Observations of Behaviors and Practices

The purpose of direct, formal observations of behaviors and practices in an Advising Program evaluation is to systematically capture naturalistic descriptions of student behavior, dialogue, and interactions during advising sessions. Such descriptions can provide insight into what participants in the Advising Program actually do. Direct, formal observations also provide evidence.

These formal observations include the use of protocols, checklists, ratings, and field notes that document the behaviors and practices of students during their involvement in the Advising Program.

Observations are employed when:
- the program wants to capture real-time student behaviors and responses to advising
- the program wishes to describe characteristics and behaviors of individual students in individual sessions and workshops
- the program is seeking a method for understanding the context of and the activities, people, and interactions in the program
**Conducting Observations**
Since these observations can occur in a variety of situations, different scenarios are possible. The most common possibility is the one-on-one session between advisor and advisee. In such a scenario, the advisor-researcher could:

- keep a running record/checklist of notes listing topics, questions, behaviors, and reactions by the advisee during the session
- maintain a checklist of expectations for the session and mark which ones were addressed or not, with additional commentary contextualizing the list

Another formal scenario could be a special class/seminar/workshop offered by the Advising Program (see IUPUI in Resources section below). Such an organized event allows for documentation of a range of student behaviors and practices in response to the Advising Program. In such an event, facilitators-researchers could:

- keep track of the presentation and reception of advising topics
- record peer interactions around the Advising Program
- create regular opportunities for advisors to observe and respond to students and their needs

**Data Analysis**
- Checklists
  - Quantitative
    - Usage of scheduled times (time clock)
    - Description of environment
      - Signage
      - Directions
  - Qualitative
    - Student behaviors and questions

**Caveats**
- Be aware of undue influence by presence of researcher-observer (in this type of method, often the advisor).
- Plan for target behavior not always occurring during established observation times.
- Account for the complexity of characterizing and classifying observations.
- Be aware of the difficulty in interpreting observed behaviors and practices.
- Budget the time and financial resources for a potentially time-consuming and expensive process.

**Resources and Examples**
Indiana University/Purdue University (IUPUI) Student Observations Outside the Office: [http://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2013/02/conversations-enhance-advising-sessions/](http://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2013/02/conversations-enhance-advising-sessions/)

UCLA Interview/Observation Checklist: [http://career.ucla.edu/Images/2Students/InterviewPracticeFeedbackChecklist.gif](http://career.ucla.edu/Images/2Students/InterviewPracticeFeedbackChecklist.gif)