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A Critical Role of Academic Advisory Service in a part of the Learning Commons Facility

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Abstract:

The academic libraries are undergoing a radical transformation deriving from changes in teaching and learning, new information technologies, and new needs of students. Therefore, the learning commons enabling the librarians and faculties to support the mission of the university to enrich student learning, are important features in today's academic library. The academic advisors who were picked out among graduate students have been serving to undergraduate students in the library of Tsurumi University since 2004. This paper is to clarify the critical role of the academic advisory service as part of the learning commons facility on the basis of practical experience in the library of Tsurumi University.

Keywords: academic libraries, learning commons, academic advisory service, academic advisor, undergraduate students

Introduction

The evolution of digital technologies has caused many librarians to rethink their roles, facility, and organizational structures. By focusing on the larger social and spatial context in which technologies are used to enhance the learning process, academic libraries across the country are beginning to realize the possibilities of what a library can be.

The academic libraries are undergoing a radical transformation deriving from changes in teaching and learning, new information technologies, and the new needs of students. Therefore, the "Learning Commons" enabling the librarians and faculties to support the mission of the university to enrich student learning, are important features in today's academic library. Whether the librarians call themselves an "Information Commons", "Learning Commons", "Knowledge Commons" or "Academic Commons", they are envisioning new spaces and new partnerships in which create environments that can support the integrated service needs of the digital generation (Beagle, 2008; Schader, 2008; Gould, 2011).

The "Learning Commons" model functionally and spatially integrates library services, information technology services, and media services to provide a continuum of services to the user, a blending of staff knowledge and skills, and referral to appropriate areas of expertise. It is a dynamic place that encourages learning through inquiry, collaboration, discussion and consultation (McMullen, 2008).

Institutions of higher education are changing their educational approach from a "teaching" paradigm to a "learning" paradigm. This transformation requires an emphasis on student learning outcomes. The library has a significant role in the learning process, and it may be the most important observation post for studying how students really learn. Since learning commons are student-centered, it is important to involve students in the planning process and to incorporate their perspective into the planning（Weiner and Weiner, 2010).

The "Learning Commons" brings external functions and activities into its environment and provides more seamless integration of services through collaborative partnerships throughout the entire building（McMullen, 2007).

The terms of "Learning Commons", Academic Commons and Knowledge Commons are found throughout the literature and on academic libraries' websites. Although these terms are often used interchangeably with Information Commons, the literature suggests there are some notable differences among them (Britto, 2011).

Academic advisory service has been incorporated into the services available to undergraduate students as a learning commons facility or standard library service in several university libraries in Japan. The term of "Learning Commons" is gaining popularity in Japan (Ueda, 2008;Hirota, 2011;Donkai, 2011).

The implementation and enforcement of such an academic advisory service has been in operation in the library of Tsurumi University since the academic year of 2004-05. Under

general direction, academic advisors are responsible for assisting the university-wide development of a relationship-based model of academic advising in support of the educational success on undergraduate students.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the critical role of the academic advisory service as part of the learning commons facility on the basis of practical experience in the library of Tsurumi University.

Methods

The academic advisory service was introduced as a part of the learning commons facility into the library of Tsurumi University in the academic year of 2004-05. The academic advisors in the library of Tsurumi University were chosen from graduate students by faculty staff members on the basis of their perceived academic skills. They are employed and serve for academic advising in support of the educational success of undergraduate students.

There are two graduate schools in Tsurumi University, the School of Dental Medicine and the School of Literature. The School of Literature is constituted of three special fields of study, contemporary and/or classic Japanese, English literature and scientific analysis of archeological materials. Accordingly, one graduate student from each of these four academic areas is chosen each year to be an academic advisor. There are therefore four academic advisors in operation for the full year since 2004.

A survey in the form of a questionnaire was conducted on the Internet in March 2012 to all persons who had an experience with academic advisors since the academic year of 2004-05. As the Japanese academic year starts on April in each year, the total number of academic advisors since the academic year of 2004-05 until the end of academic year in March 2012 should be total 32.

However, several students stayed on in their posts for two years, so the number of students who served as academic advisors is actually 26. The survey was answered by 14 students with an academic advisor experience. The 54 % of 26 students who are the actual number of academic advisors answered a questionnaire.

It is possible to sub-divide the list of 16 questions into six main groupings as shown in Table 1.

The Group One, Qs1-6, attributes of academic advisors, the Group Two, Qs7-8, attributes of the types of questions from consultor, the Group Three, Qs9-10, attributes of the beneficial effects on student's behaviors, the Group Four, Qs11-12, attributes of the beneficial effects on student's communication skills, the Group Five, Qs13-14, attributes of the beneficial effects on academic advisor, and the Group Six, Qs15-16, attributes of the suggestions for improvement to the operation of academic advisor service.

Table 1. The Questionnaire items to Academic Advisors.

Group	No	Items
1	1	Academic advisor's major field of study
	2	A period of time in charge of academic advisor
	3	Minimum amount of time with a consultation per student
	4	Maximum amount of time with a consultation per student
	5	Average amount of time with a consultation per student
	6	What grades of students visited as consultor to academic advisor were the majority?
2	7	What types of asking from consultor were the majority?
	8	Please write precisely on askings from consultor in order to make the content understandable.
3	9	What kind of beneficial effects had on student's behaviors, such as learning skill, school life, etc.?
	10	Please write precisely on beneficial effects on student's behaviors.
4	11	What kind of beneficial effects had on student's communication skills, such as building a successful relationship, viewing oneself from the third person, raising awareness of the issue, etc.?
	12	Please write precisely on beneficial effects on student's communication skills.
5	13	What kind of beneficial effects had on academic advisor, such as consulting skills, cognized what's really going on student's thought, to get a point of my observation on education and research, etc.?
	14	Please write precisely on beneficial effects on academic advisor.
6	15	Suggestions for improvement to the operation of academic advisor service
	16	Free description to the operation of academic advisor service, the lectures and the whole issues on Tsurumi Unversity, etc.

Results

  The academic advisors kept a business diary on each day of duty. The library staff supported and consulted the activities of academic advisors based on the business diary written by them on a daily basis. The graduate students who were academic advisors contributed to these efforts through their subject-related knowledge of academic practice and their own thorough understanding of undergraduate student development.

It seems clear that the service was popular as shown in Table 2. The number of undergraduate students visiting academic advisors increased year by year from the academic year of 2004-05 to 2010, it showed a trend to increase the number of visitors from 83 in the academic year of 2004-05 to 182 in the academic year of 2010-11. The current result shows undergraduate students who would like to try using the service has increased gradually over the years.

The number of visitors in the academic year of 2007-08 was lower than the other years because of academic advisory service in the academic year of 2007-08 working out latter half of the year only as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.　The Progress of Academic Advisory Service by Graduate Students.

Department/School; graduate students are attached to	Number/Counts	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Japanese Literature	Visitors	13	33	30	26	32	12	23	5
	Days of duty	25	23	27	18	31	31	17	12
	No. of visitors per day of duty	0.5	1.4	1.1	1.4	1	0.4	1.4	0.4
English and American Language and Literature	Visitors	10	7	41	43	125	162	90	30
	Days of duty	20	22	26	14	23	29	51	20
	No. of visitors per day of duty	0.5	0.3	1.6	3.1	5.4	5.6	1.8	1.5
Cultural Properties	Visitors	12	30	72	14	58	14	38	11
	Days of duty	23	24	26	20	31	23	24	19
	No. of visitors per day of duty	0.5	1.3	2.8	0.7	1.9	0.6	1.6	0.6
Dental Medicine	Visitors	48	34	43	12	40	42	31	23
	Days of duty	26	27	31	19	27	27	25	15
	No. of visitors per day of duty	1.8	1.3	1.4	0.6	1.5	1.6	1.2	1.5
Total	Visitors	83	104	186	95	255	230	182	69
	Days of duty	94	96	110	71	112	110	117	66
	No. of visitors per day of duty	0.9	1.1	1.7	1.3	2.3	2.1	1.6	1.0

As shown in Table 2, the days of duty by graduate students at the Department of English and American Language and Literature in the academic year of 2010-11 were nearly twice days of one as compared with the number of duty on the other years because duty hours per working day were changed from 4 to 2 hours.

In the academic year of 2011-12, however, there was a marked decline in the number of visitors. It is too early to ascertain precisely why this was the case, but it is assumed to be related to the general disruption caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. Maybe explain that the academic advisory service was not able to make public to

newly-enrolled students well, especially in the early part of the academic year of 2011-12.

The number of graduate students having an academic advisor experience who were answered a questionnaire is shown in Table 3. As the Japanese academic year starts on April in each year, the total number of academic advisors since the academic year of 2004-05 until the end of academic year in March 2012 should be total 32. However, several students stayed on in their posts for two years, so the number of students who served as academic advisors is actually 26. The survey was answered by 14 students with an academic advisor experience. The percentage of 14 students answered a questionnaire per the total number of different students as academic advisor was 54.

Table 3. The number and percentage of graduate students having an academic advisory experience who answered a questionnaire.

Department/School; academic advisors are attached to	Graduate students having an academic advisory experience who answered a questionnaire(AQ)	(% for AQ)
Japanese Literature	2	14
English and American Language and Literature	2	14
Cultural Properties	4	29
Dental Medicine	6	43
Total	14	100

The amount of time required for a consultation per undergraduate student is shown in Table 4. The most left-side column from the number of 1 to 14 in Table 4 shows each graduate student who had an academic advisory experience. The overall means of amount of time with a consultation per undergraduate student were 98 minutes in the maximum value, 12 minutes in the minimum value, and 25 minutes in the average value, respectively.

Table 4.   Amount of time required for a consultation per undergraduate student

Graduate Students who experienced the advisor	Amount of time per student (minutes)		
	Minimum	Maximum	Average
1	3	15	10
2	10	180	20
3	5	120	20
4	5	120	15
5	15	60	30
6	3	70	20
7	10	40	15
8	20	60	30
9	3	60	20
10	15	60	30
11	30	100	40
12	20	60	30
13	5	240	15
14	30	180	60
Overall mean	12	98	25

The values for each academic advisor are dispersed widely, as follows in the maximum values from 15 to 240 minutes, in the minimum values from 3 to 30 minutes, and in the average values from 10 to 60 minutes, respectively.

The survey revealed that the amount of time required for a consultation per undergraduate student was largely dependent on the specific content of their consultations from undergraduate students.

What types of questions from students are higher proportions in all questions from undergraduate students is shown in Table 5. It became clear that the most common question was "course content", the second one was "writing a report", and the third one was "how to study in class", respectively.

What beneficial effects of academic advisory service are there on behaviors of undergraduate students? The results are shown in Table 6.

It appeared to have beneficial effects on student's behaviors. The most common beneficial effect was "How to complete coursework assignment", the second one was "Acquisition of necessary capabilities of writing a report", and the third ones were "Assimilation of lesson contents", "Approaches to logical thinking" and "Raising of learning motivation", respectively.

Table 5. Types of questions from undergraduate students as a consultor.

Types of questions	Quantity of responses(QR)	(% for QR of the total)
Course content	12	24
Writing a report	9	18
How to study in class	7	14
Campus life	5	10
Life counseling	3	6
Relationships with friends	2	4
Family life	2	4
Working part-time	2	4
Tuition	0	0
Others	7	14
Total	49	100

1) Multiple answers allowed.

Table 6. Beneficial effects on undergraduate student's behaviors.

Beneficial effects on student's behaviors	Quantity of responses	(% for QR of the total)
How to complete coursework assignment	8	16
Acquistion of necessary capabilities of writing a report	7	14
Assimilation of lesson contents	6	12
Approaches to logical thinking	6	12
Raising of learning motivation	6	12
Taking of notes	3	6
Selection of theme and subject	3	6
Raising of the ability for creating documents	3	6
How to advance to graduate school	3	6
How to balance coursework and part-time job	2	4
Others	4	8
Total	51	100

1) Multiple answers allowed.

The academic advisory service to undergraduate students being recognized as more effective to gain communication skills is shown in Table 7.

From the results of our questionnaire, the students who gained the communication skills appeared to have benefitted from the activity. The most common beneficial effect was "Raised awareness of issues", the second one was "Building of successful relationships", and

the third ones were "Being able to view oneself objectively" and "Having a chance to talk with others across boundaries", respectively.

Table 7.   Beneficial effects on undergraduate student's communication skills.

Beneficial effects on student's communication skills	Quantity of responses	(% for QR of the total)
Raised awareness of issues	8	20
Building of successful relationships	6	15
Being able to view oneself objectively	5	12
Having a chance to talk with others across boundaries	5	12
Discovering necessity of self-expression	4	10
Recognition of personal failings	3	7
Improved hindsight skills	3	7
Raising awareness of crisis	3	7
Self-expression skills	2	5
Character-building	2	5
Others	0	0
Total	41	100

1) Multiple answers allowed.

On the other hand, Table 8 shows the beneficial effects on academic advisors as a result of academic advisory service to undergraduate students.

From the results of Table 8, it is clear that the academic advisors gained the beneficial effects through academic advisory service to undergraduate students. The most common beneficial effect was "Becoming aware of student's own thinking", the second one was "Improvement in consulting skills", and the third ones were "Importance of financial support to academic advisor" and "Gaining perspective on education and research", respectively.

The responses to the questionnaire about the operation of academic advisory service are shown in Table 9. There were several proposals from academic advisors to improve the quality and operation of academic advisory service in the future.

The students with academic advisor experience who answered questions about the operation of academic advisory service. The most common suggestion for improving the quality and operation of academic advisory service was "Greater publicizing activities through faculties to undergraduate students", the second one was "Greater publicizing activities to entire membership of university", and the third one was "Integration of academic advisor service into curriculum", respectively.

Table 8. Beneficial effects on academic advisors.

Beneficial effects on academic advisors	Quantity of responses	(% for QR of the total)
Becoming aware of student's own thinking	12	24
Improvement in consulting skills	10	20
Importance of financial support to academic advisor	8	16
Gaining perspective on education and research	8	16
Understanding well present status of students and courses	4	8
The forging of new relationships outside of laboratory	3	6
Increased in self-awareness through advisory service	2	4
The sharing of information with other person	1	2
Interconnections to other communities	1	2
Others	2	4
Total	51	100

1) Multiple answers allowed.

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Table 9. Suggestions for improvement to the operation of academic advisor service.

Suggestions for improvement	Quantity of responses	(% for QR of the total)
Greater publicizing activities through faculties to undergraduate students	9	26
Greater publicizing activities to entire membership of university	8	23
Integration of academic advisor service into curriculum	7	20
Flexibility in hours of operation	4	11
Flexibility in regard to location within library	3	9
Review of hourly payments	1	3
Others	3	9
Total	35	100

1) Multiple answers allowed.

Through analysis of the results of our questionnaire, we have been able to clearly identify how to improve on the qualities of academic advisory service.

Discussion

The operation of the academic advisory service, in which graduate students appointed by faculty researchers became academic advisors for undergraduate students, has been judged a great success. There are four readily identifiable areas in which the activity of the advisors has been beneficial:(a) advisors are seen as reliable mentors for undergraduate students, (b) their presence and encouragement promote a drive to learn, (c) their presence, advice and

encouragement also help to provide social & psychological stability for undergraduate students, which, in turn, foster social development, (d) the service, helping students to be better learners and to grow in many other ways, helps to raise the standards of the university itself.

Since the academic year of 2004-05, the librarians cooperate closely with faculty researchers for the success of an academic advisory service in part of a learning commons in the library of Tsurumi University. The experience in Tsurumi University will be of assistance to develop the academic advisory service in academic libraries in other universities.

Such academic advisory service has been in operation in in several university libraries in Japan, but, until now, there has been insufficient study and feedback on the efficiency of such a service (Ueda, 2008).

Through the experience of this service in the library of Tsurumi University, we have been able to gain a new perspective on the role of graduate students, as important facilitators in the learning commons of the universities. With the academic advisors in the library of Tsurumi University, seriously keeping a business diary of the day-to-day activities, and through the constant support and engagement of the library staff, we have obtained previous insights into how this service can be maintained and improved.

It is clear from this survey by a questionnaire that the graduate students who worked as academic advisor also achieved a positive outcome for themselves from their experiences of the academic advisory service, in which they offered their subject-related academic knowledge to undergraduate students and gained a thorough understanding of undergraduate student development theories in a practical and hands-on manner.

However, successful the scheme has been not achieved from experiences of academic advisory service in the library of Tsurumi University until now. We should continue our efforts toward incorporating this valuable experience as part of the learning commons facility of academic libraries in supporting the mission of the university to enrich student learning. We believe the academic advisory service as part of the learning commons facility will become a much more important feature in academic libraries in the coming years.

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