

# ADVISING AS A TEACHING ACTIVITY



*Dr. Beverly Mitchell cited nationally for outstanding advising*

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**I**n many colleges and universities faculty members regard advising, at worst, as a tiresome chore that interferes with teaching and research and, at best, as a routine part of their jobs that comes around at regular intervals. They must sign advisement forms in much the same way that they pay monthly bills. Neither activity is particularly rewarding but necessary nonetheless — or so the thinking goes for some college teachers. Unfortunately they do not realize the close connection between advising and teaching or that some of our best teaching opportunities come when we are alone with a student in an advisement meeting.

True, advisors do not usually teach their specific discipline when advising although “subject matter” teaching often occurs, especially with an upper level student. Nevertheless, the advisor does have a

unique opportunity to help students understand and adjust to the demands of college life, make concrete plans for both the coming quarter and the rest of their lives (a task that surely calls for our best teaching skills) and provide insight and experience students can learn from while at the same time referring them, as any wise teacher would, to other sources when they do not have the answers to students’ questions. The effective advisor, like the effective teacher, must have knowledge, patience, excellent communication skills, and, as trite as it may sound, a sincere desire to help others.

Dr. Beverly Mitchell, an Associate Professor in the HPER and a CAPS advisor, exemplifies all of the characteristics of the ideal advisor/teacher. Recently she was recognized by ACT and the National Academic Advising Association with a Certificate of Merit for Outstanding Advising. Dr. Mitchell sees clearly the relationship between advising and teaching. In her view, “any one of us who wants to be an effective ad-

visor or teacher recognizes the need to help students ‘discover’ and to be successful.” Whether the role is teacher or advisor, “in both settings we serve as facilitators,” says Dr. Mitchell. “As facilitators, we advisors do a great deal of listening and questioning. We make referrals when students are having problems in their classes or are wrestling with indecision. We encourage students to become responsible for their success whether it be seeking out the instructors for extra help or making contact with resource people.”

Dr. Mitchell believes that her role as a teacher changes very little from that of advisor. In both roles, she says, “I feel a responsibility to students for matters contributing to their success that involves much more than mere mastery of the subject matter. In the teacher role, I advise, refer, listen, and encourage.” Much has been written about the importance of students’ having a mentor during their college years. In Dr. Mitchell’s opinion, “perhaps it is the meshing of the advising-teaching roles that has been at the heart of the mentoring relationship that many of us have experienced.”

Faculty members who consider their advising as a natural extension of teaching do far more than sign schedule forms with a feeling of routine detachment. Rather, they have the opportunity, says Dr. Mitchell, “to lead students in becoming more self-sufficient and confident in their ability to ask questions and seek solutions; and, perhaps for the first time, help them to view the future as a consequence of the decisions they make now.” Good advising, then, like good teaching, is important work. Students who are fortunate enough to have both will enjoy a far richer collegiate experience. ●