“Advising and Orientation”
Outline of project activities supporting first year and prospective students

“Advising and Orientation” is part of the university-wide programme “richtig einsteigen,” which aims at enhancing student success by focussing activities on the first year experience. It is financed by the German government (2012 until 2020). Further projects address mathematical and literal skills, peer learning activities, professionalization of teaching at the university and data based analyses of study success.

Specially designated academic advisors for first year and prospective students are available as contact persons in the different disciplines. These advisors take care of all kinds of questions and problems of first year students concerning their academic life – by dealing with it themselves or connecting students to the appropriate services. In this way, students find orientation from the very beginning.

The academic advisors also provide guidance for prospective students in order to foster an appropriate choice of subject. Furthermore, they communicate insights from their advisory contacts to responsible faculty members and create networks where first year issues are discussed. These activities promote institutional changes for better study conditions.


Main project activity: one-on-one advisory contacts
Complementing activities are ...

... for prospective students
Self-assessment Instruments
Websites for study information
* Choosing a career* - talks
* e.g. online ‘preparation check’, tests used at schools, assessment days at the university

... for first year students
New or changed concepts for orientation days
Talks and advisory groups
Workshops
* e.g. career counseling, choice of profiles
* e.g. self and time-management, learning techniques, prepare consultation hours, group work

Evaluation conditions:
* comprised two semesters (2014/15), conducted by an external agency (HIS-HE)
* mainly qualitative data (documentation system of goals and activities, analyses integrated)
* some quantitative data (documentation of demand, short online survey for assessment of advisory contacts, questionnaires for workshops and orientation days)

Evaluation dimensions:
* awareness level // demand-orientation and usage // user rating // effectiveness // sustainability

Evaluation outcomes:
* Intensive publicity led to a very high number of contacts (6400 per year) with the intended group who always gave positive assessment and feedback.
* A structured assessment of needs served as a basis for planning further project activities. Users stated that the activities met their needs.

Effectiveness is concluded by professional development in the project: it is in accordance with the ‘competency profile for advisors (counselors) in (higher) education, profession and employment’ (result of a research financed by the German government).

An unresolved issue is the financing of staff costs when the government funding runs out at the end of 2020.

For sustainability please see activities in the right box above.

Several activities are carried out by the academic advisors’ project team across departments, supported by a project coordinator. These activities aim at enhancing qualified academic advising and add further measures to improve study conditions. Hence sustainability is focused.

Engage in professional development
Set advisory standards and disseminate them to other faculty members with advising function
Develop specific advising concepts for the different departments
Activities are e.g. to work out specialized knowledge and keep it up to date, learn counseling techniques, engage in a reflective culture, be aware of topics related to university policies, cooperate with relevant partners, use supervision
Advisory standards are e.g. low-threshold services, welcoming and student-oriented mind-set, transparency, confidentiality, reliability
Contents of concepts are e.g. advisory services provided, information flow and cooperation, quality assurance, developmental goals and strategies.

www.uni-bielefeld.de/richtig-einsteigen