CHALLENGES IN ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT FOR HORTICULTURAL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA’S SATELLITE CAMPUSES

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Abstract. Place-bound student populations attending horticulture classes at the University of Florida’s satellite campuses are quite diverse. The demographics of the student populations enrolled in horticulture programs in the state create unique challenges in academic advisement. Student ages range from 21 to 75 years, and many individuals are motivated by a desire to change careers or complete a degree started some time ago. Some students have completed extensive course work at other institutions prior to applying for admission to the University of Florida. Academic advisement can be challenging because of the uncertainty of course content and vigor of prior academic preparation. To meet these challenges, we developed advisement checklists to help us assist students in meeting their educational goals.

The development of educational programs to reach students who are place-bound as a result of work, family, or other responsibilities is not a new concept. The University of Florida has met this challenge by offering students the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in horticulture at the main campus in Gainesville as well as at one of the five satellite locations in the state (Fig. 1). While student registration, fee payment, financial aid, and other student support services are handled by personnel located at the campus in Gainesville, each satellite location handles the on-site instruction and daily student activities, including student advisement.

Advisement Challenges

One challenge is the diverse demographics of student populations enrolled in the environmental horticulture programs throughout the state. Student ages range from 21 to 75 years with an average median age of 35-38 years. A recent trend observed has been a shift to a bimodal distribution of ages with two groups: 26-30 and 41-45 years.

In addition to the distribution of ages, students also have varied experiential and educational backgrounds in horticulture. The majority of students in these programs work full or part time in addition to attending classes (Duke et al., 1994). In 1997, approximately 85% of the students enrolled in classes at Fort Lauderdale were already employed in the horticulture, turf, or pest control industries (Beauchamp, 1997). Many students are taking courses for job advancement while others are taking courses in anticipation of a career change or for personal interest (Duke et al., 1994).

Some students have taken extensive course work at other institutions or already have a baccalaureate degree, often in a field not closely related to horticulture. This is challenging because of the uncertainty of course content and vigor at prior academic institutions. Students often have lower division (freshman and sophomore level) course deficiencies that they need to make up while others are not interested in pursuing a formal BS degree and wish to takes courses as non-degree seeking students (Verkade and Fitzpatrick, 1989).

Advisement Checklists

To meet these advisement challenges, we have developed advisement checklists for the Fort Lauderdale and Homestead programs. When a prospective student contacts us for infor-
mation about the academic program, we start a folder with their name, address, and educational background and ask them to bring us all of their transcripts. Using this information, we complete a community college transfer checklist that outlines the lower division requirements for admission into the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) (Fig. 2). We record which CALS requirements the student has already met and which requirements need attention by comparing the University of Florida CALS lower division requirements with the course descriptions and numbers listed in the other institution's catalogs. The second advisement checklist outlines the core classes for the horticulture degree (Fig. 3). At the end of each semester we update these checklists with the semester completed, grade, and number of credits earned.

By using these checklists, it is easy and accurate to track the student's progress. We also can determine which courses will transfer from other universities to fill both lower and upper division requirements. The best attributes about the checklists are that they are easily adaptable to different backgrounds and curriculums and they can be put into a computer system spreadsheet.

Literature Cited