To Meet The Academic Advising Needs Of The Students In A More Interactive And Effective Way

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Abstract

The School of Engineering at the University of Duhok is seeking the ABET accreditation. One of the problem addressed by ABET is the advising issue. ABET accreditation require that each student should meet his academic advisor at least twice per semester. Advising has some difficulties. First, each advisor has to advise big number of students. Second, students usually do not come to the advisor office due to time clash between their time table and the advisor time table. Third, students with communication problems and those who feel shy usually hesitate to face advisor. There is significant effort by the School of Engineering to improve the advising process. One new method used is to meet the academic advising needs of the students in a more interactive and effective way is face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class. Face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class were implemented over a four-month period to 38 students. This paper describes the advising experience conducted at semester 1, 2011-2012 in School of Engineering at the University of Duhok. Results show that the experience was successful and solved a lot of problems as well as ABET Accreditation requirement.

Key Words: Academic debate class, ABET, Academic advising needs.

Introduction

Academic advising at the University of Duhok is an important partnership between students, faculty, and staff. The advisor is a valuable source of support and information to the students throughout their academic career and will help them set and achieve their academic and professional goals.

The School of Engineering at the University of Duhok is seeking the ABET accreditation see ABET (2010). ABET is the recognized U.S. accredit of college and university programs in applied science, computing, engineering, and technology. Accreditation ensures the quality of the postsecondary education students receive.

ABET requires that students be evaluated, advised, and monitored in a manner consistent with program objectives. ABET accreditation require that each student should meet his academic advisor at least twice per semester. The problems facing academic advising are that each advisor has to advise big number of students, the students usually do not come to the advisor office due to time clash between their time table and the advisor time table. Some students are also shy and have problem in communication and cannot express the problems they are facing. There is significant effort by the School of Engineering to improve the advising process. To achieve that, School of Engineering is trying to develop advising culture by encouraging all students to contact their advisor. The students are also requested to get their 70% year work marks (before final exams) from their advisors. By these mean students are encouraged to meet their advisors and discuss various academic issues concerning student's performance and problems. One new method used is to meet the academic advising needs of the students in a more interactive and effective way is face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class. Face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class were implemented over a four-month period to 38 students. This paper describes the advising experience conducted at semester 1, 2011-2012 in School of Engineering at the University of Duhok. A questionnaire was prepared to evaluate the advising

experience and results show that it was successful and solves a lot of the advising problems as well as ABET Accreditation requirement.

1- Related studies

One of the primary goals of the current study's research was to ensure that graduates are prepared to meet the demands of today's global society. Meeting this goal is an enormous task in itself, and it becomes even more complicated when coupled with the increasing number of students. Technology affords mechanisms to achieve this goal, especially in the area of advising. Sotto (2000) explained that numerous modes of technology are available to assist with academic advising. These include synchronous advising, videoconferencing, and the Internet. Dahl (2004) reported on best practices in online advising and stated that recent technological and societal changes led to current and increasingly widespread online.

Polson (2003) added that graduate programs tend to enroll students who manage full-time employment, the needs of children, elderly family members, community responsibility, and the task of accurately assessing their responsibilities. In light of these demands, the academic adviser is central to graduate student success. Polson proposed that graduate programs respond to today's graduate students with sensitivity, flexibility, and creativity.

Reporting on seven "feasible and realistic" computer-based advising strategies, Wallace and Wallace (2001, p. 196) described the use of e-mail, newsgroups, text-based computer conferences, videoconferences, computer-based voice communication, and shared applications. Wallace and Wallace proposed that distance advising practices known as virtual or electronic office hours offer students inexpensive or free direct communication with the adviser. Additionally, they stated that computer-based approaches also provide a record of the advising session. The study found that students preferred videoconferences. In light of the seven computer-based advising mechanisms, participants reported appreciation for the clearly verified involvement of a "real" person (Wallace & Wallace, p. 206).

Luna and Medina (2007) found that virtual academic advising met the rural graduate students' needs better than traditional advising. Stating the point more strongly, graduate student participants reported the necessity of in-person advising as "no longer valid" (Luna & Medina, p. 25). The researchers went on to state that graduate students need for information outweighs needs for counseling, mentoring, and social connections with advisers.

Sabrena O'Keefe (2009) described how academic advisers can create and utilize customized Student Engagement Inventory and Student Engagement Resources forms to facilitate student involvement in campus engagement opportunities.

Pamela (2009) introduces a Virtual Advising System (VAS) that is based on videoconferencing technology and compared the traditional academic advising process with a virtual advising system (VAS) process.

2- Objective of the Work

The objective of this work is to improve the advising process. One new method used is to meet the academic advising needs of the students in a more interactive and effective way is face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class. Academic debate course is created in order to solve the problems encountering the ABET accreditation requirement in School of Engineering at the University of Duhok, and discussion is implemented over a four-month period to perform advising to 38 students.

3- Academic debate class community

Academic debate class communities, differ from traditional communities because they do exist as social relationships in groups in common place. Academic debate class communities encourage communication and the building of relationships between the members and they have a leader and they all share the same goals or interests. In a Course Management System, instructors encourage students to form communities so the

students can share knowledge, collaborate on projects and learn to work together in groups. Student's satisfaction in the course, retention of the coursework and overall learning are much better than ABET Accreditation.

4- Academic debate class formation

Students seek other students with whom they have a common or shared interest. (Palloff, 1999). As students come together from all over the Kurdistan sharing common interests, an academic debate class is formed. This produces a safer environment for the members and allows them to interact uninhibitedly. Students in academic debate class are motivated to remain a part of the academic debate class community by frequent and timely participation and respect for other members. Students are more likely to find time to participate in the academic debate class community when they develop a learning relationship with other members.

5- The synchronous advising academic debate class community

To meet the academic advising needs of the students in a more interactive and effective way, participants in this research facilitated face-to-face advising meetings through the formation of a synchronous advising academic debate class community using academic debate class discussion questionnaire.

All students in the academic debate class community had the same adviser and were instructed to schedule an advising session with the adviser. The advising session was conducted using the academic debate class face-to-face method. Following the advising session, the students completed a questionnaire designed to evaluate the advising process. The questionnaire contained evaluative questions. This allowed students to evaluate and provide detailed comments about the advising process.

6- Student Evaluation:

Evaluations about the face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class were carried out by Water Resources Engineering students from two classes during Semester I of academic year 2011-2012. A total of 27 students in two classes (out of 38 students) responded to the face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class than using the ABET accreditation-specific questionnaire, shown in Table (1), representing a return rate of 71% for the survey. The first and most apparent observation is that a significant percentage of students, about 89% of the sample, do seem to prefer to work with face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class than using the ABET accreditation. Other observations were that 79% of the students reported that the overall layout of the face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class was pleasant and 84% reported that the organization of the resources into groups (according to week or topic) as useful. Concerning feedback, 81% of the students liked being able to get the feedback given to other students.

The student's response for the questionnaire is shown in figure (1).

Table (1) Face-to-face advising meetings through **a**cademic debate class **Questionnaire Results**

		Questions	Agree	Disagree
Q1		I prefer using face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class than using the ABET accreditation.	34	4
Q2		The face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class were easy for students to communicate.	35	3
Q3		More effective way is face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class than the ABET accreditation.	35	3
Q4		Students can meet his academic advisor more often than using the ABET accreditation.	32	6
Q5		A lot of problems can be solved in more interactive through academic debate class than the ABET accreditation.	32	6

| Q6	I liked being able to see our academic advisor.	36	2
Q7	The overall layout of the face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class was pleasant.	30	8
Q8	The organization of the resources into groups (week or topic) was useful for the face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class.	32	6
Q9	The advisor was becoming a valuable source of support and information to the students throughout their academic debate class than the ABET accreditation...	35	3
Q10	I liked being able to achieve our academic and professional goals throughout their academic debate class than the ABET accreditation...	33	5
Q11	I liked being able to get advising messages in different ways.	31	7
Q12	I liked being able to get the feedback given to other students via the academic debate class than the ABET accreditation...	31	7
Q13	Overall, I would enjoy using academic debate class than the ABET accreditation... again.	36	2
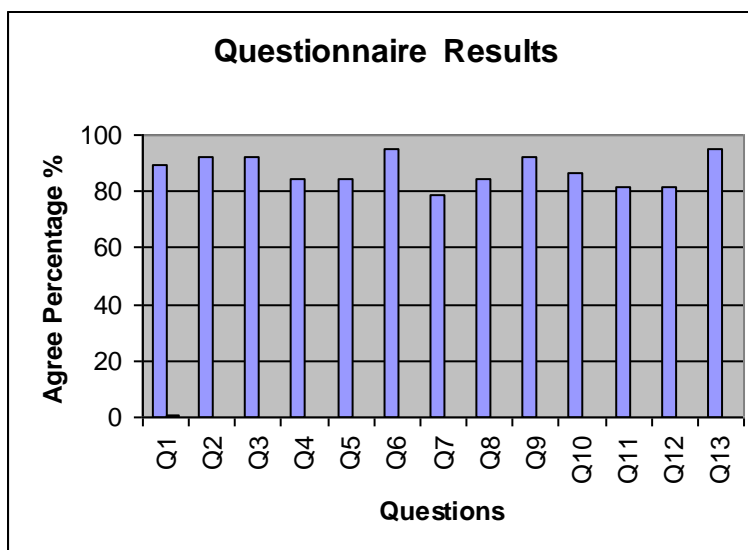
Figure (1) Questionnaire results

Results

The student responses were positive about the academic debate class advising process. Eighty nine (89%) percent reported very good results with the academic debate class advising system and evaluated it to be better than ABET Accreditation, and eleven (11%) percent chose not to answer all questions.

Conclusion

In this work a synchronous academic debate class advising system is introduced. The objective of this current research study is to conduct the academic debate class advising process in the School of Engineering at the University of Duhok. This system is build in order to solve the problems encountered in the ABET accreditation. Face-to-face advising meetings through academic debate class were implemented over a four-month period to students in two classes. The advising experience conducted at semester 1, 2011-2012 in School of Engineering at the University of Duhok. This system provides a mean to improve the interaction between academic adviser and his students. Results show that the experience was successful and solved a lot of problems as well as ABET Accreditation requirement.

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