

Almost half of student population drops out

# Advising combats high attrition rate

By DENISE RIOPEL  
Of the Emerald

Just when most students are gearing up for midterms or scrambling to finish term papers, an unfortunate few will have already decided that the college life is not for them.

Between 40 and 50 percent of the University's student population drops out before graduation, a fact that underscores the seemingly alarming attrition problem.

But apparently administrators are not alarmed.

"The administration is concerned with the long-range problem," says Judy Bogen, retention facilitator. "The pool of high-school graduates is going to drop in the next five years. It is a fact that freshmen that enter today are not going to go in the same lock-step as they did 10 years ago."

Bogen adds that "stop-outs" — students who leave the University and come back after one term or one year — are figured into the attrition rate, thus making the total number appear higher.

But analyzing figures does not solve the attrition problem. One important aspect in the dropout issue deals with prevention — prevention meaning guidance.

"Advising contributes more to the student staying on campus," agreed Mariliss Strange, associate director of academic advising. She said advising "is

concerned with the student leaving for the wrong reason."

Although appointments with an adviser are not required, incoming freshmen and transfer students must see an adviser prior to fall registration. It is often suggested that a student periodically check in, especially as graduation draws near.

Implementation of a 90-hour review, which has been legislated by faculty, would mandate that every student see an adviser after completion of 90 credit hours.

Shirley Wilson, director of academic advising, said in an Emerald story Tuesday that a system to accommodate the ruling would be to the students' benefit.

Scott Bassett, ASUO president, also said Tuesday he supported the ruling, but that he feels the current advising system "stinks."

"I don't disagree with Bassett's concern," Wilson says. "Advising hasn't been a strength."

"But it hasn't been reinforced," Strange adds. "Theoretically, advising is a responsibility of every faculty member."

Strange says students fail to meet an adviser either because they don't know who the adviser is, no faculty member is available, or just "student timidity."

"Some students want to be told (to see an adviser)," Strange says. "It's the 'nobody



Judy Bogen

Photo by Joe Schnabel

told me' syndrome against the 'I don't have enough time.'"

Strange explains that the advising coordinator for each department is well advertised in the time schedule. Each coordinator works with the advising office and matches students with faculty members.

Advisers also meet with students during Early Orientation and Registration Program sessions, which allow attention to be given to each individual prior to the academic year.

"We did a much better job of advising pre-major students of EORP this year because faculty agreed to meet in one central place, namely the EMU," said Wilson. The closer proximity of departmental advisers in the

EMU allowed information to be more easily transferred, she said.

In addition to faculty efforts, upperclassmen acting as peer advisers work with students to add another dimension of guidance. Strange says the specially trained peer advisers complement, rather than act as substitutes for, the faculty adviser.

Wilson says that attrition is also due to a student's lack of connection with the University.

"Anonymity is the problem," she adds.

While advising deals primarily with those persons considering leaving school, other segments of the University can help a confused student.

"We lose students because

we never adequately inform them," says David Hubin, director of the Learning Resources Center.

A course entitled "Introduction to University Study (Academic Learning Services 101) will be offered next term to inform students of University resources on a "consumer level," Hubin says.

"This will not be a tourist orientation," he stresses. "The program will be based on a similar course being given at the University's Honor College."

The advising department is slated to stage an "Academic Information Matinee" — using the EORP model — Nov. 8 in the EMU from 2:30-4:30 p.m. The workshop is another attempt to get experts in academic areas out to students, Strange says.

A new retention committee, composed of a dozen faculty members and students, will study the attrition problem and work on solutions to increase student involvement.

The draft of a letter announcing the new committee members is awaiting University Pres. William Boyd's signature.

"We have to recognize different education opportunities beyond campus," commented Bogen, "opportunities that extend the life of the student before completing his or her degree."

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