Academic Advising: A Personal Perspective

By
Hope Williams, Advisor, University College

It has been said that Athletics is the front porch of the university. Academic Advising must then be the living room. Advising collegiate students dates back to the 17th century when College presidents acted *in loco parentis* (Cook, 2001). Modern day advising has evolved into a complex system that provides assistance to college students as they pursue their dream of earning a college degree. Advisors and students work as partners of sorts as the student navigates the universities myriad of rules, policies, and opportunities. I enjoy advising college students because it gives me the privilege of mentoring students by guiding them on their journey to reach their academic goals. Traditional-age college students attend the university to learn, explore, experience, in essence, to expand their knowledge of the world beyond their high school experience. The end goal is to graduate and become a productive member of our society. Along the way, the university as well as its faculty and staff are enriched because of our students.

My first full-time position in higher education included responsibility for reorganizing the faculty advising program at a liberal arts college in the Midwest. As an Instructor in the Psychology Department, I developed a transition course for students provisionally admitted to the college. Working in collaboration with faculty to improve academic advising, teaching, and advising special populations of students was my introduction to collegiate academic advising. I became an advisor in part because of my love for nurturing young people and assisting them on their journey to productive adulthood. Advising students provides the opportunity for me to shape the lives of our society’s future leaders. My early days of advising and teaching young college students has indeed formed the foundation for my work with college students today.

By definition, an advisor’s role is to give advice. Students are adults and are responsible for their individual decisions. An effective academic advisor provides sound advice based on their professional experience, university/college policy, sound advising principles, and pedagogy while taking into account the advisee’s particular situation. Advisors perform best by gathering all pertinent information needed to advise the student and then presenting the information in a manner that is best understood by them. Questions should always go through established department protocol to ensure accuracy and consistency in the delivery of advising services. Finally, advising sessions should be properly documented for future reference.

Good academic advising provides the student with appropriate options related to their academic pursuits. College students make their decisions in part based on advice from their academic advisor. Advisors should be mindful of the fact that sometimes their student does not make the decision that the advisor thinks is the most appropriate. The advisor’s role is to advise, not dictate. Within the policies of the university lie opportunities for students to make good as well as not so good decisions related to their academic pursuits. Advisors are best
served by keeping in mind their duty to provide good advice while supporting the students right to make decisions that meet their individual needs.

Overcoming frustrations with students is easy; do not get frustrated. My approach to not becoming frustrated with students is to remember when I was an undergraduate student. Remember like it was yesterday, and work to help the student improve. Sometimes advisors and other university employees forget that a student is not always ready to do what it takes to be successful at the university. We must keep working to help them move forward even if the forward movement is out of the University, a stop-out of sorts to give the student some time to regroup so that when they return, they are in a better position to achieve success.