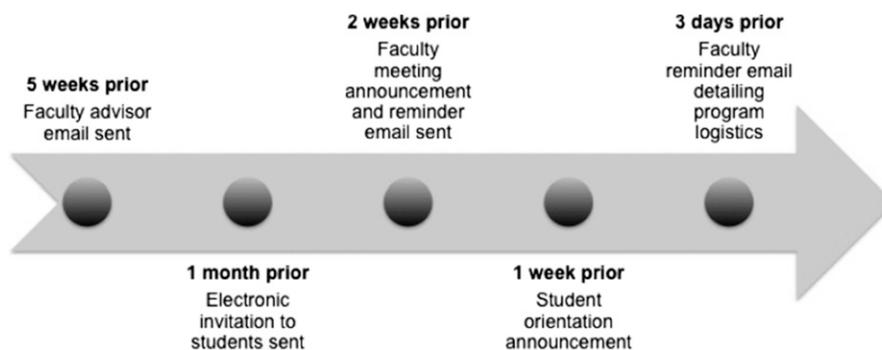
Figure 1. Preparation and logistics timeline for the advising meet-and-greet program.

identified students assigned to each advisor. Advisors who were unable to attend the event were encouraged to contact their advisees, inform them of their absence, and schedule a separate meeting time. Shortly thereafter, advisors were reminded of the event during the summer school-wide faculty meeting committee announcements.

Students also received multiple announcements for the meet-and-greet event. A P1 class orientation session was scheduled one week prior to the event. In advance of this class orientation session, advisor assignments and information on accessing the faculty advisor list were e-mailed to students and posted to the university course management system. A verbal announcement reviewing this information was also made to students during the P1 orientation. In addition, representatives from the advising committee presented a brief overview of the advising program and reviewed its associated goals, processes, initiatives, and available university resources (eg, academic support, career services, financial aid). After the presentation, upperclassman from the fourth professional year (P4) class participated in a panel discussion intended to highlight the value and impact of advising from the student perspective.

The chairman of the advising committee and advising task force members coordinated program development and logistics. To facilitate discussions among advisors and advisees, a portion of the room allocated for the White Coat Ceremony was used to support meet-and-greet introductions. Additional meeting space adjacent to the ceremony venue was reserved to accommodate the large number of students and faculty participants, minimize crowding, and reduce disruptions from neighboring conversations.

On the day of the program, signs indicating faculty advisor names were placed around the rooms to assist students in locating their advisor. A list with student names was distributed to advisors in case a student was not aware of their faculty advisor's name. Students could be identified by the personalized white coats they

received at the ceremony. Since the meet-and-greet was scheduled immediately after the White Coat Ceremony on an evening during the week, not all advisors were able to attend. This information was captured from the faculty invitation responses. To account for this, students without advisors present were assigned to meet and speak with another faculty advisor, designated as an "advisor liaison." The advising committee chairman assigned liaisons based on similarities in departments, disciplines, or practice sites of advisors who were unable to attend. The majority of advisors in attendance (75%; n=21) served as liaisons.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, students were instructed to locate their advisor or liaison. Advisors began their group meet-and-greet sessions at their own discretion. No specific directives or restrictions were provided to advisors regarding discussion topics. Suggested conversation starters were provided to advisors (Table 1). Advisors were open to discuss any topic of interest, use any preferred method to initiate and carry on discussions. The room was reserved for one hour for this interaction; advisors could speak with their advisees for any length of time within this window. The intent of not giving advisors stringent instructions on the flow of their session was to provide advisors the opportunity to bring their own personalities, experiences, and style to

Table 1. Suggested Conversation Starters for Faculty Advisors During the Meet-and-Greet Program

Why did you select pharmacy as a major/profession?
Do you have any work experience (pharmacy or otherwise)?
Realizing it is very early in your professional curriculum, at this point in time, what is your current practice interest (community/hospital/industry/other degree programs)?
What do you do besides pharmacy? Sports? Activities?
What has been your best or favorite class so far?
What electives are you interested in learning more about?
Do you commute? Live on campus? What challenges does your living situation pose (eg, able to have access to internet, printer, etc, commute time)?

this initial meeting with advisees. Available student services had been reviewed with advisors during a training program held as part of the first initiative for the formal advising program. In affiliation with the White Coat Ceremony, food and light refreshments were provided for all attendees.

One week after the program, online anonymous surveys were distributed to student and faculty participants via Qualtrics, a web-based survey service (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Shared objectives of the student and faculty evaluations included perceptions of value of the meet-and-greet activity, comfort in initiating contact, scheduling convenience, and recommendations for the program. Additionally, student participant preferences for more one-on-one time with advisors and likelihood of independently contacting advisors were evaluated. Faculty assessments included the success of the meet-and-greet compared with previous attempts at meeting with advisees. Separate surveys were sent to faculty advisor and student advisee participants. Surveys were open for 2 weeks with a reminder sent at week 1. A total of 4 gift cards valued at $25 each were raffled off at the end of weeks 1 and 2 to encourage student participation. Students completed a separate survey to be eligible for the raffle. This study was deemed exempt by the Rutgers University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Of the 233 enrolled P1 year students, 226 attended the White Coat Ceremony, and 58% (n=28) of all faculty advisors attended. All students attending the ceremony remained after to meet with advisors, based on attendance reported by advisors. The survey was completed by 42% (n=95) and 61% (n=17) of students and faculty advisors, respectively. Survey results did not distinguish between students who met with an advisor vs a liaison.

Respondent characteristics are outlined in Table 2. Most of the P1 students participating in this survey reported entering the pharmacy program directly from high school and living on campus. The majority (68%, n=19) of faculty advisors present were from the pharmacy practice and administration department. Most advisors had been faculty members (59%, n=10) or formal student advisors (88%, n=15) for 10 years or less at the time of the event.

Meet-and-greet survey questions along with student and faculty responses are summarized in Table 3. Students and advisors agreed or strongly agreed that the program was valuable (85%, n=81 and 100%, n=17, respectively) and recommend holding it for future classes (93%, n=87 and 100%, n=17, respectively). Eighty-three percent (n=79) of students agreed or strongly

Table 2. Survey Respondent Characteristics of Attendees at the Meet-and-Greet Program

First Professional Year (P1) Student Advisees (N=232)	n (%)
Students who attended White Coat Ceremony	226 (97)
Students who attended meet-and-greet	226 (97)
Completed survey	95 (42)
Entry Level into program	
High-school into preprofessional year	75 (79)
Transfer into first professional year	20 (21)
Housing situation	
On-campus	56 (59)
Off-campus within the city	23 (24)
Off-campus within the state	16 (17)
Faculty Advisors (N=48)	**n (%)**
Faculty advisors who attended meet-and-greet	28 (58)
Completed survey	17 (61)
Department	
Chemical Biology	1 (6)
Pharmacy Practice and Administration	12 (71)
Pharmacology and Toxicology	4 (24)
Years as a faculty member	
0-5 years	4 (24)
6-10 years	6 (35)
11-15 years	3 (18)
>20 years	4 (24)
Years as a formal advisor	
0-5 years	7 (41)
6-10 years	8 (47)
11-15 years	2 (12)

agreed that the session was more convenient than scheduling a separate time to meet with their faculty advisor. However, 57% (n=54) agreed or strongly agreed they would prefer more one-on-one time for the initial meeting with their advisor. Eighty-eight percent (n=14) of faculty advisors reported feeling more successful meeting with their student advisees compared to previous attempts to meet with P1 advisees. A majority of faculty survey respondents (71%, n=12) indicated the program also decreased the time and resources allocated to scheduling and meeting with advisees as compared to previous years. Twenty-six percent (n=25) of student survey respondents reported that they were unlikely to have independently contacted their advisor for initial introductions; however, after having attended the program, 61% (n=58) of students felt more comfortable contacting their advisor.

DISCUSSION

Pharmacy faculty members have limited time to devote to nonclinical academic activities, including student advising.[11] Further they spend, on average, 2 hours per

Table 3. Meet-and-Greet Survey Results

First Professional Year (P1) Student Advisee Responses (N=95)	n (%)
Which of the following statements best describes your comfort level regarding contacting your advisor?	
I feel more comfortable reaching out to my advisor after having attended the meet-and-greet event than before	58 (61)
I feel the same level of comfort reaching out to my advisor before and after having attended the meet-and-greet event.	33 (35)
I feel less comfortable reaching out to my advisor after having attended the meet-and-greet event than before.	4 (4)
This meet-and-greet is more convenient than scheduling a separate time to meet with my advisor.	
Strongly Agree	30 (32)
Agree	49 (52)
Neither Agree or Disagree	8 (8)
Disagree	5 (5)
Strongly Disagree	3 (3)
I would have preferred more one-on-one time with my advisor for my initial meeting with my advisor.	
Strongly Agree	17 (18)
Agree	37 (39)
Neither Agree or Disagree	26 (27)
Disagree	15 (16)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0)
The advising meet-and-greet was a valuable program.	
Strongly Agree	32 (34)
Agree	49 (52)
Neither Agree or Disagree	9 (9)
Disagree	3 (3)
Strongly Disagree	2 (2)
How likely would you have been to independently contact your advisor if they did not contact you first?	
Strongly Agree	13 (14)
Agree	30 (32)
Neither Agree or Disagree	27 (28)
Disagree	18 (19)
Strongly Disagree	7 (7)
Would you recommend holding the meet-and-greet event for next year's P1 class?	
Yes	87 (93)
I am not sure	4 (4)
No	3 (3)

Faculty Advisor Responses (N=28)	
Which of the following statements best captures your comfort level regarding contacting your advisees?	
I feel more comfortable reaching out to my advisees after having attended the meet-and-greet event than before.	11 (65)
I feel the same level of comfort reaching out to my advisees before and after having attended the Meet-and-greet event.	6 (35)
I feel less comfortable reaching out to my advisees after having attended the meet-and-greet event than before.	0 (0)
How did the meet-and-greet compare to your previous attempts at meeting with P1 advisees?	
I was more successful at meeting with my P1 advisees by attending the meet-and-greet.	14 (88)
There was no change in the success of meeting with my P1 advisees by attending the meet-and-greet.	2 (13)
I was less successful at meeting with my P1 advisees by attending the meet-and-greet.	0 (0)
What impact did the meet-and-greet have on the time and resources committed to meeting with advisees?	
I spent less time and resources compared to scheduling/meeting with students individually or as a group on my own.	12 (71)
There was no change in time and resources committed to scheduling/meeting with students individually or as a group on my own.	5 (29)
I spent more time and resources compared to scheduling meeting with students individually or as a group on my own.	0 (0)

(Continued)

Table 3. (*Continued*)

First Professional Year (P1) Student Advisee Responses (N=95)	n (%)
Please evaluate the following statement based on your level of agreement: The advising meet-and-greet event was a valuable program.	
Strongly Agree	14 (82)
Agree	3 (18)
Neither Agree or Disagree	0 (0)
Would you recommend holding the meet-and-greet event for next year's P1 class?	
Yes	17 (100)
I am not sure	0 (0)
No	0 (0)

student per year on advising activities in PharmD programs.[12] At Rutgers University, a majority of faculty members balance clinical responsibilities with teaching, scholarship, and serving as an advisor to 4-5 students per professional year (approximately 20 total). Thus, the opportunity to meet with student advisees in a large group setting for an introductory meeting worked well. Prior to the event implementation, advisors typically met with students individually to introduce themselves and the program, which required a separate time to schedule and meet with students for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Advisors were able to complete an initial meeting with their P1 advisees and serve as a liaison to other advisees (4-5 students) over that same timeframe during the meet-and-greet. A majority of faculty participants reported feeling more successful in establishing an initial meeting with students and indicated the program decreased the amount of time spent in planning and meeting with advisees compared with previous years.

In a "0-6" program, a majority of students enroll directly from high school, so they may have unique advising needs compared with students who already have an undergraduate degree. These students, in particular, would benefit from early interaction with pharmacy professionals and established faculty members within the professional degree program to provide them with guidance on navigating university life. Additionally, this activity could be easily replicated by other pharmacy schools where students are assigned to faculty members for advising purposes.

Although the meet-and-greet event helped facilitate introductions between students and their advisors as a result of a high student attendance rate, some obstacles and limitations were identified. Despite efforts to promote the event and encourage faculty attendance, approximately 40% of advisors did not attend. A majority of faculty members are based at remote practice sites and cited professional or personal responsibilities as common reasons for not attending. Students not able to meet with their advisor met with a faculty liaison instead. An evaluation of the program's impact on students whose advisors attended vs those who met with faculty liaisons was not performed. Additionally, 57% of student respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer additional time for an initial meeting with an advisor. This may have been a result of some students feeling uncomfortable speaking with their advisor in front of other students. Facility space and time constraints also prevented additional one-on-one interactions. Considering the intent of the event was to facilitate initial meetings, additional one-on-one time with their advisors could be scheduled at the student's or advisor's discretion.

Low survey completion rates and limited demographic data collection were also noted. Approximately 40% of students and 60% of faculty members completed the online assessment. Although the results were favorable, the low rates of survey completion may not be a direct reflection of the faculty member and student perception of the event. Students who did not complete the survey may have had a liaison present in lieu of their assigned advisor and, therefore, may not have found this experience valuable. Conversely, it is possible that students and faculty members who had a positive experience completed the surveys. Program coordinators felt that an introductory meeting with any faculty advisor would be valuable; it is unknown if student participants felt the same. In addition, student and faculty demographic information was not collected, which prevented the authors from potentially correlating responses to student and faculty characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity.

Program space and set-up were other factors that impacted the discussions between students and faculty advisors. The White Coat Ceremony room set-up involved lecture style seating with space in the front of the room for presenters. This format made it difficult for students during the meet-and-greet event to locate their advisor, assemble, and speak. Chairs were rearranged within the room as best as possible to

accommodate groups while some used open student lounge space outside of the meeting room.

Another factor that impacted the successful implementation of the event was food service. Advisors used their discretion with allowing students to obtain food prior to their discussions; others met prior to eating. This may have been confusing for participants. In addition, some students became anxious and less involved with discussions as they witnessed others eating and the supply of food diminishing.

To maximize attendance by students and faculty members, future programs could be scheduled around events when most faculty members are on campus, such as a school-wide faculty meeting or faculty development day. Faculty advisors not attending this event were asked to follow up with student advisees and host their own introductory meetings to afford their students the same opportunities as those students with advisors present at the event. In the future, the committee may consider faculty attendance a requirement for serving as a student advisor.

Logistical changes were implemented for later meet-and-greet programs. To minimize food-related distractions, students were directed to obtain food and return to their designated advisor's table. In addition, an arrangement of round tables with chairs positioned throughout the room was used instead of lecture style seating for the White Coat Ceremony to maximize room space and interactions. After the ceremony, each table was labeled with a faculty member's name which minimized confusion and made it easier for students to locate their advisors. This also provided ample space for groups to meet.

Future studies evaluating the impact of such a program on student academic performance and retention could be considered. In addition, the quality of the intervention and long-term effect on students scheduling follow-up meetings with their advisors and building an advising relationship could be tracked. An assessment of potential differences between study participants and nonparticipants, along with demographic data collection, should also be considered for future evaluations.

SUMMARY

Implementation of a meet-and-greet program can facilitate initial student and faculty advisor introductions, while reducing faculty time and resources devoted to scheduling individual student meetings. Other pharmacy schools seeking to promote advisee and advisor introductions could implement this activity and modify it to the needs of the respective organization or program.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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