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## ADVISING FUTURE TEACHERS IN AN ERA OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

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*Academic advisors and counselors of future teachers can have a great impact on the status of education and its reform by attracting top-notch students into the field and by providing encouragement to those who select teaching as their career. Consequently, advising in teacher education programs should elicit top priority in funding and rewards. In this article, several suggestions are outlined for teacher education advisors who wish to become leaders in the education reform movement and who are concerned about dealing more effectively with students entering the profession of teaching.*

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Consider, if you will, these recent reports concerning teacher education reform: the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education report, "A Nation At Risk," which sought to generate reform of our educational system by several means, including raising standards in teacher preparation programs; the Association of American Colleges 1985 report, "Integrity in the College Curriculum," which implied that our colleges and universities have turned loose thousands of graduates unqualified to teach either at the elementary or the secondary levels; the Southern Regional Educational Board report (1985), "Improving Teacher Education," which advocated strengthening the general education component of teacher education programs; and, most recently, the Holmes Group Report (1986) and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy report, "Shaping Our Future: Teachers in America" ("Panel Eyes Changes," 1986), both of which call for radical changes in teaching and the education of teachers, including the abolition of the undergraduate education major. These and countless other similar reports and statements<sup>1</sup> tend to make educators want to throw up their hands and give up their profession. White and Barrett (1986) maintain that the problem of education reform becomes *more*, not less, bewildering with each new report. Although these reports address the need for bold leadership and fundamental change in public education, as well as teacher preparation, there is little indication of exactly what direction this leadership should take, or what kind of fundamental change is actually needed (Seeley, 1986).

One potential source of leadership and change, however, need not come from influential legislators, commissions, college deans, teachers' unions, or even from teachers themselves. Instead, that source could be those academic advisors on university campuses who have a major influence on students entering the profession of teaching. At a time when the nation is demanding educational reform, even greater dedication is needed from the advisors of students who pursue education degrees.

Almost every state in the union has upgraded certification requirements in order to counteract one set of criticisms of our current educational system. Such reforms, however,

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frequently have resulted in bureaucracies that require scores of forms to be completed, entrance exams to be taken, grade points to be averaged, and complicated combinations of coursework to be completed, as well as new practica to be accomplished. The requirements may be admirable and progressive; unfortunately, students tend to get lost in the stream of forms and requirements. Even the ablest aspiring teachers can become discouraged as they try to move through the maze of requirements.

For this reason, quality advising is crucial. Faculty advisors and professional staff should work to simplify the process and learn the procedures so that requirements are clearly and effectively articulated to students in education curricula. A carefully planned advising program could encourage able students to continue through the process, whereas a badly planned program could encourage able students to have second thoughts about entering a field already fraught with controversy. A well-planned advising program—with special strategies, procedures, and goals—could make the difference in how educational reforms are received by those entering the profession today and, consequently, could make a difference in the future of education itself.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE ADVISING SYSTEM

The following twenty-three suggested procedures do not necessarily reflect the consensus of administrators and faculty in any college, but are based on the author's professional experience. Each suggestion is ultimately intended to foster more effective relationships with students entering the profession of teaching.<sup>28</sup>

#### • Procedures for Administrators or Directors of Advising •

##### 1. *Choose only experienced, enthusiastic, and committed persons to serve as advisors.*

Generally, faculty are overloaded with commitments to teaching, observing student teachers, conducting research, and serving on committees. In order to offer quality advising, select only a few dedicated people to serve as advisors. Those selected must view their advising role as one of their most important functions and must be willing to provide to their advisees the necessary encouragement, time, and support.

Some advising systems consist of non-faculty, professional counselors whose only responsibility is to advise students. This could be an acceptable option. Full-time advisors, however, should hold Master's or doctorate-level degrees. They should have teaching experience in schools or should be very familiar with the profession and the courses required for certification. Potential advisors should be screened for their interest in, and commitment to, advising, for their effectiveness in working with students, and for their knowledge in the areas of degree and teacher education requirements. Advising loads (or the number of advisees per advisor) should be large enough to justify the time these advisors spend on learning the intricate rules and details of advising and certification.

Regardless of their rank or title, advisors must serve as positive role models for their advisees. Thus, professional knowledge of education and pedagogy, experience in teaching, and commitment to student advising are "musts" if the desired effect of educational reform is to be achieved by advisors.

##### 2. *Reward advisors with desirable incentives for their efforts.*

King (1984) maintains that administrators "should give the first priority to the formulation of a significant administrative commitment to a quality advising program evidenced by adequate budgetary support, staffing, and resource allocation" (p. 354). He adds that administra-

tion must also demonstrate commitment to advising by making the quality of advising a significant part of the reward system—an integral part of promotion, tenure, and merit criteria" (p. 354). In addition, Noel (1985) maintains that quality teaching and advising reduce the attrition rate. Although research is important, Noel insists that it should not crowd out recognition for teaching and advising. In an era of financial crisis on many college campuses, monetary incentives are difficult to offer, but the long-range goals of lower attrition rates and quality students in education should make monetary reward a top priority.

There are also alternatives to monetary rewards that could provide important incentives for advisors. An "Advisor of the Year" award could provide recognition similar to teaching and research awards. Although an award is extrinsic in nature, Kanter (1984) maintains that the intrinsic rewards of advising, particularly for faculty, are not emphasized enough in recruitment and training. Advisors should be made aware of the "nontangible" rewards of advising such as the satisfaction derived from forming relationships with students, from intellectual stimulation, and from the sense of autonomy and achievement in carrying out one's job (McKeachie, 1982; Kramer, 1984). Observing students grow into potentially dynamic teachers is, in itself, a powerful incentive for many advisors. Administrators who value the advising responsibility should, in some way, recognize advisors' efforts.

### 3. *Establish regular hours that are compatible with student needs.*

Accessibility is an absolute "must" for an advisor. An open-door policy projects a caring and friendly atmosphere, but your advisors *should* post specific hours for student appointments. This approach insures a more efficient and effective system.

### 4. *Use computers and clerical personnel for paperwork and recordkeeping.*

Your advisors should be able to minimize the amount of paper shuffling involved in the advising process by delegating those aspects of their job to clerical personnel. In addition, computer systems for advising are becoming increasingly available and can assume the repetitious recordkeeping chores, thus allowing the advisor time for the more important aspects of advising (Crockett, 1982). Uses of computer systems for advising purposes include documentation of demographic and course information, identification of students in academic difficulty, and verification of graduation requirements (Grites, 1979). Additional data on admission to teacher education and certification status can also be programmed for easy accessibility.

### 5. *Monitor students' progress for both positive and negative outcomes.*

All universities provide information to advisors regarding students' grades, problems, and progress. Advisors of students in teacher education programs should not only take the time to analyze such information, but should communicate concerns, encouragement, and praise to their students as well. For example, when your advisors receive their students' grades, they might send letters of congratulations to those on the honor roll and to others showing high levels of achievement.

Since maintaining high standards in a teacher education program is becoming increasingly important to a university's regional and national image, students with grade averages below the minimum level established by the university should be placed on academic probation. While on probation, these students should receive counseling, tutoring, and encouragement from their advisors. If a student fails to complete the terms of an established contract, he/she should be suspended from the teacher education program and encouraged to seek a new major where success is more likely. Although this policy may seem harsh, teacher education has an obligation to maintain high standards—for its students, for the profession, and for the children in our schools.

6. *Attend to the advising of special populations.*

Certain groups of students have special needs; this, in-turn, requires special attention from the advisor. For example, students with physical handicaps and learning problems, international students, minorities, athletes, and older adult or returning students are among those with special needs.

Gordon (1984) maintains that handicapped students may need a very individualized approach to educational planning. Advisors in education, who should be aware of legislation related to the education of the handicapped, do not always encourage the handicapped to enter the teaching profession, since it does not seem to lend itself to such handicaps as blindness, deafness, or learning disabilities. Even the legislation recognizes such limitations. Simple ambulatory disabilities, however, should pose no problem for admission to teacher education. In fact, physically handicapped teachers could be very positive models for students in our schools.

For those students with a learning disability, special programs should be devised for diagnosis and treatment. If the results indicate that it would be impossible for these students to be effective classroom teachers, they should be counseled to explore other career options.

International students require special attention since their programs must be geared to their academic abilities. In addition, if they plan to return home, they must meet their country's requirements for teacher preparation. Organizations and counseling services for international students should be able to locate specific academic requirements needed in a native country, as well as immigration laws pertinent while in the United States.

Although the number of minority students in public schools is increasing, the number of minority teachers is not. A recent article noted that "between 1979 and 1983 the percentage of bachelor's degrees in education awarded to blacks declined by 52 percent; the percentage of such degrees awarded to Hispanics climbed by only a fraction of a percent" ("At Risk," 1986, p. 28). In those states requiring competency exams for teacher licensure, it is feared that the pool of minority students is expected to shrink even more. Consequently, recruiting and advising minority students must be a priority.

Burrell and Trombley (1983) maintain that minority students are more likely to seek help from minority professionals; therefore, it is advisable to involve minority advisors in a program. It is also important that minority students have an opportunity to interact with ethnic role models who have been successful in the field of education (Saunders & Ervin, 1984). Hendersen (1986) notes, however, that "little empirical evidence supports the assumption that race *per se* relates to understanding levels between academic advisors and ethnic students" (p. 10). Thus, matching the race of student and advisor is not always justified. In the long run, students benefit by developing trusting relationships with advisors of a different ethnicity. To consistently pair advisors with like students risks perpetuating problems of segregation, racism, misunderstanding, and distrust. A simple yet effective strategy to make minority students feel at home in an office is to display pictures of minority students on the bulletin board, to have brochures about minority student campus organizations easily visible and accessible, and to be aware of resources for minority students.

Another special population that personnel in colleges of education advise is student athletes. Advisors need to insure that athletes are not stereotyped as non-academics. Hendersen (1986) suggests that advisors of athletes (a) urge their advisees to be the best kind of human beings they can become, (b) establish a relationship that offers "open dialogue," not "automatic approval," (c) be good listeners, (d) serve as guides to demonstrate ways one might learn, and (e) serve as role models. Advisors of athletes in education should strive to achieve these goals not only for the good of the student as *athlete*, but also for the benefit of the student athlete as potential teacher.

Projects confirming athletes' abilities in academic settings are important for building self-esteem in those who lack confidence in the academic arena. For example, one university's student athletes in education assist in leading several area public school workshops on teen problems. In addition to serving as positive role models for young students, the athletes are able to relate this activity to their own education coursework, and gain experience in the role of "teacher."

Older adult and returning students are becoming increasingly prevalent in the field of education. They, too, need special confidence-building experiences. Generally, larger campuses have special organizations and counseling programs for returning students that arrange for tutoring sessions and support groups. Tutors and informal groups could serve the same purpose in smaller colleges. Such students, along with members of other special populations, should be encouraged to participate actively in student education associations and similar groups in order to become a part of campus and professional life.

*7. Compile and use public relations materials about your program.*

Public relations materials are used primarily to communicate with students, but can also be shared with parents and the public at large. Since advisors are often very conscious of the need for such materials, the role of writing and editing this information becomes their responsibility. Such materials might include brochures on program requirements in education, undergraduate handbooks or manuals, student and advisor newsletters, and course or event flyers.

Brochures describing college programs should be thorough, concise, accessible, and aesthetically appealing. Handbooks and manuals can outline requirements for admission to the teacher education program. Both student and advisor newsletters provide a wealth of information including a calendar of events; personal and professional news about undergraduates, graduates, faculty and alumni; education club announcements; graduate school, job, and scholarship activities; and upcoming special events, meetings, or scholastic opportunities. Newsletters also build a collegial spirit among advisors by providing information about common concerns and procedures.

*8. Establish an effective process for disseminating information on degree and certification requirements.*

Efficient dissemination of timely and correct information about teacher certification is extremely important since efforts to "reform" education generally have resulted in complicated certification procedures. You and your advisors should ask yourselves if the requirements are improving the quality of future teachers, or are they merely making perseverance a new criterion? Could the procedures be simplified and still assure certification of only the best students? Once these questions are satisfactorily answered and procedures are established, concise summary sheets should be given to students detailing the sequence of procedures, requirements, tests, and deadlines. Advisors must be totally familiar with the processes and requirements in order to articulate them clearly to students and to track students through the process. To surprise a student in his or her senior year with an unknown requirement tends to alienate the student from both the institution and the profession.

*9. Sponsor and offer social and professional events for your students, staff, and faculty.*

Many advisors and faculty underestimate the value of social events. These events not only serve a public relations function, but they also increase the morale and cohesiveness of teacher education while fostering closer relationships among students, staff, and faculty. Direct contacts in relaxed environments can provide a better context for learning. For example, stu-

dent organizations might sponsor an annual reception honoring faculty members and administrators; faculty and staff may be guest speakers at organization meetings. In such cases, informal visits with professors are effective means for building rapport with, and enthusiasm for, the program.

*10. Develop an honors program to attract quality students to education.*

Traditionally, honors programs that attract academically gifted students are housed in the liberal arts or pre-professional disciplines. If education is to attract the best of high school graduates, it should offer not only financial incentives, but academic incentives as well.

An education honors program with rigorous standards should include both general education coursework and pedagogy. Special opportunities such as summer programs abroad or on-site comparative education seminars might be offered to these students exclusively. To have such a program would not only build pride within the student body, but would also eliminate the stereotype of the mediocre education student.

*11. Work cooperatively with units outside education to inform them about programs and certification requirements.*

The Holmes Group (1986) and the Carnegie Forum ("Panel Eyes Changes," 1986) advocate abolishment of undergraduate degree programs and courses in education. Pilot programs at some schools have virtually eliminated undergraduate teacher education. Rather than becoming defensive, educational administrators and faculty should share their knowledge and expertise with all programs, such as the liberal arts, that have a connection with teacher certification. Education's strength is the ability to interpret standards and mechanisms that certify teachers. Thus, education programs should take the initiative and disseminate clearly and concisely teacher certification requirements to advisors in related programs.

Another practice that could unify education and liberal arts programs would be to create graduate degree programs in education that would combine certification with coursework in specific disciplines or areas. Countless liberal arts graduates ask, "What can I do with my liberal arts degree?" Many would find the option of acquiring certification through a Master's program an appealing answer to their dilemma.

*12. Design and promote degree programs relative to teaching areas in greatest demand.*

It is unwise and sometimes irresponsible to encourage students to pursue fields that offer little opportunity for employment. If the student has strong abilities and preferences for a low demand area, he or she should be made aware of the program's market limitations. For example, financial crises in many states result in drastic cuts in areas such as health, physical education, music, and drama. Students entering these fields should be made aware of the potential for low employment opportunities. At a minimum, your advisors should encourage those students to acquire certification in an additional area. You should urge policymakers in your college to redesign degree programs to combine rigorous requirements in compatible areas, such as physical education / science or English / drama / journalism. This expands the students' employability while meeting society's needs in high demand areas.

An annual "Supply and Demand Report," which lists needs in various disciplines/teaching areas and the number of teachers certified in each field, is a valuable aid to advisors and advisees. Such information helps students make informed decisions as to the area(s) of certification they might wish to pursue.

## Procedures for Advisors ■

13. *Articulate the purpose and content of each course and its relationship to the entire program.*

"Why must I take mathematics and humanities when I only plan to teach social studies?" "Philosophy of Education sounds boring. Do I have to take it?" These frequently asked questions deserve good answers. Updated syllabi, descriptions, and goals for each course should be available in the advisor's office for student review. Additionally, the advisor should articulate the rationale for each course in the curriculum and how it fits into the overall programs. These measures would help many students approach coursework with a more positive attitude.

Noel (1983) argues that a student's final selection of a major depends on the advisor's ability to articulate the purpose, substance, and rationale for the curriculum. Thus, education advisors must be the substantive promoters for their programs. Noel also maintains that advisors also are interpreters in that ". . . good advising may be the more critical and more significant academic function than teaching because what you are doing is bringing together academic content and applying it to the lives of people" (p.18).

14. *Work cooperatively with the campus placement office to assist students in securing teaching positions.*

Graduation and certification of teacher education students should be a primary concern of education advisors, but assistance in a job search should also be a priority. Most university placement officers are willing to assist education majors in their job search, and advisors often may be the catalysts to bring the two groups together. Encourage students to use the services of the placement office. Write letters of recommendation, for they are extremely important in helping an advisee get his or her first job. After all, placement not only helps the student, it also promotes your program.

15. *Cooperate and share your expertise in education with the media.*

Education faculty and advisors should inform the public about their programs and progress using a variety of media. The campus public information office can cooperate with education advisors, faculty, and students to promote updated teacher education reform efforts on their campus. That information can also include special conferences, speakers, awards, scholarships, grants, and achievements by individuals. Besides coverage by the print and electronic media, speakers can be made available to civic, social, and off-campus education organizations in an effort to attract top students to the profession.

16. *Make referrals to other counselors and resources.*

A sensitive area for advisors is the personal counseling that frequently evolves in a one-on-one advising relationship with students. Advisors must listen to, and often cope with, stories of career confusion, financial difficulties, and health and personal problems. Sometimes a concerned nonjudgmental listener is all a student really wants; yet, additional help may often be necessary.

University counseling centers, mental health clinics, and graduate programs in applied psychology usually offer free counseling services staffed with experts trained in crisis intervention. For students with financial problems, advisors should make referrals to the university financial aid office. The advisor should gather and disseminate information about such things as day-care and baby-sitting services, career counseling, divorce or marital counseling, and

family planning clinics. To fail to do so results in role overload for the advisor, and students are deprived of the expertise of other trained professionals.

*17. Inform undergraduate students about graduate work in education and related fields.*

Too often, the "once a teacher, always a teacher" image discourages ambitious, upwardly mobile students from continuing in the profession. Beginning in the undergraduate years, students should form attitudes that education is a continuing process. Advisors should encourage students to pursue graduate work part-time or, if financially possible, full-time. In fact, a graduate program is enhanced by practical experiences in education. Graduate work should be viewed as recognition that competent people often move on to different levels or to other careers. It is also an exciting way of interacting with other quality professionals as well as a means of causing teachers to engage in reflective thought about their careers.

Advisors should recognize that classroom teaching is a base for other careers in education such as administration, curriculum development, supervision, counseling, and school social work. It can also provide a foundation for fields such as law, medicine, and politics. Students may also pursue graduate work in order to teach at the college level.

Advisors of liberal arts students are accustomed to widening students' horizons about career possibilities. Education advisors should do the same. To do less implies that education programs emphasize "training" rather than a broad "education." It implies that one can do nothing except teach in a classroom for the rest of his or her life. An education advising center might furnish information on careers and graduate programs, as well as materials and counseling that promote visionary goal-setting for students.

*18. Assist students to qualify for as many teaching areas as possible.*

Generally, most academically strong students have more than one area of expertise and interest. Such students should be encouraged to meet certification requirements in more than one area.

*19. Encourage women to enter nontraditional fields in education.*

Research indicates that women interested in pursuing science and mathematics need more encouragement from advisors to enter these fields ("Women Need," 1986). Too often, women dominate elementary school classrooms while men compose the majority in secondary classrooms, particularly in natural and theoretical sciences. The phenomenon can be attributed in part to an advising approach that fails to encourage women to consider majors in science and mathematics.

Women, likewise, should be encouraged to consider administrative positions in education. Statistics from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (1986) illustrate the lack of women administrators in public schools in that state. Although 70.5 percent of the total work force in education in Oklahoma is composed of women, only 15 percent of the higher level administrative positions (principals through superintendents) are female. In contrast, the ratio of women elementary teachers to men elementary teachers is 10 to 1.

*20. Teach an education orientation course and other courses that directly relate to and affect the advising process.*

Although the rewards for such activities may be only intrinsic for non-faculty advisors, some teaching by the advisor is helpful for keeping in touch with students. To isolate oneself in an office away from a classroom situation allows one to forget the purposes of the advising and educational process. In addition, much content that is related to teaching careers and

curricula can be better transmitted in a classroom—i.e., group—setting than through one-on-one advising. For example, a freshman course that could be particularly useful to the advising process is an "education orientation." An advisor's goals as instructor in such a course could be to acquaint students with university life, the teacher education program and its curriculum, the requirements for formal admission into the teacher education program, and the teaching profession itself. Advisors, in their role as instructors in such a setting, can serve as positive role models for future teachers.

*21. Become involved in your program's student teaching program.*

At the heart of most colleges of education is the student teaching experience, and the success of that program often depends on the advisor's abilities to translate its value and meaning to students. If one believes in holistic advising, the advisor should follow through all stages of a student's progress, from exploration of a major, to finding both a student teaching position and, finally, a job after graduation. Although it is generally impossible for an advisor to observe all of his or her students during the student teaching experience, verbal support and encouragement should be given in advising sessions during that time.

*22. Conduct periodic research studies of current and past advisees in your program.*

There should be no need to express the importance of evaluation and assessment to educators. As a reminder, however, it can be helpful to accept input from current students concerning their views both on advising and curriculum that faculty, advisors, and administrators often overlook in their day-to-day routines. Insights into programs, successes, attitudes, and areas in need of improvement can be conveyed even in the simplest survey. Surveys of teacher education graduates could also be a great source of information about the usefulness of the curriculum and the success of the advising process. Also valuable would be an assessment of the employment status, salaries, and location of former education majors.

*23. Join professional organizations, use their publications, and publish information about your own programs.*

To share common concerns and problems, to seek solutions to these problems, to create an awareness of the importance of advising in teacher education, and to seek professional growth are just a few of the reasons for becoming involved in professional teacher education organizations, such as Phi Delta Kappa, and organizations promoting quality academic advising, such as the National Academic Advising Association. In addition, such contacts provide greater access to available publications and information.

Advisors should also share their insights with others by publishing articles about their successful techniques of advising and about their teacher education programs. The image and reputation of education and advising are enhanced by such publications. Too often an advisor is stereotyped as one who cannot succeed in research or teaching; consequently, he or she is "demoted" to the role of advisor. This myth should be put to rest once and for all. Advising should be recognized for what it is—an extremely important activity in higher education. When the achievements of advisors are published frequently enough through articles in professional journals, that message of the purpose and importance of advising will be given the recognition it deserves.

## CONCLUSION

In the midst of criticism of schools and educators, advisors of future teachers must be prepared to give time and encouragement to students entering the field. Each student should be remind-

ed of the importance of his or her chosen profession and excellent students must be attracted into the field if criticisms of education are to end. Effective advising in teacher education programs can assist these efforts immeasurably, and advising should be afforded priority in funding and the reward system. To paraphrase the message of Gerald Cory's (1973) book, *Teachers Can Make A Difference*, "advisors can make a difference" in this era of educational reform.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This in no way is meant to be a review or summary of all the recent reports and reform statements on teacher preparation published since 1983. To attempt this would result in a full-length volume on teacher education reform proposals, rather than an article on advising in teacher education programs, which is the author's intent.

<sup>2</sup> Many of these suggestions are adapted from a monograph written by the author concerning advising in sociology departments (McMillian & McKinney, 1985), whereas others are unique to advising in teacher education.

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