

The Compleat Advisor

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In NACADA's newsletter, *Academic Advising News*, I wrote about a bass drummer who played in a cadet band. This cadet, you see, was out of step with the rest of the band as they began their maneuvers one beautiful Saturday afternoon before a throng of spectators. Like all bass drummers, he depended on the music to keep in step. The rest of the band, however, followed the lead of the drum major who, on this occasion and in a rare moment, stepped off on the wrong foot. There were many attempts to get David Birley, the cadet bass drummer, "back" in step with everyone else, but Birley insisted that he was in step with the music. Finally, the band director, alerted to the dilemma, issued the strangest order ever heard on that parade ground, "With the exception of Birley, Parade: Change Step!"

Thoreau perhaps would have felt right at home with the courage of Birley. It was Thoreau who said, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." We might ask, similarly, are we as advisors or as a profession in step with the changing environment on our campuses?

There is some evidence that we are. For example, exemplary programs and individuals in academic advising, many of which have been recognized by the ACT/NACADA Awards Program during the past several years, abound on college campuses. Also, interest in the role of academic advising on the campus has increased dramatically over the last decade. Membership in NACADA alone has nearly doubled since 1985. As a profession, we are doing well enough that we hesitate to criticize our efforts, yet is there room for reflection and improvement?

From another perspective, Harriet Sheridan (1988), in a paper for the American Association for Higher Education, wrote about The Compleat Professor—a paper about being out of step, if you will. Her remarks stem from a seventeenth-century writer named Izaak Walton, who beautifully described the art of fishing in a masterful book entitled *The Compleat Angler*.

Sheridan proposes a reeducation of the col-

lege professor. Of the professorate, by redefining its methods and roles, Sheridan suggests several attributes of the compleat professor. Likewise, what constitutes the compleat advisor? What changes are needed in developing, training, and preparing academic advisors today?

To keep our profession marching forward, I propose four steps to prepare the compleat advisor for a harmonious entry into the nineties.

Step 1: Use Computer Technology to Enhance the Advising Process

How fast is a computer? According to Thomas R. Billadaui, president of Automated Office Systems, if a glass of juice is spilled from a table, before the juice hits the floor a large computer can debit 2,000 checks to 300 different bank accounts, analyze the electrocardiograms of 100 patients, score 150,000 answers on 3,000 examinations, and process the payroll for 1,000 employees.

If a computer can do all that before the juice hits the floor, just think what it could do during an advisor's day. Unfortunately, most institutions today—despite all the applicable computer programs and hardware available—use a manual system to track student academic requirements, a method that has plagued institutions and students since its inception. This traditional practice is not only unproductive, inaccurate, and inefficient, but it also leaves advisors little time to concentrate on more important issues such as student development, retention, and academic planning. Manual tracking relegates advisors to the status of clerks. In addition, the complex changes in degree requirements make it difficult for academic advisors to maintain accuracy (Spencer, Peterson, & Kramer, 1982). Because institutions are becoming more complex and because information given to students is often repetitive, use of computer programs will improve the quality of our paperwork, which will allow us to improve the quality of our people-work (Sampson & Pyle, 1983). Computers simply can manage and monitor student progress more easily and more cost-effectively than personnel can.

Step 2: Use Developmental Principles in Advising

During World War II, because of the beef shortage, it was legal to substitute horse meat up to fifty percent. In those days, Bubba, a stew vendor, was accused by his competition for making stew with more than fifty percent horse meat, so the FDA came to investigate Bubba's stew. Bubba told the investigators that his accusers' claims were false. He said, "For every rabbit I put in, I match it with a horse"!

As a profession, we need to more than "match" our efforts as information givers with a knowledge and use of student developmental concepts. Some have suggested that, without a theoretical framework to identify, evaluate, and respond to student advising needs, advising is nothing more than information dissemination. Most of us would argue that advising is much more than course juggling.

Let me suggest three key points to help focus developmental advising.

First, advisors who are sensitive to the distinct ways in which individuals view the academic world are in a position to be more responsive to student needs. Especially today, advisors must be prepared to **respond** to ethnic diversity, gender issues, increased numbers of older students, and students coming from dysfunctional backgrounds. Knowing who is entering the system and how they are progressing is the key to developing effective programs that enhance student success.

Second, we ought to consider research indicating that students who actively participate in the advising process, and are not just recipients of advice, move more successfully through college. For example, Sandy Astin suggests that greater student involvement in college results in greater student learning and personal development (Astin, 1986). Therefore, effective advising is directly related to how much it increases student involvement.

Third, advisors alone cannot help students develop academic skills; advisors alone cannot clarify expectations concerning academic major and career plans. Advising should then enlist the aid of many campus services to satisfy student needs. It is a collaborative process. In other words, developmental academic advising above all is relationship building. John Gardner, the guru of the freshman experience, reminds us that long after students have forgotten the in-

formation and advice we have given them, they will remember our gift of self.

Step 3: Use Program Planning and Evaluation to Improve Advising Services

Will Rogers was once asked what he would do to stop German submarines from tracking and sinking Allied ships. He replied, "Warm up the Atlantic Ocean to bring the subs to the surface." When asked how he intended to warm up an ocean, he responded, "I've told you how to resolve the problem; you'll have to figure out the details."

Although we cannot offer a panacea for all of higher education's ills, advisors can do certain things to raise the quality of the undergraduate experience. We might begin by seeing if our advising program goals complement the institution's mission. Is advising clearly defined in applicable institutional publications? In short, program planning and evaluation allow advisors not only to be accountable for their activities, but also to communicate to the campus community program developments and effectiveness.

Let me emphasize three sources of help to improve advising services.

(1) *NACADAS Consultant Bureau*

The Bureau's main objectives are to (1) assemble a network of professionals in academic advising, (2) provide quality consultation services via site visits, workshops, and conference speeches, and (3) offer these services at a reasonable cost.

(2) *Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS)*

Another key resource for advisors is the document *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Services/Development Programs*. This publication (included elsewhere in this issue) offers guidelines for establishing and monitoring an academic advisement program. In addition, last year CAS developed a self-assessment guide to help institutions benefit from the self-study process.

(3) *NACADA Clearinghouse*

NACADA endorsed a clearinghouse to be established at Ohio State University which provides resource material on a variety of advising topics (see advertisement in this issue).

Step 4: Use Professional Development Opportunities to Become Change Agents

At the height of the Iran-Contra affair, Speaker of the House Jim Wright joked, "For six years we went around saying Ronald Reagan didn't know what was going on. And now, when he says the same thing about himself, we say he's lying."

A responsive staff development program can keep us informed about what's going on—that is, issues, trends, and methods for improving academic advising. An effective advising program reflects the quality of its staff; the staff, in turn, reflects the quality of its program.

Most important, staff development should prepare us to respond to needed change on campus, even to be the catalysts to bring it about.

Sara Looney (1988), of George Mason University, suggests that campus advisors can serve as bellwethers who forecast changes in student populations. Advisors are the most able to act as bellwethers because of their frequent interaction with students; they are usually the first and most consistent contact between students and the institution.

Advisors can also act as agents of change because they see the effects of policy, procedures, and decisions on both students and other facets of the institution. "Students and 'the system' often meet face-to-face, if not head-to-head, in an advisor's office," Looney observes. "As advisors, we are in the unique position of representing the institution to the student and representing the student to the institution" (p. 208).

In summary, I submit that the compleat advisor is in step with (1) using computer technology to ease the clerical burden, (2) understanding student needs through a developmental academic advisement model that seeks to enhance student success through a collaborative advising program, (3) using available resources, such as NACADA's consultant bureau, to enhance advisement program planning and evaluation, and (4) seeking professional development opportunities to become a campus change agent.

The field of advising awaits fresh reinforcements who march fearlessly to the beat of their own drummers—advising bellwethers, if you will. We all need the confidence of my friend Birley—confidence to step to the music we hear. And I hope the music we hear is in step with the needs of students and the appropriate responses to those needs. The success of any organization or program is clearly linked to individual effort.

So I close this address by offering just one more bit of advice, which comes from Edward Everett Hale: "I'm only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something I can do!" As individuals each of us can do something: Each of us can make a difference.

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