



The Teaching and Advising Connection

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If asked to identify a favorite assignment, role, or responsibility related to work as a faculty member many might say, “conducting research”, or “teaching graduate students”; others might identify teaching orientation courses for undergraduate students as a favorite part of the job. It’s my assumption that very few would identify academic advising as a favorite assignment, in fact, according to Vowell and Farren (2003) faculty regard advising “as a low-status activity or as an add-on to a faculty load already full with the obligations of teaching, research and service (p. 66). With only a fraction of institutions considering advising in the promotion and tenure process, faculty motivation to improve advising skills is understandably low. One approach to improving faculty perception regarding advising could be to hire a battalion of professional advisors and release faculty from the burden... but that’s not going to happen. The reality of instructional faculty serving as advisors and data supporting student retention attributed to academic advising is here to stay (Habley, 2004).

Goodness! This coffee conversation is turning cold quickly, perhaps we can “warm” up to the notion that advising is synonymous with teaching; as such, we can turn advising encounters into teachable moments for students. OSU faculty frequently demonstrate the desire to invest in students, show genuine concern for student welfare and often engage students outside of the classroom in informal settings such as student organizations and campus events. According to Mathie (1993) learning can take place when 1) students/advisee’s participate dynamically in the learning process, 2) are stimulated at higher cognitive levels and, 3) understand the relevance of the activity with the subject matter, other content, and to events in their own lives. When teachers/advisors identify expectations for teaching/advising sessions and require students to actively participate in “owning” their degree plan and academic progress, eventually students will take more control of the basic course selection and create opportunities to move the

conversation from, “what to take, to why it’s important” for the career field identified by the student.

Helping students identify and acquire knowledge and skills through advisement of course work is one aspect of teaching/advising that is straight forward. The third piece to the overall development of students is helping them discover and learn the importance of professional dispositions i.e., written and oral communication, timeliness, respect, responsibility, and goal setting. Sharing expectations with students regarding how they communicate and interact with teachers/advisors before, during, and after teaching/advising sessions is one more contact point for students to practice the dispositions needed in professional settings.

Ralph Tyler (1949) identified four essential questions for planning instruction. The questions serve as prompts to the instructor as they prepare for instruction; I contend they will serve advisors as well.

1. What is the purpose of the advising session?
2. What experiences are needed to accomplish the session objectives?
3. How should the experiences be organized?
4. What evidence will exist that learning occurred?

In an effort to shift faculty perception concerning academic advising away from a “low status activity” to another dimension of faculty teaching efforts. I encourage faculty to develop guidelines and expectations of their advisees much like they would do when developing a course syllabus. Utilizing Tyler’s four questions to guide the advising session combined with establishing expectations and following through with them has the potential to make advising encounters with students more fruitful and enjoyable for both faculty and students.

References

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