

# ADVISING AS TEACHING

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Quite a few misconceptions exist about academic advising. Perhaps the most common is that advising is synonymous with the scheduling of classes. In this view, the advisor prescribes courses for students to take and is in a sense a “talking catalog.” Other misconceptions include the belief that advisors can easily be replaced by a computer program, that advising is a boring, repetitious task or that it is altogether unnecessary because college students should simply be able to self-advise.

Granted, there is a kernel of truth in each of these views. The problem, however, is that they overlook the importance of students having personal contact with an instructor in an out-of-class advising setting. Research clearly supports the value of such contact with faculty as a major force in the retention and success of students. But what this research refers to is not the advisor-as-scheduler model but rather what is commonly called “developmental advising.” Put simply, developmental advising is a form of teaching.

## New Advising Perception

The developmental advisor views the student as a maturing individual in need of guidance but fully capable of making decisions. According to this approach, advising is a student-centered process concerned more with human growth and development than with prescribing courses. The advisor guides the student with questions such as “What do you want to do in your life?” or “How can this college help you reach your goals and how can it change you?” in addition to the more mundane questions about scheduling classes.

What makes developmental advising so similar to teaching is that, when it is done well, learning takes place. The advisor-as-teacher engages students in serious academic planning and views the college years as an opportunity for students to explore new ideas, to set goals and to grow intellectually, emotionally and socially.

Perhaps the most obvious difference between advising and classroom teaching is that the latter is done in groups with the primary goal being cognitive growth in students. Advising is usually a one-to-one relationship with the aim of growth in several dimensions. But the two activities share student development as their common goal.

Advising and classroom teaching have another thing in common: neither can be done well without preparation. In the same way that instructors need knowledge in their discipline, the effective advisor needs to know information about policies, procedures and programs of study. Students want—and deserve—correct information from their advisors. But, just as knowledge in one’s discipline does not necessarily make an outstanding teacher, it is equally true that the advisor-as-teacher needs other attributes as well as correct answers to specific questions.

## Mentoring as the Key

The most important skills that the advisor-as-teacher can exhibit, however, are mentoring skills. Helping students recognize their

strengths and encouraging them to build on these strengths and being a role model that students feel comfortable confiding in are con-

## Important characteristics of the successful advisor

- 1) *The ability to listen nonjudgmentally and to hear exactly what a student is saying.*
- 2) *An understanding of student development and differences in learning styles*
- 3) *A knowledge of career opportunities in particular majors*
- 4) *An ability to foster critical thinking and decision-making skills in students*
- 5) *A respect for individual differences in students from diverse backgrounds*
- 6) *An ability to set parameters for the advising session. Having clear-cut goals for an advising session is akin to having a plan for a particular class.*
- 7) *A knowledge of referral sources on campus. Wise advisors, like wise teachers, know that they do not always have the answer or the help that a student needs.*
- 8) *A recognition of the importance of availability. Successful advisors treat advising appointments with the same attention they give to meeting their classes.*

tributions that cannot be overestimated. The student-advisor connection lends itself quite naturally to a mentoring relationship and with it the possibility for out-of-class teaching to take place.

Teaching and developmental advising, then, are definitely related since they are about the same concern: instruction. Viewed in this light, advising is an important activity that should not be relegated to the low status of a nonessential or routine task. Rather, advising is central to the mission of a teaching institution and therefore should be highly valued. Finally, when advising is seen as an extension of the teaching role, our students are the clear winners. 🍎