
HATS OFF TO "CAPS"

Improving Advisement, the Neglected Side of Teaching

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As a relatively new member of the faculty, I remember vividly how excited and pleased I was to have been offered a position at Kennesaw State College. There were many reasons I was so pleased, but one of the primary issues was the commitment of the faculty to provide each student with a quality educational experience. A key component of this commitment is the provision of comprehensive and competent advisement to each student.

The teaching component of the job was one with which I was already quite familiar, as I had been teaching since 1980. As for advisement, that was an entirely different issue. I drew heavily on my experiences with advisement, both as a former student and as an instructor in an effort better to understand what would be required of me. As a student, advisement consisted of determining my own schedule each semester and then hunting down my advisor for the coveted signature that would enable me to enter the hallowed halls of early registration. I recalled the sense of frustration at not having a knowledgeable person to talk with and the fear that somewhere along the way I would make some horrendous error that would delay my graduation.

When I began teaching I was an adjunct faculty member at two colleges. That meant I was not assigned any advisees but I observed with keen interest the advisement process and

found essentially the same phenomena: students stopping faculty in the halls, after class, and sometimes even in the restroom to get a signature so they could register.

As I reflected on these memories, two thoughts occurred to me: "How fortunate the students at KSC were to get personal advisement," and "How in the world can I provide good advisement given that I have no experience with the process myself." Very calmly I concluded that it was not appropriate to panic, at least not yet. I still had a couple of months before school began, I would simply commit the whole catalogue to memory. The catalogue was easy enough to understand and this strategy proved useful, at least in easing my fears about not knowing anything at all.

Then the fateful day arrived. A student appeared at my office door with a big smile, introduced herself and uttered the dreaded words "I'm here to be advised." *Now* was the time to panic. Memorizing the catalogue wasn't enough. I soon realized the unique nature of each student, each with a seemingly inexhaustible barrage of questions that required knowledgeable accurate answers.

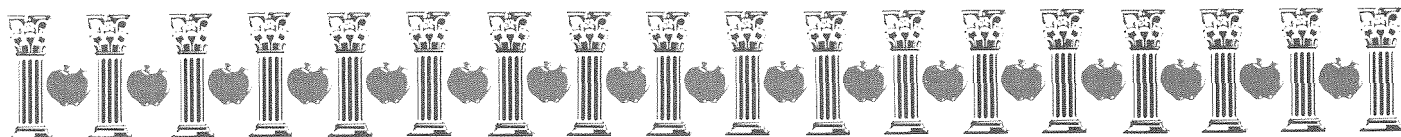
My colleagues were tremendously helpful during this first quarter of advisement, answering all my questions and providing valuable insights. I was extremely grateful but I felt it was imposing too much on their time and patience.

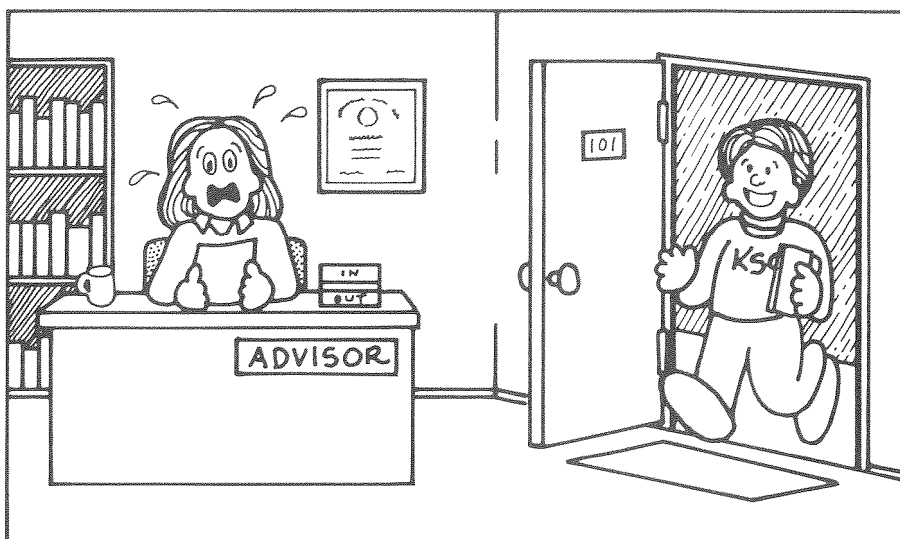
Sensing my growing concern, Dr. Ruth Hepler suggested that I make an appointment at CAPS to get some

additional insight into good advisement skills. I contacted Chuck Goodrum at CAPS and a process began that was of enormous benefit to me personally and, I believe, my advisees as well. On that first occasion Chuck spent nearly two hours explaining many issues that were still unclear. He provided me with many useful ideas and delivered a great pep talk. When I left I felt much better, more confident and certainly better informed.

Not long after that a memo was in my mailbox from CAPS asking for volunteers to do advisement. I thought that this must be a mistake, for surely they couldn't be interested in a neophyte such as myself. Not wishing to appear ungrateful, I called CAPS to bow out gracefully. I spoke with Julie Kelley. I suggested that since only the best advisors were at CAPS, perhaps I should wait until I had more experience. Julie encouraged me to volunteer for one quarter, as it would be an excellent learning experience. She also assured me that both she and Chuck Goodrum would be available to answer questions as they came up. I was very comforted when Julie added that there were no stupid questions and if something came up that couldn't be answered by someone at CAPS, that they would find the person who could provide an answer.

Feeling inadequate to the task, but greatly comforted by these kind words, I volunteered for the winter quarter at the CAPS center. Before actual advisement all of the new advisors received a very thorough program of training. We learned how the core curriculum works,





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the philosophy behind core requirements, and how to apply credits transferred from other colleges. These were areas with which I was already familiar, but now my vague understanding had congealed into a firm grasp of the nuances of the core curriculum. I breathed a sigh of tentative relief. I was feeling better already.

The next task on the road to becoming a CAPS advisor was to become familiar with the resources available to students. I was amazed at the wide variety including computer assisted instruction on study habits, tips on how to speak to a professor, and information about placement services. The CAPS center has something for everyone. For instance, the counseling workshops offered every quarter are aimed directly at providing exactly the kinds of skills and services critical to a student's success. What makes these workshops so unusual is their relevance to everyday living. Many of these resources I was not familiar with. As a new person on the faculty this information proved to be extremely helpful.

As I grew more familiar with the services provided by CAPS and the

delightful group of people who work there, I began to feel that I could do a reasonable job there and that certainly I would get better with practice. I have to admit that when my first CAPS advisee came in for an appointment, I felt a little anxious, but I was more knowledgeable and that was reassuring.

Since my first chat with Chuck Goodrum I have done three quarters of CAPS advising. The experience has been invaluable. I have learned a great deal about Kennesaw students, the resources available to both students and faculty, and how and where to get answers to unique questions. At the end of every quarter the folks at CAPS were always very gracious in expressing their gratitude for my help. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to these folks for their patience, assistance and sense of humor. Finally, I would like to recommend to all who would like to sharpen their advising skills and those who are already excellent advisors to consider a quarter of advising for CAPS, because one of the very nicest things about the philosophy at CAPS is that they welcome all, both novice and expert. 🍎

To this point we have focused upon the faculty member's personal responsibility for maintaining professional interest, enthusiasm, and effectiveness. To a large degree we must control our own destinies. However, as pointed out in an article by Amour, Cafferella, Fuhrmann, and Wergin in *Coping With Faculty Stress* (Josey-Bass, 1987), faculty build and maintain successful, productive careers in an institutional environment that values and supports development. CETL's reason for being is to help foster both an attitude of support and to provide resources and opportunities for professional growth. Grants for research in Teaching Adult Learners (TAL), Instructional Enhancement Grants, and Faculty Development Grants all help to promote professional interest and maintain vitality. Leadership Kennesaw is a unique program which allows faculty to gain a renewed respect for our profession, to develop a network of colleagues, and to capitalize upon and improve individual leadership skills (both in the classroom and across the campus).

Through this program, professors come to understand the interrelationships which exist among ourselves, administrators, students, our Board of Regents, and Kennesaw's broader consistency. Participants come away with a revitalized sense of self-worth and a mutual respect for the skills and diverse styles of colleagues. These and other programs administered by CETL are designed to rekindle our flames through professional growth.

Finally, we hope *Reaching Through Teaching* will help keep your fires burning. If it strikes one spark of interest in the mutual celebration of good teaching, or of doing what you do well even better, then its goal will be accomplished.

Teaching is an intense profession, with no apparent alternative to an uneconomical burning of intellectual and emotional fuel. We all must realize the need to refuel more often if we are to keep the flame alive throughout a long career. However, burnout, while a phenomenon to be avoided, is not a professor's worst end. As Dr. Noah Langdale, former president of Georgia State University, was quoted as saying many years ago, "I would rather burn out than rust out." 🍎

