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n the spring 2006 *Liberal Education* article “Teachable Moments: Advising as Liberal Education,” Ned Scott Laff wrote that “advising can help students realize how their contextual and critical thinking continually helps them examine and be sensitive to new contexts that challenge their ways of understanding.” Further, he states, “in order to help students better understand the nature of liberal learning and how it informs their overall undergraduate experiences, advising must be reconceived as a liberal learning experience in itself.”

While editing this issue of *Peer Review*, I found it enlightening to read about the range of practices on today’s campuses that exemplify Laff’s description of effective advising. As an undergraduate student in the seventies, I attended two very different institutions; as such, my advising in each setting couldn’t have been more dissimilar. I liken my advising experience while enrolled in a large university to academic triage—my only contact with my adviser came in times of emergencies, such as having to obtain a signature to allow me to register or add/drop a class. At the other school I attended, a small college, my academic advisers throughout the years were more like primary care doctors—almost everything I did, curricular and cocurricular, I discussed with them.

To gain a sense of others’ academic advising experiences, I conducted a small informal poll of some my colleagues in which I asked them to recall and rate—from one (no impact) to five (a true academic mentor)—how important their academic advisers had been to their undergraduate academic successes. It was disheartening to hear that most of the group, which spanned from Boomers who graduated in the sixties to more recent Generation Y graduates, rated their advising experience as three or lower. The following comments represent the general sentiment of what I heard:

“I don’t remember if I even had an adviser,”

“I basically picked my courses myself,”

“There was no shaping in my advising experience, just compliance,” and

“After seeing that I was fairly competent in choosing courses, my adviser told me ‘You’re very well advised by yourself.’”

However, sprinkled among the negative comments were a few positive remembrances:

“[My academic adviser] really understood how I learned, what my strengths/weaknesses were, and where I wanted to go in my education.”

“The academic adviser took the time to get to know me and I got to know him. Most importantly, he asked me pivotal questions about my interests and my future plans. I would definitely attribute much of my undergraduate success to this adviser.”

AAC&U senior fellow Jerry Gaff clearly recalls his adviser’s influence on his undergraduate career as a member of the class of 1958 at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. “The guy who was my major adviser was very thoughtful and helpful. We talked about courses in my field and he helped me determine my future plans. Since I was interested in religion at that time, he even arranged for me to get some ‘real world’ experience by setting me up to preach my one and only sermon at a local church.”

Ideally, as in Gaff’s experience, academic advisers can have a memorable impact on student satisfaction and success. The 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that “the quality of academic advising is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment for students at four-year schools.” The NSSE data further showed that “students who rate their advising as good or excellent are more likely to interact with faculty in various ways, perceive the institution’s environment to be more supportive overall, are more satisfied with their overall college experience, and gain more from college in most areas.”

Academic advising should give students a compass to navigate the maze of choices they will encounter throughout their undergraduate education.

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY
Academic Advising in the New Global Century: Supporting Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

- Susan M. Campbell, associate vice president for academic affairs, University of Southern Maine
  Charlie L. Nutt, executive director, National Academic Advising Association

In her article “Losing Sleep over Student SUCCESS?” in the spring 2006 issue of The Presidency, France A. Cordova, then chancellor of the University of California–Riverside and now president of Purdue University, stresses the importance of student success and achievement to all higher education stakeholders—parents, students, educators, as well as the public at large. She also acknowledges the challenges inherent in supporting a concept that is sometimes difficult to articulate. Cordova suggests that a renewed focus on student success could “reinvigorate the public’s appreciation” of higher education as a place of opportunity in which to grow, to dream, and to think. In this regard student success is about facilitating curiosity, wonder, and immersion in the college experience and, as Cordova says, institutions should focus their efforts on supporting those college experiences that create, foster, and cultivate student curiosity and engagement in learning—all in service of their achievement or a set of essential outcomes as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has suggested. While certainly there are many ways to support student immersion and engagement in learning, one strategy that is increasingly being acknowledged for its potential in this regard is academic advising.

ACADEMIC ADVISING AS AN ENGAGING EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

When viewed as an educational process and done well, academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their engagement, success, and the attainment of key learning outcomes. Viewing academic advising as an educational process moves it from a paradigm of teaching that focuses on information or inputs to a paradigm of learning that focuses on outcomes for student learning. In this way, academic advising supports key institutional conditions that have been identified with promoting student success. Such conditions include setting high expectations, providing support, offering feedback, and facilitating involvement in learning through frequent student contact with faculty and staff (Tinto 2002). As a strategy, academic advising holds the potential to address these key conditions for student success that Tinto notes, particularly when it is approached as a process grounded in teaching and learning. The case for the power of academic advising in supporting student success has been made over and over again in the literature, but perhaps not succinctly or clearly enough, particularly in relationship to supporting institutional goals for persistence toward graduation and the achievement of key learning outcomes.

In his seminal work, Leaving College, Tinto (1993) describes retention not as a goal but as a by-product of a successful and engaging college experience. AAC&U’s 2007 report, College Learning for the New Global Century, also notes that retention and graduation rates are important, but the ultimate measure of progress and success is whether students have learned what they need to know to be successful both professionally and in their personal and civic lives. Thus, for institutions, the focus of attention ought to be on developing value-added educational opportunities that actively engage students in their own learning. If we do this, the by-product will be increased student satisfaction, learning, and persistence toward graduation. How does academic advising fit into this scenario? Tinto indicates that institutions have come to understand that quality academic advising is at the very core of successful student success initiatives, for it reflects an institution’s commitment to the education of its students. Indeed, in Making the Most of College, Richard Light (2001) found that academic advising was perhaps one of the most “underestimated characteristics of a successful college experience,” adding further evidence that
academic advising, when done well, adds value to the college student experience.

The concept of engagement in learning is not that old, but not that new, particularly in student affairs. In Involving Colleges Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) concluded that institutions that value and expect student initiative and responsibility encourage involvement. These researchers also suggested that campuses should “spend more effort encouraging student involvement in learning opportunities than designing new ones.” AAC&U has identified a set of these practices that research demonstrates have an impact on student success. In a forthcoming AAC&U publication, George Kuh makes the further point that these practices have an even greater positive impact on students are still underserved by higher education. Effective academic advising practices are especially important for these often first-generation students. Encouraging students to take advantage of learning opportunities that are designed to challenge their intellectual and social development and add value to the college experience is central to good academic advising and at the heart of student engagement.

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005), talk about the dimensions of the college experience as including both student behaviors and institutional conditions. They describe engagement as the intersection between student behaviors and institutional conditions over which institutions have at least marginal control. The challenge is directing students toward those activities that are the “right” ones for student learning and success. The concept of engagement is significant when thinking about academic advising, for we would argue that all institutions have some control over the design and delivery of academic advising. We would also argue that, when done well, academic advising can serve as a powerful lever in improving the college student experience and in supporting an institution’s goals with regard to persistence and time to graduation because it provides the structured opportunity to direct student behavior toward the ‘right’ activities.

Hunter and White (2004) write that academic advising is “perhaps the only structured campus endeavor that can guarantee students sustained interaction with a caring and concerned adult who can help them shape a meaningful learning experience for themselves.” As such, academic advising can and should play a pivotal role in directing student behavior toward those activities that will nurture and support their success toward educational, career, and life goal achievement.

When equated with course schedule development and registration, the potential of academic advising in facilitating student immersion and engagement in learning as Cordova (2006), Tinto (1993), and Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) describe is diminished and trivialized. Academic advising that facilitates student engagement and success is developmental and, in that regard, acknowledges that one lens cannot be used to view the experience and skills of all students. Effective developmental academic advising supports the social and intellectual growth that occurs during the college experience, regardless of the age at which students begin their postsecondary journeys or their level of preparation for college-level work. It is grounded in teaching and learning, understands, embraces, and is responsive to the complex nature of effective teaching as well as to the myriad ways in which people learn. Developmental academic advising is inextricably linked to the educational mission of the institution and is considered, recognized, and rewarded as a form of teaching. This is the academic advising of the twenty-first century, and colleges and universities nationally and internationally are acknowledging and realizing the potential of this powerful educational strategy to engage and support student learning.

In 2006, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) developed the Concept of Academic Advising in response to the growing body of literature that, however loosely or tightly, coupled academic advising to student engagement in learning. The concept intentionally and rightfully aligns academic advising with teaching and learning and more fully integrates it into the educational fabric of an institution—not merely “layered on” as a student service. The preamble of the concept makes this critical educational point: Academic advising is integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education. Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community. Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution. Regardless of the diversity of our institutions, our students, our advisers, and our organizational structures, academic advising has three components: curriculum (what advising deals with), pedagogy (how advising does what it does), and student learning outcomes (the result of academic advising), (2006)

This preamble outlines several key concepts to guide academic advising on campuses today. First, the concept frames academic advising around a student’s
learning—learning that concerns much more than knowing about institutional policies and processes and includes knowledge about the broad essential outcomes of a good college education. Second, the concept outlines that the activities of academic advising are intentional and occur throughout a student’s undergraduate experience and not merely in the first year, first semester, or until a program of study as been developed. Sequencing and scaffolding learning experiences as part of a comprehensive educational plan assumes a collaborative partnership between students and advisers in which the roles and responsibilities of each are clearly defined. Finally, since we recognize academic advising really is a form of teaching, we must explicitly develop and articulate the curriculum for academic advising, address the myriad pedagogies available to address students’ individual learning styles, and identify the expected outcomes for student learning within the context of the academic advising experience. The challenge for academic advising is significant; facilitating the development of coherent educational plans across a student’s educational career is no small task and requires those who are committed to the intellectual and social development of students both in and outside the formal classroom.

Marc Lowenstein (2005) articulated the comprehensive nature of the academic adviser’s role in this way: An excellent adviser does the same for the student’s entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course.

The similarities between the role of an academic adviser and the role of a teacher should not go unnoticed: both develop clear curricula that specify expectations for learning, both craft clear sets of student learning outcomes, both create a variety of learning experiences for students to learn what is expected, and both identify appropriate measures to determine the level of achievement of these outcomes in relation to learning expectations. Lowenstein’s portrait of the academic adviser as educator suggests that, regardless of who serves in the formal academic advising role—professional staff member, faculty member, student peer adviser, etc.—the inherent importance of the role and the responsibilities of academic advising should be valued and supported as being integral to the teaching and learning process.

**THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING IN STUDENT LEARNING SUCCESS**

Nationally, campuses are taking seriously the potential of academic advising in improving student success. The trends include acknowledging the contribution of effective academic advising to the quality of the college student experience by integrating improvements into campus planning; aligning statements of mission, goals, and program objectives with a campus’s overall mission, designing initiatives to identify key outcomes for student learning and the delivery of academic advising, and implementing effective reward and recognition systems for academic advising. What emerges from these trends is the potential of academic advising in the following set of guidelines that institutions can use to develop a coordinated, effective academic advising program that is linked to teaching and learning and focused on student learning success.

Collectively develop and widely share a philosophy/mission for academic advising that links it to the teaching and learning mission of the institution. These collectively developed statements of philosophy, in turn, guide the development of mission and goals statements at other organizational levels, such as school/college/department or program. For institutions with highly decentralized academic advising programs, these statements provide a framework within which to guide and foster consistency in academic advising across a campus.

Identify clear outcomes for student learning and the delivery of academic advising that are derived from the philosophy/mission and that guide the development of learning opportunities. It perhaps goes without saying that in order to link an academic advising program to an institution’s teaching and learning mission, the program must be outcomes-based and student-learning focused.

Increasingly, campuses are developing assessment plans for academic advising that identify what students are expected to learn as a result of participating in academic advising. Framing the intentions of academic advising in this way changes the conversation about what academic advising is and, in turn, how it is delivered. Treating academic advising as curriculum development opens avenues through which the intentions of academic advising can be communicated to students. Increasingly, campuses are adopting a syllabus format to communicate the intentions of and expectations for academic advising. The advising syllabus articulates the particular, and perhaps unique, goals and outcomes for academic advising, acknowledges the variety of ways in which academic advising might be organized (e.g., individual school/college-based, centralized advising center) and delivered (e.g., faculty, professional academic advisers, peer advisers), and identifies expectations for students and advisers in the academic advising relationship. More recently, some academic advising programs have elected to submit these syllabi to school/college curriculum review committees for official review and validation as valued institutional experiences.

Design systemic and systematic processes of assessment to inform and support changes in philosophy and practice. An outcomes-based approach
to academic advising demands the development of an assessment plan through which learning opportunities are developed, benchmarks for success are identified, and multiple measures are used to gather evidence to inform improvement and demonstrate program success. Essential to this process is the identification of measures that go beyond mere measures of satisfaction and facilitate understanding of what and how student are learning what we expect them to learn. Multiple measures can be both quantitative and qualitative. The latter should include conversations with students about knowledge they have gained, skills they have developed, as well as their values regarding higher education and their futures. Clearly, these conversations extend beyond those about institutional policies and course requirements that are most often equated with academic advising.

Implement comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs that are informed by the identified outcomes for student learning and for the delivery of academic advising. These professional development programs are built around the mission and philosophy of academic advising, the expected outcomes for student learning, and the desired outcomes for the delivery of academic advising. These comprehensive programs recognize the myriad ways in which professional development programs can be delivered and utilized both campuswide and in more localized formats, as well as in combination with low- and high-tech pedagogies. Campuses that are effective in designing and delivering professional development programs for academic advising ensure that they are organizationally sustainable. On some campuses these programs are coordinated by someone responsible for academic advising professional development, while on others these programs are aligned with the centers for teaching and learning. Regardless of where it is housed, any professional development program for academic advising must consider advising as a form of teaching in order to be effective and successful in supporting student learning.

Develop campus programs and structures that recognize the value of academic advising and reward advisers for quality academic advising and for their contributions to the field. Increasingly, campuses are demonstrating, in key ways, the value of academic advising to the success of their students by rewarding the work of professional and faculty advisers. There is significant work being done on many campuses to develop career ladders or paths for professional advisers that reward such things as advanced graduate work in the field as well as research and publication in the field of advising. These career ladders or paths demonstrate, in very concrete ways, the institution’s commitment to quality academic advising. For faculty members, more and more institutions are beginning to revisit policies concerning how academic advising is regarded in promotion and tenure processes. Research and scholarship in advising are becoming more universally accepted and supported as a field of applied research and publication.

The trends in academic advising indicate that institutional recognition of academic advising is a campuswide responsibility in which all constituencies—including administrators, students, faculty, and staff — work together to promote student success. As higher education continues to find itself increasingly under the microscope of internal and external scrutiny, it must identify strategic ways to demonstrate student satisfaction and learning. If considered integral to the teaching and learning mission of an institution, academic advising then offers the potential for this visible demonstration of student satisfaction and learning through the experiences of students who are well served and connected to the campus. As Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) write in Student Success in College “Advising is viewed as a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them.” Indeed, these connections are essential to student engagement and the role of academic advising in facilitating them should not be underestimated.

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Toward Reflective Conversations: An Advising Approach that Promotes Self-Authorship

Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, distinguished professor of educational leadership, Miami University
Patricia M. King, professor, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan

Academic advisers can play a special role in students’ lives, as they are in positions to brainstorm possible futures with their advisees and map out paths to get there. In partnership with other faculty and staff, they can use this opportunity to promote students’ self-authorship, the capacity to internally generate beliefs, values, identity, and social relations (Baxter Magolda 2001; Kegan 1994). Jane Pizzolato writes that “if students were self-authored, they would be more likely to choose majors that were appropriate and interesting to them, engage in critical thinking about their choices, and develop healthy relationships with diverse others” (2008, 19). Becoming self-authored requires transformational learning that helps students “learn to negotiate and act on [their] own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those [they] have uncritically assimilated from others” (Mezirow 2000, 8). Unfortunately, most traditional-age college students have not yet developed these capacities, both because many enter college having been socialized to uncritically accept knowledge from authorities (including well-intentioned advice), and because many influential people in students’ lives are inclined to simply offer such knowledge. Academic advising is a key venue through which educators can assist students through this transformation.

This transformation extends beyond developing cognitive skills. The interplay of one’s view of knowledge (epistemological development), view of self (intrapersonal development), and view of social relations (interpersonal development) are clearly articulated in research recounting young adults’ transformation from external definition to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda 2001; Kegan 1994). Late adolescents typically view knowledge as certain and possessed by authority figures. They do not see themselves as active agents in constructing knowledge, and their interest in acquiring others’ approval often restricts their ability to engage in debating multiple perspectives. For example, a student in a course where the instructor modeled knowledge construction offered this reaction:

I understand what he was trying to do. He was trying to give examples to show what happened. But if he had just said cryoprotectants whatever, just said the point, I would believe him because he is the teacher. I don’t need the proof, it’s not like I’m going to argue with him about it. (Baxter Magolda 1999, 3)

Her assumptions about knowledge precluded her from seeing that her instructor was modeling knowledge construction. Instead, she interpreted his approach as trying to prove the truth. Her view of herself precluded the possibility of arguing with the teacher; she perceived their teacher/student relationship as one of purveyor and receiver of knowledge, respectively. These assumptions about knowledge and self lead students to view faculty and academic advisers alike as having the formula for students’ academic and career success.

The shift to self-authorship occurs when students encounter challenges that bring their assumptions into question, have opportunities to reflect on their assumptions, and are supported in reframing their assumptions into more complex frames of reference. However, college students commonly report that adults and peers in their lives tend to attempt to solve their problems...
for them rather than helping them learn to do so themselves. Thus, one of the myriad reasons that this shift seldom occurs during college may be related to the way advice is given and the lack of opportunities for guided reflection. Based on our work with the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, we constructed a conversation guide to assist educators in engaging students in reflective conversations. Here we portray how this guide can be used in academic advising.

**THE WABASH NATIONAL STUDY CONVERSATION GUIDE**

The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education Interview was structured to learn how student characteristics, including their views of knowledge, self, and social relations, mediated their participation in educational experiences. The interview further explored how students interpreted their educational experiences and which ones promoted their epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. Encouraging interviewees to reflect on their experiences and consider why they found them useful helped students consciously analyze their assumptions about the world, themselves, and their relationships. Realizing that the structure of this interview could be beneficial in routine interactions, we translated the interview to a conversation guide for educators who wish to engage students in guided reflection.

In the introduction to the guide, we describe the purpose of these conversations as offering students an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their experiences and to help them develop reflective habits. In academic advising contexts, an additional purpose is using these reflections to guide academic decisions. The role of the educator is to initiate conversation, listen, and help students learn from their experiences.

The guide highlights ways to initiate conversation, invite students to tell their stories, and encourage them to reflect meaningfully on what their experiences mean for developing beliefs, identities, relationships, and future plans. This conversation is most successful when the student does most of the talking and the educator’s contributions are limited to comments that keep the reflection flowing and encourage deeper reflection. *The key element is encouraging students to make sense of their experience rather than the educator making sense of it for them.*

Although there is no particular formula for this conversation, we suggest that it unfold in four general phases: getting acquainted; encouraging the student to reflect on important experiences of his or her choosing; encouraging the student to interpret those reflections; and concluding the conversation. Successful conversations will be directed by the students’ interests and by their willingness and ability to reflect on and interpret the experiences they choose to share.

**Getting acquainted and building rapport.** Start the conversation with questions that invite students to tell you about themselves in ways that are comfortable. Possible conversation starters include:

- Tell me a little about yourself
  —For first-year students: tell me about your background and what brought you to [institution]?
  —For continuing students: tell me about your background and your involvement here at [institution]?
- What did you expect college would be like for you this year?
- How has your college experience gone for you so far? To what extent does it match your expectations?
- What has surprised you most about your college experience so far?
- What has disappointed you most about your college experience so far?

When using these conversation starters, try to get the student to talk substantively about the topics. Nudge them to give you a good description of particular experiences they bring up, why these were important to them, and what they took away from these experiences.

**Encouraging reflection about important experiences.** Once the conversation is rolling, you can use the following ideas to encourage students to identify, reflect on, and make sense of their salient experiences. Ideas for soliciting these include:

- Tell me about a significant experience you’ve had so far at college.
- What has been your best experience thus far?
- What has been your worst experience thus far?

As you ask for these types of stories, invite students to describe and examine them fully, including what made it noteworthy,
and how it affected them. To help students reflect meaningfully, encourage them to explore beyond what happened to them to why it was important or meaningful and how they interpreted the experience. For students who need a little more structure in talking about their experiences, these prompts might be useful:

- Tell me about some of the challenges you’ve encountered. Follow-up: How did you approach them?
- What kind of support systems do you have? What role have they played in your college experience thus far?
- Have you had to face any difficult decisions? Follow-ups: What was that like? How did you handle it?
- College is often a time of exposure to multiple perspectives—encountering people who grew up differently than you, people who hold different beliefs than you, encountering new ideas in classes, etc. Have you encountered new perspectives? Tell me about them. Follow-up: How did that experience affect the way you see things?
- Are there aspects of college that you find stressful? If so, tell me about them. Follow-up: what are the common threads of the aspects you find stressful?
- Tell me about aspects of your college experience that have brought you the most joy or satisfaction. Why do you think this is the case?

**Encouraging interpretation of these reflections.** Near the close of the conversation, it is helpful to encourage students to step back and “make sense” of the stories they’ve been sharing. The goal at this point is to help students interpret how their experiences have affected them and how they might use insights from this conversation to inform academic decisions. Possible approaches to prompt this interpretation include the following questions.

- It sounds like you’ve had a variety of experiences thus far. How do you think coming to college here has affected who you are and the way you see yourself? Has it affected the way you see your academic goals?
- How do you think your college experience here has affected your beliefs or values?
- Tell me about what you’ve learned about relating to other people from your college experience.
- In what ways do you see yourself as the same as when you began college? In what ways do you see yourself as different than when you began college?
- What questions does this raise for you to explore in the future? How might you go about doing that? [Responses here might raise an opportunity to discuss choosing a major, internships, or other educational activities, and to offer resource referrals.]

**Concluding thoughts.** At the close of the conversation, affirm the value of students sharing their stories and of thinking through experiences to discern lessons and implications for one’s beliefs, values, identity, relations with others, and academic decisions. Encourage students to reflect regularly and to keep track of their reactions and insights. Invite them to bring those reflections to the next academic advising conversation. Respond to students’ requests for answers and advice by returning the focus to exploring and following up on their questions. If asked for your perspective, share it briefly, but emphasize the importance of students exploring what is most appropriate for them; you could also offer to think through the implications together.

**The goal at this point is to help students interpret how their experiences have affected them and how they might use insights from this conversation to inform academic decisions**

**Using Reflective Conversations to Promote Self-Authorship**

These reflective conversations are one approach in educators’ overall efforts to guide students through the transformation from external definition to self-authorship. They are one way to construct learning partnerships that intentionally combine challenge, reflection and support to help students develop increasingly complex frames of reference to guide their academic decisions. What kinds of experiences enable college students to transform their frames of reference in ways that enhance their capacity to use their understanding to fuller advantage? Baxter Magolda (2004) drew from an extensive body of research to synthesize key components of experiences that young adults identified as helping them achieve self-authorship, and subsequently proposed the Learning Partnerships Model. Learning partnerships challenge learners by explicitly portraying knowledge as complex and socially constructed,
students’ current assumptions yet invite exploration of more complex ones. (Detailed examples showing how these principles have been used to guide educational and administrative practices are described in Baxter Magolda and King 2004.)

This conversation guide creates a learning partnership that can help students learn from their experiences in ways that enable them to make better informed academic decisions and learn what it means to take responsibility for their academic and life choices (Pizzolato 2008). These conversations guide students to consider how their values, interests, skills and goals for further exploration affect academic and career choices. Were these types of conversations to become commonplace throughout students’ advising experience, reflection could become a mainstay of their college learning, and advising a richer context for learning. Students would be able to take better advantage of educational opportunities by better understanding their experiences and based on this understanding, construct such opportunities themselves.

Despite their value, the insights gained from these reflective conversations must be used carefully. Students at early phases of development should not be judged as incapable of growth because their development reflects a successful response to external demands rather than their capacity for complex meaning making. There is an inherent tension in accepting students “as they are” while encouraging them to transform their meaning making frameworks through learning and personal growth (i.e., to change). We resolve this tension by using students’ development as a starting point, avoiding judging them as deficient or incapable of moving forward, and helping them evaluate their current frameworks in terms of their current struggles and future goals. Another dilemma arises from the rapport these conversations may generate. Students may share information the adviser might have preferred not to know about students’ personal behavior, which may make the adviser uncomfortable and uncertain how best to respond. Balancing respecting students’ privacy and educators’ responsibilities is a challenge. Used judiciously, the insights gained from such conversations can promote transformational learning toward self-authorship.

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Establishing Effective Advising Practices to Influence Student Learning and Success

Visit any campus in the United States and ask undergraduates what they are unhappy about, and you are likely to get the same three answers: parking, dining hall food, and advising. Academic advisers across the country have to wonder how their dedication to learning and hard work on behalf of students results in being on this auspicious list. In 2002, this was the case at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh, and the chancellor and provost decided it was time to do something about the state of advising—both structurally and culturally.

The University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh is a rural, regional, comprehensive campus located in northeastern Wisconsin. With approximately 10,000 undergraduates, the campus’ two largest populations are first-generation and transfer students. The most common incoming first-year student major is “undecided,” and 50 percent of students declaring a major will change their major before the middle of their sophomore year. This is a population that is especially able to benefit from developmental and intrusive academic advising.

With the help of an outside consultant, UW–Oshkosh came to understand that we suffered from a common plague in higher education—paralysis by analysis. We had been gathering information about advising—students’ (dis)satisfaction, lack of participation by faculty, enormous adviser-to-advisee ratios, advising limited to course selection and registration—and making recommendations about how to change it for ten years. However, we never actually changed anything.

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE IN ACADEMIC ADVISING

In 2002, UW–Oshkosh made a commitment to improve advising and other student academic support services, and a rapid transformation took place based on the findings from ten years of study and from the consultant’s recommendations. The university hired the first director of advising in thirty years, established an advising center, adopted a new campus advising model (Total Intake), established the Advisory Council for Comprehensive Academic Advising to advise the provost and director of advising about campus advising issues, and expanded the academic advising staff.

Approved in May 2004, the university’s advising program now includes a definition, goals and outcomes, and defined roles of faculty, students, and the advising center. This provides a framework for academic departments, colleges, and the advising center. College and departments are strongly encouraged to structure their advising practices on the campus’ advising definition, goals, and outcomes.

Our campus defines advising as the “dynamic relationship between a student and adviser. At the center is a shared responsibility for a coherent education plan that incorporates personal, social, academic, and career considerations. Advising focuses on helping students identify life goals, acquire skills and attitudes that promote intellectual growth, and become academically successful.”

Campuswide intended outcomes of academic advising state that

- Through advising, students will learn to frame questions about the future and seek information needed to formulate answers. As a result, they will practice decision-making strategies and self-leadership skills that they will use throughout their lives.
- Through advising, students will be able to put the college experience into perspective, especially with regard to understanding the value of the learning process, whether it is independent or collaborative.
- Through advising, students will experience stimulation of and support for their quests for an enriched quality of life. They will be encouraged to utilize unique opportunities to structure
their college experiences so as to maximize their abilities to lead their lives as they decide. Comprehensive academic advising shall follow the developmental advising hierarchy, defined as:
- exploration of life goals, values, abilities, interests, limitations
- exploration of vocational/career goals
- selection and design of academic major or program of study
- selection of courses
- scheduling classes

TRANSFORMING THE UNIVERSITY ADVISING CENTER
Advising at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh is now quite different from previous practices; course selection is now situated in the broader context of exploration, self-knowledge, goal setting, decision making, and planning for a major, career, and lifelong learning.

At the undergraduate advising resource center (UARC), the campus advising goals and outcomes have been further developed by the advising staff, and they provide the foundation for all of the center’s activities; including hiring, annual personnel and program evaluation, and project prioritization. The center’s goals are to:
- create an atmosphere of support and provide expert information to students
- promote decision making and independent thinking by assisting students in their exploration of personal, academic and career goals
- develop practices that support student success
- establish effective working relationships with faculty, staff and administration in support of the Total Intake Model of advising
- increase campus awareness about advising
- promote ongoing professional development of the UARC staff

The center is structured to support the university’s advising mission and goals. The advising staff is organized by curricular area, with an advising team assigned to each college (Letters and Science, nursing, business, and education and human services). The structure enables the center to support the needs of all undergraduates on the decision-making continuum, from decided to changing to undecided and exploratory. The center also provides support to faculty advisers and departments because each adviser has advising expertise in a curricular area. This structure enables regular communication between the academic departments and the advising staff. A few examples of the benefits of these relationships include an adviser and department chair providing collaborative group advising to the department’s majors and advisers participate in departmental discussions about the impact of curricula changes. As a participating in departmental discussions about learning outcomes in the major, the adviser is able to articulate how advising practices support those learning outcomes, and consider how advising practices can be adapted to better meet the learning outcomes. The collaboration has benefited students, faculty and academic advisers.

THE STRUCTURE ENABLES THE CENTER TO SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF ALL UNDERGRADUATES ON THE DECISION-MAKING CONTINUUM, FROM DECIDED TO CHANGING TO UNDECIDED AND EXPLORATORY

The university has made a substantial commitment to the improvement of advising, and we need to know if what we are doing is having the impact that we intend. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) recognizes this challenge across institutions and advocates and supports the development of learning outcomes and advising assessment through annual workshops and advising-related research (www.nacada.ksu.edu).

Within the UARC, we use Maki’s assessment cycle (Maki 2004). In an ongoing process, we:
- identify outcomes
- gather evidence
- interpret the evidence
- implement change

Our established learning outcomes for students and for advisers are based on the advising mission and objectives. The UARC learning outcomes for students include understanding and taking responsibility for their role in the advising relationship; having the ability to read and understand their degree audit; understanding how policies and requirements affect their plans; understanding and articulating their major and career options based on their interests, skills and abilities; and being able to make effective decisions. Our learning outcomes for advisers include understanding and applying student development and learning theory; using feedback to understand students’ needs and to improve their advising practices; initiating and maintaining contact with faculty in their advising areas; and staying current on curricula.

The advising program gathers evidence from a broad constituency (faculty, nonadvising staff and administration, students) in order to understand how well the program’s activities achieve the outcomes. Prior to the campus changes in
advising, advising evaluation was limited to student satisfaction, and assessment did not exist. Now, the focus is on outcomes and learning. We collect information using the annual Educational Benchmarking, Inc., survey through a partnership with residence life; we conducted the first 360-degree program evaluation this year, and last year we conducted a campuswide survey asking students about their usage of, perceived importance of, and satisfaction with advising. Because we asked the satisfaction questions in the context of how often students had met with an adviser and how important they thought advising was to their academic progress, success and learning, we had a better understanding of what students’ satisfactions ratings meant. We learned that:

- our outreach to and communication with departments has the effect we intend, and we need to continue to increase outreach efforts
- first- and second-year students’ use of and satisfaction with academic advising has increased significantly
- upper-division student usage and satisfaction with advising has increased, however, compared to first and second year students, there is room for improvement for both faculty advisers and the advising center.

Annually, we process the results of the evaluations and determine how we can better support the advising mission and learning objectives. For example, we restructured appointments for first- and second-year students to provide more time with the adviser for major and career exploration; we created an advising syllabus and incorporated it into new student (first-year and transfer) orientation; and we are implementing adviser peer observation and evaluation. As we focus on how advising supports campus initiatives, we have identified three priorities this year: advising’s contributions to retention and first-year experience and engagement, and how advising can best support liberal education.

**ONGOING CHALLENGES**

Five years after the campus committed to changes in advising, student satisfaction and usage has increased annually, the adviser-to-advisee ratio has been reduced by 30 percent (putting it closer to national norms), faculty involvement in the professional colleges and across Letters and Science has increased, and we have expanded our focus from course selection to developmental and exploratory advising. While we have tackled every weakness with aggressive strategies, we are not done. There are still opportunities to align and improve our advising practices.

It’s clear that students are learning to make decisions from a variety of their college experiences, being able to attribute them to particular experiences is nearly impossible.

Another challenge to all developmental and intrusive advising programs is that students often want to be told what to do and when to do it. As a result, they don’t always enjoy the advising experience or think that it has helped them. Students also continue to confuse advising with registration issues such as course availability or how well the online registration system works. Therefore we need to continue to educate them about the purpose and practice of advising as a teaching/learning experience rather than a simple task (e.g. registering for classes).

Finally, evaluating faculty advising as part of the campus advising assessment process is a challenge. The Advisory Council is focusing on this as part of their work this year, and hopes to learn more about the junior and senior year advising experience, and to be able to address the gaps between the lower- and upper-division students’ experiences with advising.

While the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh’s advising program has made impressive and rapid progress over the past five years, there remains much work to do, particularly with regard to examining how and if our practices achieve what we hope they achieve. If our incremental improvements continue, we will have the opportunity to increasingly influence our students’ learning and success.

**REFERENCE**

Reenvisioning and Revitalizing Academic Advising at Western Oregon University

Karen Sullivan-Vance, director of the Academic Advising and Learning Center, Western Oregon University

Western Oregon University is a public, four-year, comprehensive, liberal arts university that is grounded in student access and success. Our incoming students are 51 percent first generation and 8 percent Latino/a. Located in the Willamette Valley, the university strives to help students attain a college education and change their lives.

In 2004, as part of its work on a new strategic plan, the university conducted a sample survey of approximately 600 students. At that time, 50 percent of students rated academic advising as poor. Hired as the director of the Academic Advising and Learning Center in August 2005, I was given the mandate to change advising. Fortunately for me, there were already many good systems and policies in place, thanks to the hard work of the previous director.

A SHARED MODEL OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

Coming into the director position, I made it clear that I am a developmental adviser. Many institutions and advisers still use prescriptive advising. In the latter model, there is a distinct power differential between the adviser and student. The adviser is in charge and tells the student what to do. From a theoretical standpoint, I base my interactions with students on the work of Burns Crookston and Terry O’Banion. Both Crookston and O’Banion presented their separate views on developmental advising in 1972. Put quite simply, they believe that advising is a holistic, developmental process. Scheduling classes, while important, is not the most important thing we do in academic advising. Instead, it is the questions we ask students to reflect on—what they are doing and why they are doing it—that is of fundamental importance. When a student announces they want to be a teacher, my immediate response is “Why?” I want students to learn how to articulate their academic goals, but in relation to their values and their life plans. It is the bigger picture of “Who are you and what do you want to do with your life?” Developmental advising focuses on student potentiality and student values, and how these values and potential relate to their academic goals.

Western Oregon University has a shared model of academic advising. The Academic Advising and Learning Center (AALC) works primarily with exploratory students, pre-education majors, and those who have questions about the general education program, known at Western as the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum. Prospective students, academically at-risk students, and any students who have questions about advising often use the AALC.

Western Oregon faculty are committed to working with students and helping them succeed. Once a student has selected a major, he or she meets with a faculty adviser in the chosen discipline. New faculty members are not assigned advisees until they have spent a year at the university. This allows them the opportunity to get to know the university and the policies and procedures prior to advising students.

Upon coming to Western Oregon University, my first task was to assess the current operations. In speaking with the staff, it became apparent that no one knew what or where the office mission was, and, therefore, no one was using it. An old copy of the mission was finally located, but it did not align with the university’s current mission statement. Around this time, one of the advisers decided to return to teaching, as she had been offered a position that paid more. Shortly afterward, the other academic adviser accepted a position in his academic field. Finally, the
receptionist decided to move to the East Coast. Only one staff member remained. In a matter of three months I had almost a complete turnover in staff.

Another challenge that I faced as the new director of academic advising was that my predecessor was still on campus in another position. Since I had been charged with revamping the advising system, I risked treading on a lot of sacred ground.

**TAKING ADVISING PRACTICES TO THE NEXT LEVEL**

In the midst of all this doom and gloom there was, however, a bright side. This unexpected turn of events allowed me the opportunity to look at advising and reenvision the process. The bones of the system were good; we just needed to take things to the next level. I was able to take the front desk position and pool that money with the other two adviser salaries to create three full-time, twelve-month positions, compared to the previous two advisers, who were full time for nine months. At the front desk, I used student peer advisers to answer phones, schedule appointments, and file. When three new advisers were hired, our first project together was to create a mission statement. We opted for this short but concise mission statement that accurately reflects the developmental process and is aligned with the university mission:

*The Academic Advising and Learning Center engages students in identifying and pursuing their educational, career, and life goals through personalized learning experiences. The AALC serves and supports students in developing collaborative relationships that foster student success.*

The next task set forward was to create an academic advising syllabus for students. Most students entering colleges and universities do not understand the role of an academic adviser. A syllabus sends a clear message to students that, first and foremost, this is a teaching relationship based on where that student is in his/her own development. One of my colleagues compares it to extemporaneous thinking because an adviser is constantly adjusting his or her guidance based on where the student is developmentally. A syllabus also sets up the learner outcomes and adviser/advisee responsibilities. This proved to be a great opportunity for the new advisers to work together to create a dynamic document.

Now that we had our foundation in place with a mission statement and syllabus the office was ready to move forward. One of our peer advisers painted the mission statement on the wall as you enter the office so everyone could see it. We posted the syllabus online and started handing it out to new entering students. It became a talking point in our presentations to new students at summer orientation advising and registration in the summer.

We also unveiled a new program called Academic Success and Advancement Program (ASAP), which was directed at helping academically at-risk students get back on track. ASAP is the umbrella under which several different types of intrusive advising reside. Intrusive advising is intentional and proactive rather than reactive and utilizes intervention strategies such as mandatory advising sessions to help students become successful. For example, we started a new course called Academic Success for students who were on academic warning or probation. This two-credit, graded course is voluntary and helps students develop the study skills needed to be successful in their coursework. Another instrument to help students is the Action Plan, an individual approach to assist students who are struggling academically. Students are referred by faculty and staff on campus to come to the AALC to develop a strategy to assist them with their academic pursuits.

**ASSESSING OUR EFFECTIVENESS**

As an office, the AALC staff began developing ways to assess our effectiveness. An in-office survey was designed for students to complete when they came in to meet with an adviser. There was a pre- and post-advising appointment assessment. The survey also included information from the syllabus as well as the appointment, giving us richer data from which to respond.

Sixteen months into my position as director, in collaboration with the then-dean of enrollment management, admissions and retention, and the
met by the desk—which can be seen as students walk in the front door and being by the entire staff. Now instead of having majors! created a plan that was embraced one of our students (love those math numbers continue to rise, it gives strength to the notion that we are accessible and students view us as a resource on campus. As the numbers continue to rise dramatically.

During the 2005–6 year we had 10,039 student contacts, which includes appointments, phone calls, walk-ins and tutoring. In 2006–7, that number rose to 12,939 student contacts. There were 1,179 more advising appointments in 2006–7 than in 2005–6. In the current year, we are already at 9,216 student contacts, and we expect to exceed last year’s number. As the numbers continue to rise, it gives strength to the notion that we are accessible and students view us as a resource on campus. Now students are sending their friends to meet with us.

Some of the reforms we’ve completed seemed like long shots at the outset. As a case in point, when we determined that our space was not being used functionally, one of our students (love those math majors!) created a plan that was embraced by the entire staff. Now instead of having students walk in the front door and being met by the desk—which can be seen as a roadblock to some — the front area features our student computers and study tables. The reception desk was placed halfway back and the advising offices completed the second half of the office.

What we lacked in financing we made up for in dreaming. I showed the finished plans to anyone who would look at them and talked about why we wanted to do this and how it would benefit students, especially providing more confidentiality during appointments. At the end of last year, the university had some funds left over that needed to be spent. Our plans were put forward by the associate provost and approved. By July, we had a newly reconfigured office that was not only aesthetically pleasing, but a more functional space.

SUPPORTING THE ADVISING STAFF
What are the best means to provide effective support to staff? As a director, I feel that one of my jobs is to model appropriate behavior to my students. In addition, I feel it is appropriate to model professional behavior to my staff. Since they are all at different stages of their careers, I find it useful to have each one develop a professional development plan. These plans are updated each year and allow the staff opportunities to identify areas they want to work on in the ensuing months. Together, we look for ways that they can attain the skills or opportunities needed to continue their growth as professionals. Given that I have no professional-development funds in my budget to help them, it means we have to get creative in finding opportunities and resources for them.

Only 7.9 percent of students rated advising as poor and 61.91 percent stated that advisers help students identify their educational, life, and career goals. We have come a long way in a few years, but we still have a long way to go. This summer, we will be creating a new plan to take us through the next three to five years. Included in that plan will be a new assessment cycle that we are rolling out this spring. One of my secret weapons as a director has been the support I have received from the National Academic Advising Association. Aside from opportunities to go to conferences and institutes, I have been able to pick up the phone on numerous occasions and call colleagues across the country. Their insight and problem-solving skills have allowed me to reframe issues and approach them from a different point of view.

Looking back, I have learned many things in this position. Perhaps the most important is that I work at an institution that truly values student learning. I work with faculty and staff who are passionate about teaching and learning, and most important, I work with incredible students each day. Good academic advising is labor intensive and time consuming, but in the long run, it is worth it.

REFERENCES
Centralizing Advising to Improve Student Outcomes

S. Jon Steingass, dean, University College, Virginia Commonwealth University
Seth Sykes, assistant dean, University College, Virginia Commonwealth University

In Making the Most of College (2001), Richard Light concludes that good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience. For many students, academic advising provides the only out-of-class contact they have with a faculty or member of the professional staff. Unfortunately, many college students express disappointment in the quality of advising that they receive. It is not surprising, therefore, that academic advising, along with parking, commonly receives among the lowest ratings on student satisfaction surveys. Although solving the complex transportation and parking needs of college students will continue to be a challenge for many institutions, the quality and nature of academic advising need not be.

ADVISING TODAY’S STUDENTS
Enhancing the quality of academic advising is essential to meet the challenges presented by the changing demographics and expectations of today’s students. The student body is growing ever more diverse with regard to ethnicity, cultural background, economic status, and academic preparedness. An increasing number of students come from groups that have been underrepresented and underserved by higher education in the past, including groups who have previously entered higher education in low proportions and those who have traditionally experienced high attrition rates.

If it is the intention of institutions of higher education to assist all students in succeeding, then some fundamental changes are needed—especially in the area of academic advising.

Students are more apt to succeed academically, establish clearer educational and lifelong objectives, and tailor their educational experience toward their goals and aspirations when they receive ongoing and meaningful academic advising. Compelling evidence links student engagement, academic success, and persistence with good academic advising. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, many colleges and universities have yet to maximize the full potential of academic advising. Improving academic advising is a pressing concern, and an ongoing, never-ending endeavor on many college campuses.

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a public, four-year, urban research university located in the city of Richmond, the state capital of Virginia. With nearly 32,000 students VCU holds the distinction as Virginia’s largest university with among the most diverse student populations in the state. Over the last several years, VCU has implemented a series of changes to student support services and academic advising in particular. New programs respond to data regarding the effect of advising on student engagement. Consistent patterns confirm that the more times students meet with academic advisers, the more satisfied they are with the advising services that they received. Similarly, students who meet with their advisers at least twice per semester persist at much higher rates and are more likely to be in good academic standing at the end of the first year in college compared to their peers who met fewer times with their adviser.

Students are more apt to succeed academically, establish clearer educational and lifelong objectives, and tailor their educational experience toward their goals and aspirations when they receive ongoing and meaningful academic advising.
Sweeping Changes in Academic Advising

Based on these compelling conclusions, the university implemented a series of sweeping changes in academic advising over the past two to three years to address stagnant retention rates, low levels of student engagement, and the high proportion of students who experience academic difficulty.

Sweeping change number one—Establishment of the University College. As one of the key initiatives of the VCU Strategic Plan 2020, the University College was established to provide a central home for the new core curriculum and campuswide academic support programs. The University College assumed academic advising responsibilities for all first-year students regardless of major, undeclared majors, pre-health and pre-law programs, interdisciplinary studies, and student athletes. A total of thirty full-time academic advisers (almost half of which were newly established advising positions) were appointed to the new university-wide advising center. This centralized advising model resulted in a decrease in the number of first-year students assigned to each professional adviser. Consequently, the size of the average advising caseload decreased from 300 first-year students to 175 advisees per full-time adviser.

Sweeping change number two—Development of programmatic advising goals and objectives. As the cornerstone of the University College, the academic advising program has established specific goals related to increasing student engagement, academic success, and persistence at the university. The advising program works on the principle that advisers can help students feel more connected with the university by increasing the number of advising interactions with each individual student. By feeling more connected with the university, students make more informed educational decisions, interact more with faculty, collaborate with other students outside of class, and report higher levels of satisfaction with their undergraduate experience. Consequently, students will experience higher levels of academic success and persist at higher rates.

Sweeping change number three—Creation of individual advising plans. A “one-size-fits-all” approach to advising is not the most effective way to serve the diverse student population in the wide array of academic programs offered at VCU. Consequently, each University College adviser determines the best advising approach for his/her students. Each adviser creates an advising plan that addresses key areas regarding how he or she will advise students and assess the effectiveness of advising. Prior to the beginning of each academic year, advisers submit their advising plans to their immediate supervisor to ensure that the plan contributes to the overall objectives of the advising program. At key periods throughout the year, the adviser and supervisor meet to assess adviser’s progress.

Sweeping change number four—Incorporation of proactive advising philosophy. Because many first-year students do not initially see the value of academic advising, the UC advisers take steps to take a proactive approach to connect with their students using a variety of methods. Students’ first contact with their advisers begins during summer orientation when students and parents learn about the advising program for the first year and meet with their assigned academic adviser. Each academic adviser strives to meet with each advisee a minimum of twice per semester. The first fall semester advising session takes place within the first six weeks of the term. At the conclusion of each advising session, advisers schedule a follow-up advising appointment. Throughout the academic year, advisers maintain regular contact with their advisees by sending announcements through e-mail, BlackBoard, and Facebook. As students exhibit at-risk behaviors such as low midterm grades and absences from class, advisers immediately contact students to address these issues.

Sweeping change number five—Collaboration between academic advisers and core curriculum faculty. As part of the strategic plan creating a new core curriculum, the university replaced freshman composition with a two-semester course sequence (Focused Inquiry) that targets five skill areas, writing chief among them. Nearly 175 sections of Focused Inquiry are offered each semester with approximately 22 students per class. The course incorporates an electronic attendance monitoring system. When students are absent from class, they receive an e-mail that encourages them to return to class immediately and to meet with their instructors to discuss the absence. At the same time, the students’ advisers are copied on the e-mail that the student receives. Advisers contact those students who have missed two or more classes to determine if there are underlying problems that are preventing them from attending class and other classes. Advisers
work closely with the core curriculum faculty to address other problematic behaviors that may be preventing students from being successful in their classes.

Sweeping change number six—Implementation of extensive advising training program. With the number of University College advisers and the comprehensive nature of its advising program, the University College has invested time and resources for developing an extensive training program. To this end, advisers spend two hours per week in ongoing training sessions to update them on the curriculum, policy changes, and campus resources. Each semester, the entire University College professional staff attends a half-day workshop to develop greater depth of knowledge and skills in a particular area of need. In addition, the University College coordinates the master adviser certificate program for new and experienced faculty and professional advisers from across the university. Established in 2005, the fifteen-hour training program is an important step in promoting continuous improvement of academic advising.

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVISING
Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the University College has incorporated a rigorous assessment system to measure the effectiveness of advising and to determine if adjustments are needed. Based on data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the VCU Center for Institutional Effectiveness (CIE), first-year students advised through the University College show higher levels of engagement and academic success and persist at higher rates. For example, NSSE reported a 14 percent increase in the number of students making more informed educational decisions compared to the previous NSSE administration. Similarly, NSSE reported gains in student engagement with their learning. For example, 10 percent more students reported that they collaborated with other students in studying outside of class. Additionally, the CIE reported the highest percentage of students ending the first year in good standing (76 percent) as well as a record percentage of students returning for a second year (82 percent).

A number of conclusions can be drawn from centralizing advising services for all first-year students. Most important, improving the quality of academic advising requires support from the top administrative levels and appropriate financial resources. The provost’s idea of the University College became a key component of the university’s strategic plan, endorsed by the university community and approved by the board of visitors. Therefore, the university committed substantial financial resources toward the centralization of academic advising through the University College. Through these reallocated and new resources, the University College was able to hire a staff of thirty professional advisers to implement a proactive advising approach and improve the quality of advising services. Establishing clear objectives for the advising program as a whole while allowing advisers to develop their own advising plans encourages advisers to use flexibility in helping the unit to achieve its overall goals. By so doing, the advising program capitalizes on both the specific strengths of individual advisers and the diversity of the student body. Moreover, creating a partnership between advisers and core curriculum faculty helps students make sense of their first-year experience and relate it to their overall education goals.

Over the past two to three years, the centralization of advising for all new students at Virginia’s largest university faced some challenges. Whenever an institution makes a change of this magnitude, it requires ongoing cultivation of supporters from stakeholders across the university. Considerable effort has been devoted to justify the benefits of a centralized advising program for first-year students. Fortunately, immediate positive results helped to convince even those who were most dubious of this new approach to advising. Also, when creating a large unit of this nature, it is essential to create an advising team of individuals who have a wide variety of skills and a passion for helping students to unlock their potential. Finally, early triumphs and documented accomplishments lead to high expectations of continued success. With an effective advising team to implement the proactive advising program in place at VCU, the University College is confident that its contributions to student success will be long-lasting.

Creating a partnership between advisers and core curriculum faculty helps students make sense of their first-year experience and relate it to their overall education goals.
Advising and the Liberal Arts: It Takes a College

Margaret Freije, associate dean of the college and associate professor of mathematics, College of the Holy Cross

At the College of the Holy Cross, as at many other schools, all students are advised by full-time members of the faculty. This is as it should be. Good advising is about what good faculty do best—engaging students in the life of the mind, supporting their intellectual development and raising questions that help them think critically and reflectively. It is about ensuring that they meet requirements, but also about enlightening them to the ways that a liberal education can be liberating. But advising at Holy Cross is not the purview of the faculty alone. This too is how it should be.

Students are assigned a faculty adviser when they enter the college and they remain with that adviser until the spring of their second year. Most of our students come to college without knowing what major they would like to pursue, or they enroll in a major that they eventually change. Thus in their first three semesters, this adviser is assisting them as they explore the breadth of the curriculum, complete distribution requirements and identify their major area of study. As we enter the enrollment period for the fall of their third year, students have identified a major and will be preparing to pursue advanced work in this area. At this point, they will be assigned a faculty adviser in their major area of study who can help them navigate this curriculum and serve as a resource as they imagine life after college.

Advising: Monitoring And Mentoring

There are two primary dimensions to advising at Holy Cross. The first is monitoring. Faculty advisers monitor the academic progress of their students toward successful degree completion. Are they completing their common requirements? Have they identified a major? Will they complete all of their requirements in four years? Are they struggling in their courses? Would they benefit from a workshop on study skills or time management? Have they used the writer’s workshop to get help on writing or the calculus workshop to get assistance for their mathematics course? Generally this monitoring is done during the mandatory advising meeting that takes place each semester. In preparation for this meeting, advisers review transcripts online. Our automated degree audit gives advisers and students information about which requirements have been completed and which are outstanding. The college’s common requirements are specified in terms of areas of study, or modes of inquiry, not specific courses. The discussion of which courses students should take often leads to a conversation about areas of student interest and their potential majors. This discussion also presents an opportunity for conversation about why it is important for students to engage in coursework in the arts and the sciences, in literature, philosophy, and language in order to be liberally educated. Faculty complete midsemester reports on students in their classes which are sent to advisers to flag students who are having trouble and need particular attention. Advisers then meet with these students to discuss strategies, to suggest options, to make referrals, to identify resources—or just to listen to the student’s frustration. All of these interactions send the message to the student that academic progress is not just about checking off the correct boxes. It is about personal and intellectual development, and we can grow as much from our struggles and failures as we do from our successes.

It is these moments that move advisers from monitoring to mentoring, the second dimension of advising. Mentoring our advisees—that is, connecting them more fully to the liberal arts program—seems to be more challenging each year. Our students have been admitted to this school by completing all requirements, participating in all appropriate cocurricular experiences and building a set of credentials. They have been told what to do and they have done it well. The challenge is to move them beyond that. What do you want to explore here? Who do you want to become? What do you want to say about yourself as a student? How will you identify your intellectual passions? What about other opportunities—study abroad, internships, interdisciplinary
study—and how they might contribute to your intellectual journey? These are the opportunities to imagine the ways in which a liberal arts education is liberating. This is hard work—but it is work that faculty are well suited to. They are committed to a liberal arts education, passionate about intellectual pursuits and dedicated to working closely with individual students.

**IT TAKES A COLLEGE TO ADVISE A STUDENT**

Pursuing advising as monitoring and mentoring is time consuming. It requires the time to ask questions and, more important, to listen to the answers. It requires the time to build relationships of trust with our students. It cannot be done by individual faculty working in isolation.

Students will have more than one faculty adviser in the four years they spend at Holy Cross. They will be advised about particular programs by a variety of program directors. They will be encouraged to develop habits of reflection by teachers, chaplains, and student affairs professionals. They will be counseled on postgraduate opportunities by graduate study advisers, career counselors, and even alumni. They will have a network of formal and informal advisers.

The center of the advising network at Holy Cross is the class dean, a unique aspect of the college’s advising structure. While many schools have a person identified as the first-year, second-year, third-year, or senior dean, at Holy Cross a dean is appointed to each class at the time of orientation and remains with the class until graduation. Over the course of four years, the class dean serves as the point of contact for students in this class. When a faculty member or adviser is concerned about a student, they will notify the class dean. When a student needs advice beyond what they might receive from their faculty adviser, they will see the class dean. When the fellowships adviser wants to know who should be recruited to apply, he will contact the class dean. If a student is doing well, the class dean will send a congratulatory note encouraging the student to think about a variety of opportunities—fellowships, internships, research positions. If a student is struggling, the class dean will meet with them to talk about the issues. Often students’ academic difficulties in a single class are part of a larger problem. The class dean can piece together the information received from faculty and administrators, and from the student her or himself, to identify resources—such as the counseling center, the academic resources center, or the chaplains’ office—that would best serve the student’s needs.

Because the class dean works with students from the beginning of their Holy Cross experience to the end, he or she has the opportunity to build the necessary relationship of trust with the students and the privilege of observing and participating in the intellectual and personal development of the student over her or his four-year undergraduate career.

There are also programmatic ways that the class deans support the advising system at the college. There are a number of opportunities for the class dean to address the class, in speeches and in writing, as well as opportunities for monitoring and mentoring students to better prepare them to be full participants in the advising relationships they will have with faculty. The class deans will offer workshops on advising for faculty each year. Some of the workshops are for new faculty, focusing on the “nuts and bolts” of advising. Others are for more seasoned veterans, focusing on developmental advising or updating faculty on issues facing our students today. The point is that in working with students and faculty, the class deans are working to create a culture of advising, one that requires the participation of all in building and sustaining advising relationships.

**ADVISING FIRST-THROUGH SENIOR-YEAR STUDENTS**

Our students require different kinds of advising support for each of their four years at Holy Cross and the class deans are constants in this progression. They have a unique view of the rhythm of our students’ undergraduate career, and they can tailor their efforts to support students and advisers to meet the different needs of each year. The first year at college is marked by urgency—fitting everything in and fitting in. First-year students are urgent about completing requirements, anxious about making friends, worried about making everything count and frantic about being able to participate in every possible curricular and cocurricular option. For the class deans and for advisers this means explaining that choosing a major is not choosing a career; that there are more careers than doctor, lawyer, business person, and teacher; and that focus in their curriculum and cocurriculum must shift from quantity to quality. It also means directing students to the variety of offices on campus that are providing workshops and support services—on time management and study skills, or dealing with homesickness and loneliness or building reflective habits.

[Advising] requires the time to build relationships of trust with our students. It cannot be done by individual faculty working in isolation.
The second year, on the other hand, is marked more by a certain vagueness or lack of clarity, the so-called sophomore slump. They have made it through the transition to college, some more successfully than others, and their theme song appears to be Is That All There Is?

In response to this, Holy Cross, with funding from the Lilly Endowment, instituted a program in 2004 called Second-Year Opportunities (2YO). Designed to support advisers as they work with our second-year students, 2YO provides a framework for faculty and administrators to reach out to students at the beginning of their second year and encourage them to explore the rich array of academic opportunities available at the college. Advisers welcome these students back before classes start and meet with them to reflect upon what they have learned about themselves in their first year—the good and the bad—and how they can best use their next three years. They can take the time to talk about the big picture: Where are you now? Where do you want to go? How will you get there? The advising meetings are followed by an Academic Extravaganza, where department representatives, program directors, and advisers staff tables to answer questions about majors and minors, interdisciplinary opportunities, study abroad, internships, career services, graduate programs, etc. The focus is on helping students to create and take ownership of their educational experience.

By their third year, students are immersed in a major, and most have found an academic home in their major department. Many have developed close mentoring relationships with more than one faculty member, and they will seek the advice of several members of their department. They often need encouragement to explore possibilities they may not have imagined yet. They also should be reminded to take advantage of the wide variety of opportunities at the college for developing leadership skills. Advisers once again can ask the same questions: Where are you now? Where do you want to go? How will you get there?

The student’s fourth year is often a return to urgency. Most will be leaving an academic environment for the first time in their lives and they are anxious about the transition. Some will try to avoid the question completely; others will become obsessed with the question. This is the time when a number of different offices and programs step in to support advising, including the fellowships office and the career center. But the senior year also a time when student life professionals and chaplains work with our students to help them reflect on who they have become and what this transition to a new life can mean for them.

At Holy Cross we make a commitment to the education of the whole student. We also commit to the advising of the whole student—and fulfilling this promise takes dedication and diligence from all of us.

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**Why Do I Have to Take This Course?**

*A Student Guide to Making Smart Educational Choices*

By Robert Shoenberg

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Under the leadership of provost Johnnell Butler in fall 2005, the faculty began to examine and reenvision the liberal arts mission of Spelman College. With the support from a 2006 Mellon Foundation Grant “Rethinking and Refocusing the General Education Curriculum,” the faculty began transforming our general education curriculum to an interdisciplinary, connected experience in liberal education. Included in this reenvisioning was an examination of our current advising program. Under the leadership of associate dean Geneva Baxter and former dean and professor of English Donna Akiba Harper, an advising working group was formed. This article will briefly describe the current system and detail the preliminary changes recommended by the advising working group.

**SPelman’s Current Advising System**
The mission of the advising program is to prepare students for lifelong learning by empowering them to develop and implement sound educational strategies that promote their academic, professional, and personal development. Students become self-directed learners and decision makers through a shared advisory process between advisers and advisees. This program, reflecting the institutional goal of excellence in teaching and promoting learning that focuses on student success, will:

- provide a system that allows students to track their academic progress
- provide a system to ensure regular communication among advisees, advisers and support/resource personnel
- use technology to enhance advisement, which would include career advisement links on the office of undergraduate studies homepage
- provide a daylong, campuswide information session/fair on majors so that students can visit prospective departments and explore majors
- mentor students as they identify and clarify their values and educational goals

Advising is administratively divided between the office of undergraduate studies (OUS) and individual departments and programs. Advising of first-year students is coordinated by OUS and Lula Roberts of the Learning Resources Center. Once a student selects her major, the academic department she selects then assigns her an adviser to provide her with departmental advising.

**First-Year Advising**
The initial first-year advising session occurs during the new student orientation. Students who have selected a major are advised by a first-year adviser in their chosen discipline. Students who have not selected a major are asked to indicate whether they are interested in a science or nonscience major and are assigned an adviser accordingly. If a student thinks she will be a science major, then it is important that she is advised by science faculty because of the requisite courses required by the discipline.

First-year advisers are faculty members from the various academic departments and programs. All advisers must attend an advising training workshop before the initial meeting with first-year students. They are given a First-Year Advising Handbook, which mirrors...
the workshops and contains information on core and divisional requirements, the advising process and best practices, academic support services, academic policies and procedures, and an electronic tutorial. Also, advisers are given a Course Sequence Handbook, which outlines the recommended course sequences for each major and minor offered. Both the Advising and Course Sequence handbooks can be accessed online at the OUS and registrar’s homepages.

During new student orientation and before the student registers for classes, advisers meet with first-year students individually and in groups. Group meetings introduce the core requirements, the registration process, and share math and language placement examination results. During individual advising meetings, the adviser discusses the student’s Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate results, appropriate first-year courses, and helps the student register for her courses. After finalizing her courses in our administrative software system, the student prints three copies of her registration: one each for her adviser’s file, the registrar’s office, and herself.

ADVISING IN THE MAJOR

Most students have selected a major by the sophomore year. Once they declare their major, the department assigns each student an adviser based on its advising system, which varies among departments. In most departments, advising responsibilities are shared equally among all department members. All students are assigned individual advisers; a few departments supplement one-on-one advising with group advising sessions. Most, if not all, departments provide their majors with departmental handbooks and/or major sequence checklists.

The student–faculty advising ratio is determined largely by the total number of majors in the department. Small departments average between five and twenty majors per adviser, and large departments average between twenty and forty majors per adviser. Some departments assign advisers according to the student’s classification while others assign the advisers to advise the same students through their junior year. In most departments, seniors and transfer students are advised by the department chairperson because chairpersons are responsible for conducting senior audits and verifying fulfillment of major and minor requirements. Chairpersons receive audit sheets and transcripts from the registrar’s office to complete this process.

ADVISING PROBATIONARY/PROVISIONALLY ADMITTED STUDENTS

First-year students admitted provisionally and those who fall below the recommended grade point average are advised not only by a departmental adviser but also by a learning resources specialist. Students must meet with the learning resources specialist on a biweekly basis and meet with their class dean monthly. Also, probationary students are required to attend academic success workshops that include topics such as task management, test-wise strategies, note taking, and textbook reading.

| THREE-YEAR RESULTS FOR THE SPELMAN COLLEGE SURVEY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                                 | **First Year**  | **Senior**      | **First Year**  | **Senior**      | **First Year**  | **Senior**      |
| **2006-2007**                                   | (N=275)         | (N=228)         | (N=378)         | (N=381)         | (N=302)         | (N=359)         |
| I consider my adviser to be effective.         | 54.5            | 69.7            | 64.0            | 66.4            | 62.2            | 62.7            |
| My adviser was helpful to me                   | 59.3            | 71.9            | 71.1            | 68.7            | 70.9            | 67.4            |
| My adviser provided adequate information to    | 64.4            | 70.1            | 76.7            | 67.1            | 73.5            | 62.4            |
| enable me to complete the registration process. |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| My adviser was knowledgeable about the college | 78.3            | 78.7            | 65.8            | 79.4            | 72.8            | 77.7            |
| curriculum.                                    |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| My adviser helped me with personal problems.   | 22.2            | 29.8            | 22.0            | 34.4            | 15.9            | 32.6            |
| In general, the advising system met my needs.   | 49.8            | 64.9            | 61.7            | 61.7            | 62.9            | 59.6            |
ADVISING EVALUATED

Advising is evaluated on many levels. At the college level, the Office of Assessment and Student Learning annually administers the Survey of Academic Advising to first-year students and seniors. The results have been relatively consistent for the last three years, however more variation in assessment result is observed for first-year students.

From 2004–7, the survey of first-year students and seniors reveal that most were satisfied with their advisers’ knowledge of the curriculum, their availability, and their support and encouragement (i.e., helped with academic issues, identified intern/graduate opportunities, scholarships). However, the results are lowest when assessing the level of personal interactions and student overall satisfaction with the advising system. Once again, first-year students’ results are significantly lower than those of seniors. This is expected, since seniors typically become less dependent on the assigned adviser as they learn to navigate the academic system and in many cases self-select mentors and advisers to support their academic growth. It is important to note that our current survey does not address any career advisement questions.

In addition, departments evaluate their advising process at departmental meetings and end-of-the-year retreats. Likewise, chairpersons share advising concerns and solutions in Department Chairs’ Council. While students seem to be most satisfied with the mechanics of the advising system (completing registration process, knowledge of curriculum, etc.), faculty are more critical of the process. Their concerns include, but are not limited to, the following:

- lack of communication with enrollment management regarding enrollment forecast, start-of-term reporting, and student progress
- faculty workload/overload/overwork
- nonattendance at annual advisers workshop/misadvising
- consistent access to advisee records
- self-advising by students
- the college’s administrative software system not being fully functional

REVAMPPING THE SPELMAN ADVISING SYSTEM

From the faculty’s viewpoint, the advising system needs revamping; hence, our almost two-year-long discussion of how best to repair or dismantle the current system. Before discussing the existing program, the advising working group decided unanimously to transform the current system into an advising mentoring program, given students’ needs and the results of the Survey of Academic Advising, which reveals that we have fallen short of our mentoring goal. For example, the 2006–7 results indicate that only 22.2 and 29.8 percent of first-year students and seniors, respectively, report that advisers helped with personal problems. Additionally, less than 50 percent of the first-year students report that the advising system met their needs. These results indicate that advising has evolved into helping with students’ schedules and registration only. Hence, our first recommendation—to make mentoring the cornerstone of the first-year advising program that promotes frequent quality interaction between students and advisers. Currently some students only see their advisers once or twice a semester. However, a strong advising program demands more “face time,” formally and informally. We will ask first-year advisers to structure informal gatherings with the advisees, such as lunch or dinner in the cafeteria, and a visit to the museum or some educational or cultural event in the Atlanta area. The first of these interactions, a dinner for advisees and adviser, is planned during new student orientation. The other major recommendation is the implementation of technology to facilitate the advising process, thereby creating more time for mentoring activities. Tools such as a degree auditing system and a conversation card would expediously move students from first-year advising to the departmental advising program by providing advisers with access to pertinent student information. To discourage self-advising, we will reinstitute the use of registration PINS to ensure adviser-advisee collaboration occurs prior to registration. In addition, advisers would be notified if there are any changes to the students’ schedules and would be able to advise students accordingly. Students will be held accountable for self-advising. We have also asked that the prerequisite module in our administrative software be activated so students cannot enroll in inappropriate courses.

Other recommendations include but are not limited to:

- mandatory attendance at the advising workshop; advisees will be reassigned if the adviser does not attend the workshop
- annual performance evaluation of advisers
- advisers and department chairs will be attached to advisee and majors’ academic records
- establishment of online adviser chats
- formal declaration of major during the second semester of the sophomore year during a celebratory major-declaration convocation

We will implement our new system in phases, beginning fall 2008, and will continue to restructure it until we have completed our new academic mentoring process. Change is always slow but under the leadership of our strong and supportive provost and with the continued input of a motivated and committed faculty, Spelman’s redesigned academic advising program will serve our students more efficiently and effectively.
The Value of an Outdoor Education Experience

Cheryl B. Torsney, associate provost for academic programs and professor of English, West Virginia University

Last summer I took five days to travel to Dolly Sods, a wilderness area in the Allegheny National Forest, with one of my institution’s sixteen summer excursions designed to introduce first-year students to institutional expectations, campus culture, study skills, other students, and themselves. Doing without cell phones—let alone restroom facilities—was a real challenge for these twenty soon-to-be freshmen on my Adventure West Virginia backpacking trip. But they not only managed, they came out of the woods stronger people and more serious about their education. We even have the data to prove it.

In our drive to educate our students for the real world by providing internships, undergraduate STEM research experiences, and high-tech opportunities for learning, such as Second Life and podcasts, we have somehow forgotten the educational potential of our backyards. We implement recycling programs and construct buildings with green roofs, but neglect to educate our students about the out-of-doors. Why? Outdoor education doesn’t have to be terribly expensive. It’s a “green” activity. And travel and tourism is an exciting industry that offers jobs for recent college graduates—especially, perhaps, for those liberal arts majors with an interdisciplinary bent of thought.

Perhaps the promise of outdoor education has yet to be realized because the generation of students we teach—and their parents—has yet to see its value. These Millennial kids need constant stimulation: they have been brought up on television with frequent commercial breaks and films with so many jump cuts I get woozy; they use cell phones, play video games, and instant message 24/7. Nearly all of their preferred activities happen inside. Common neighborhood green space has all but disappeared, and kids who grow up in suburban McMansions don’t play hide-and-seek or capture the flag the way we did. In Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv explains that our children suffer from what he calls “Nature-Deficit Disorder.”

I learned from my wilderness backpacking with first-year students that they are afraid of the woods. They are terrified by both bugs and bears; they are leery of camp cuisine; and they are revolted by performing one’s morning ablutions in the out-of-doors. As young adults, jaded in many ways, they also display a refreshing and childlike fascination with dew-laden early-morning spider webs, wild blueberries, and successfully digging and using a latrine. To become a member of the “Order of the Shovel” is a high honor indeed. With no cell phone service and nothing but the stars and a campfire to distract them, these students open up about their fears about starting college. Most of them are more worried that they won’t find friends than that they won’t be able to succeed academically. They fret about being away from their families. Around the campfire, we talk to them very frankly about the risks of alcohol abuse and how dangerous the first six weeks of school are, especially for young women. Student assistants relate personal stories that make me cringe: stories about waking up in an emergency room after having been treated for alcohol poisoning, stories about attempted rape. In their tents, on a rock in a creek with their feet dangling in the water, out in an open field during a solo hike, these backpackers write in their journals, plumbing their souls.

Talk about bonding—together the students learn about the natural history of the area they’re backpacking through and simultaneously traverse the territory of their hearts. They form support groups that last. As a result, students who experience these outdoor adventures are retained from first to second year at a higher rate than students who do not go into the woods or on other nature adventures such as caving, rock climbing, and white-water rafting.

Ralph Waldo Emerson would have agreed that we need to reconsider the importance of outdoor education. In “The American Scholar” (1837), he explains: “The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. . . The scholar must needs stand wistful and admiring before this great spectacle.” The section concludes: “[I]n fine, the ancient precept, ’Know thyself,’ and the modern precept, ’Study nature,’ become at last one maxim.”

I would not argue that we do not need to offer high-tech classrooms, online opportunities, and updated residence halls. I’m not so sure those residence halls need movie channels, however. I’m more convinced that if the residents of those halls spent some quality time outside experiencing nature and looking inside themselves, they might learn far more than they could from an umpteenth viewing of Die Hard III or Legally Blonde.
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