

THE ACADEMIC ADVISOR: A NEW PROFILE FOR GUIDANCE AND TUTORIAL AT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Currently, we are in a very important moment to strengthen guidance and tutoring at University level. In this context, the integral formation of students is essential to attend their personal, academic and professional development.

Spanish universities have reflected this by establishing lines of action related to our students' guidance. In this work we show the development of actions and experiences, that attempt to respond to these approaches, presenting the results of a study in the Educational Sciences School of the Córdoba University, which purpose was to identify the possible failures and strengths arising during the academic advising program, a model of intervention for guidance at this University. This research was included in an exploratory, descriptive and correlational investigation. 49 students and 14 teachers were chosen from an intentional sampling to take part.

The results show that guidance is considered necessary by students for their comprehensive development and university career. Teachers also consider this discipline necessary and as a complement for their teaching labor.

Keywords: Guidance, Tutoring, Research and Innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Guidance and tutorial have currently reached an essential role in the university context due to being considered one of the best strategies to improve teaching skills. The need that teachers are involved in guidance practice is unquestionable, taking into account the heterogeneous nature of current university students (Álvarez, 2006).

We agree with Zabalza (2003) who considers that one of the basic elements of the teaching practice is tracking and advising students. So, teachers have to organize and plan tutorial as a true complement of teaching. Students reach university with poor information and with troubles to accomplish academic tasks. This makes more than necessary this activity (Álvarez y González, 2008).

As Cano expresses (2009), guidance and university tutorial have to deal with more than attending doubts and consultations of students and must also be much more

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than a regular routine provided in the “tutorial schedule”. As we have pointed out above, it has to be conceived as an academic institutional practice, included in the teaching practice of all professors, with a multidimensional perspective of their training.

1.1. Academic advice as a guidance and tutorial practice at the Córdoba University

The Plan of Teaching Quality of the Córdoba University, 2006 (*Plan Propio de Calidad de la Enseñanza de la Universidad de Córdoba - UCO*) considers the creation of the position of an academic advisor which, as a right of students, is included in the Organic University Law, 2001 (*Ley Orgánica Universitaria - LOU, 2001*). As Castillo Arredondo says (2008: 150): *there is another way of teaching ... because there is another way of learning*.

The academic advice is a teaching practice to guide students for them to take part in their comprehensive training, to strengthen their academic and personal development as well as their social and professional results. In this sense, García Nieto (2008) underlines the tutorial model as a personal counseling that seeks to provide personalized attention to students (Jiménez, 2010).

This work expects to be a simple contribution about the role that tutorial should play in the European Space of High Education (Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior - EEES) as a basic element of the teaching practice (Dulling, 2009). To sum up, we will display the results reached in a study carried out in the Educational Sciences School, Córdoba University, as a previous step or initial stage that will follow in the development of a Guidance plan included in the teachers training.

2. METHOD

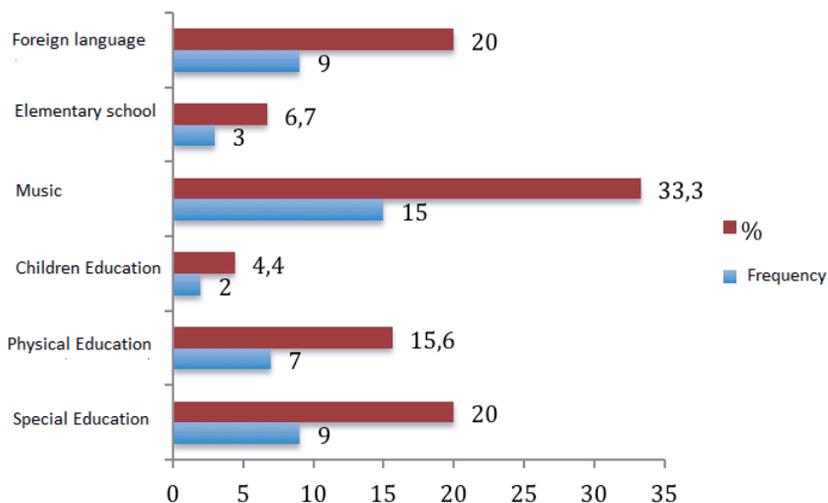
The initiative mentioned above started in every centers and schools of the Córdoba University (UCO) in 2007-2008 and during this period it was developed according to each institution's identity. 488 teachers from the UCO took part in the academic advisor program.

The implementation of this study was carried out under an exploratory, descriptive and correlational investigation, whose purpose was to identify the possible failures and strengths arising during the academic advising program and also to propose possible improvements to add quality to our university teaching practice.

49 students and 14 teachers selected from an intentional sample took part in this study. They belong to the sectors implied in this activity from the beginning of this implementation during 2007/2010 period.

In Figure 1 we can see that students of Music present a higher percentage of participation (33%), compared to a 4% of the students of Children's Education.

Figure 1: Participation of students in academic counseling



On the other hand, the level of involvement of teachers has shown differences according to their specialties. The teachers of Foreign Languages present a higher percentage (36%) followed by Special Education (22%).

The collection of information was carried out by means of two questionnaires which were designed *ad hoc*, both by teachers and by students involved, considering the objectives of the investigation and after an exhaustive theoretical and documental revision in order to properly understand the field of study. It is about two instruments that combine different types of closed questions (additive scales, ordinal choice and multiple choice) with open-ended questions. The teacher's instrument includes 15 items and 2 open-ended questions and the student's questionnaire includes 12 items and 2 open-ended questions. They are equally structured and correlated with each other to contrast both results.

All questions are put into groups under the following dimensions:

- a. Analysis of needs
- b. Satisfaction of teachers/advisors and of students/advised
- c. Objectives achievement
- d. Assessment of the experience after their participation

In order to estimate the validity of the designed instruments, we contacted a group of experts of 10 university teachers from different knowledge areas (Research Methods and Education Diagnosis, Didactic and Scholar Organization, Evolutionary and Educational Psychology). They were requested to assess the propriety and clearness of the questions and the dimensions in which they were grouped and also to share

general suggestions and comments. The conclusions reached for the treatment of the questionnaires were:

- Inaccuracy in the formulation of some questions, which made us redefine many issues in a clearer and more understandable language.
- Repeated questions in some subsections.
- Some questions were irrelevant and others had a poor content, and did not provide enough information to the research objectives.

After responding to these observations, the definitive questionnaires were implemented.

3. RESULTS

At first we've tried to find out the reasons why students have decided to embrace the academic advising program. Data at Table 1 show that the main reasons were *to get academic and personal support* (12.5%), as well as *to solve problems of different nature* (10.4%) and *to receive information* (10.4%).

Table 1: Reasons why students require academic advice

Why have you decided to require a tutor?	Frequency	Percentage
To solve problems	5	10,4%
To get information	5	10,4%
To solve academic doubts	3	6,3%
To get help	2	4,2%
To have a more direct relationship with teachers	1	2,1%
To have academic tutoring	1	2,1%
I found it interesting	3	6,3%
It was my first year at college	3	6,3%
To get academic and personal support	6	12,5%
Total	29	60,4%

Next we display the outstanding results related to the dimension “*satisfaction of advisory teachers and students mentored*”, as the main axis to know the motivations of the development of this action as well as the improvement proposals arising from the start of this guidance practice.

Regarding the satisfaction on the lived experience, when asked, both groups, teachers (78.6%) and students (93.8%) think that it has been a positive experience and that it has fulfilled their expectations.

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In second place they were required to say which were the improvements they proposed to optimize this program. Data at Table 2 shows the proposals collected by some students that focus, among others, on asking for more sessions (18.8%), for more information on the professional future (8.3%), the possibility of choosing the counselor (8.3%) and more information about academic advising programs (8.3%).

Table 2: Students' proposals to improve the program

What improvements would you suggest?	Frequency	Percentage
More sessions	9	18,8%
More information on professional employment and training	4	8,3%
Development of a guidance program	3	6,3%
More information to students about tutoring	4	8,3%
More availability of advisors	2	4,2%
Perform joint sessions with other mentored groups	3	6,3%
Include tutoring in teaching schedule, or as a subject	3	6,3%
Possibility to choose the counselor	4	8,3%
Organize more guidance activities	2	4,2%
Total	34	70,8%

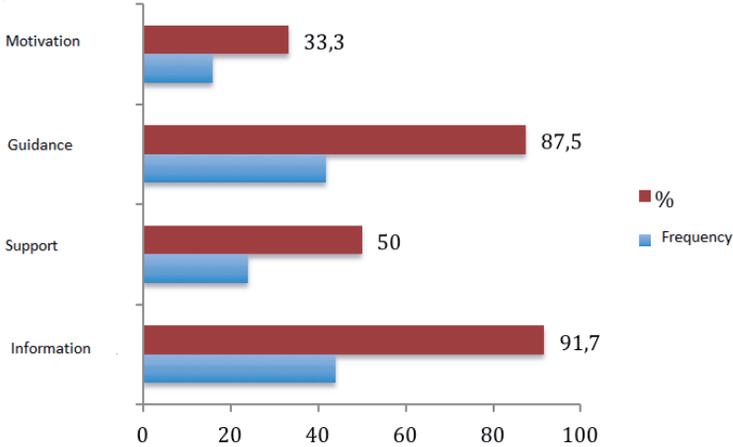
In table 3 we describe the proposals made by teachers, mainly focused on the need of training related to guidance and tutorial practice (35.7%), on the activities planning design (14.3%) and on the recognition for participating students (14.4%).

Table 3: Teachers' proposals to improve the program

What improvements would you suggest?	Frequency	Percentage
Counselors training	5	35,7%
Start of activity at the beginning of the course	1	7,1%
That the counselor is a teacher of the group	1	7,1%
General information to the students at the beginning of the course	1	7,1%
That students can choose their counselor after the first trimester	1	7,1%
That guidance is taken into account by students	2	14,3%
Set a schedule of activities	2	14,3%
Define the tasks of the advisors properly	1	7,1%
Total	14	100%

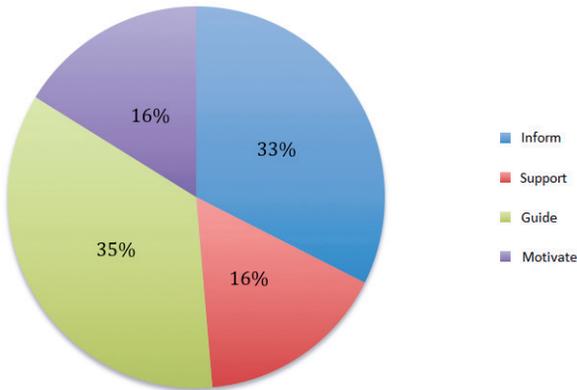
As we have noticed, students' opinion about what they had expected to reach, information has been the most significant (91%), followed by 87% guidance and 50% support. We can see that motivation has been the factor less considered by students (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Students' expectations



At last, when asking the teachers about the tasks carried out in their advising practice (see figure 3), they state that they have informed (85%) and guided (92%) in most cases. In this way, we can confirm a correlation between both, the most demanded tasks required by students and the tasks carried out by teachers.

Figure 3: Academic counseling tasks



4. CONCLUSIONS

From this initial study, we can agree with later works (Álvarez and González, 2008) and notice that students consider academic advice carried out by teachers as necessary and valid for their comprehensive development and their university career. It is about optimizing their skills and training to face the issues that can arise throughout their academic career (Amor, 2016a, p.106). Likewise, teachers appreciate this practice as a very positive experience, which is necessary for their teaching realization. It is a model of academic tutorial which was identified by Bisquerra and Álvarez (1998) and is currently developed by Barberis and Escribano (2008) in which *students are no longer a passive element that receives guidance, but he is the one who takes his own academic decisions and who is responsible of its consequences ...*" (Sanz Oro, 2010: 349).

The main conclusions we've reached, make us think about the current situation, to propose new lines of comprehensive practice according to our reality with the following objectives:

- Make academic inclusion easier for students in the university context and encourage their participation in the university life.
- Provide academic support to students to help them to define their academic and professional project.
- Guide students on options of employment and training.

Finally, from these first results, we believe on the development of a position of teachers that performs the guidance and mentoring practices to university students. This idea is supported by Salinas and Cotillas (2005) when they refer to the need of teachers to stop being the source of all knowledge, and start guiding students.