

Academic Advising in Higher Education: A Developmental Approach for College Students of *All Ages*

DONEA SHANE is *Director of Student Advisement, Albuquerque, New Mexico*

In 1969, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education sponsored the largest survey of academic opinion ever undertaken. The survey included 70,000 undergraduates, 30,000 graduate students, and 60,000 faculty members. After analysis of this monumental collection of data, the Commission recommended that "enhanced emphasis should be placed on advising as an increasingly important aspect of higher education."¹ A theme throughout the voluminous reports of the Commission's work, higher education needs to humanize programs, with the explicit intent of maximizing the individual student's development. Mash² responds to this particular theme by pointing out that effective academic advising can and should be the heart of a developmental approach to the student. Since individual development represents a goal of adult education according to Knowles,³ Tough,⁴ and others, I think it appropriate to define and to describe a process of academic advising which incorporates strategies aimed at traditional college age students and adults.

1. *Differentiating Between Advising, Counseling, and Psychotherapy*

Scant agreement exists about the definition of academic advising or about who should do it. The literature shows the boundaries between "guidance and counseling and advising as, indeed, fuzzy. Interestingly, the 1978 *Eric Thesaurus of Descriptors* does not include the descriptor "academic advisement" or "academic advisor," while "counseling" and "guidance" are major descriptors. An Eric search combining the descriptors "adult counseling" and "faculty advisors" yielded about a hundred sources within this large educationally oriented retrieval system, of which about one-third actually dealt with a topic close to the advising of adults or college

¹Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, *Reform on Campus*, 1971.

²Donald J. Mash, "Advising: Too Often Taken for Granted." *The College Board Review*, 107 (Spring 1978).

³Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, (New York: Association Press, 1970), p. 34.

⁴Allen Tough, "Major Learning Efforts: Recent Research and Future Directions" *Adult Education*, 28 (1978), 250-261.

students. At the Second National Conference on Academic Advising (1978), Crockett defined academic advising as a service which "assists students to realize maximum educational benefits by 1) helping them to understand themselves, and by 2) helping them to learn to use available resources to meet their own needs."

Farmer provides us with a definition of counseling. "Counseling is a systematic exploration of self and/or environment by a client with the aid of a counselor to clarify self-understanding and/or environmental alternatives so that behavior modifications or decisions are made on the basis of greater cognitive and affective understandings."⁶

While neither definition directly alludes to a specific approach geared to enhancing human growth and development, both definitions emphasize self-awareness and an enhanced ability to meet one's own needs.

Bocknek, a counseling psychologist, notes that his particular discipline traces its origin to **educational guidance** (providing information and recommending courses of action) and a traditional **medical treatment model** (correction of abnormalities, adjustment to disabilities, and restoration of function). He believes that the newest approach will be **developmental counseling**, an approach focusing upon "enhancing growth potential and mobilizing those resources which will augment optimal development."⁷ Recent research into adult growth and development by several researchers have stimulated this **approach**.⁸

Potter and Shane⁹ have proposed a model classification to differentiate among diverse types of advising content. The Potter model is a general, functional overview of the advising process. It defines four basic types of advising and describes seven characteristics of each type. (See Figure 1.)

Utilizing the Potter Model, we can begin to describe boundaries separating advising from counseling. Also, we can offer rational judgments about skills advisors/counselors need to study one's target population with the intent of documenting the percentage of each basic type of services the target population typically requires, and

⁶David Crockett, "Making Advising Work: Basic Elements in Developing and Implementing a Successful Academic Advising Program" presented at the Second National Conference on Academic Advising, Memphis, Tennessee, October, 1978, (Unpublished).

⁷Martha L. Farmer, *Counseling Services for Adults in Higher Education* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1971).

⁸Gene Bocknek, "A Developmental Approach to Counseling Adults," *Counseling Adults* by Nancy K. Schlossberg and Alan D. Entine. (Monterey, California: Brooks//Cole Publishing Company, 1977), p. 87-97.

⁹S. L. Presey and R. G. Kuchlen, *Psychological Development Through the Lifespan*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); Levinson, D., et. al. "The Psychosocial Development of Men," *Life History Research in Psychopathology*, edited by D. Ricks, A. Thomas, and M. Roff, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974).

¹⁰D. Levinson et al., "The Psychological Development of Men," *Life History Research in Psychopathology*, ed. D. Ricks, A. Thomas, and M. Roff (Minneapolis. University of Minnesota Press, 1974).

¹¹E. Potter and Donea L. Shane, "Basic types of Academic Advisement," presented at Second National Conference on Academic Advising, Memphis, Tennessee, October. 1978. (Unpublished).

	Informational	Explanatory	Analytic	Therapeutic
Content	Data	Procedures	Options	Values
Purpose	Informative	Clarification	Insight	Self-Acceptance
Nature	Presentation	Discussion	Analysis	Awareness
Focus	The Data	The Institution	The Student	The Person
Perspective	Atomistic	Atomistic	Holistic	Introspective
Setting	Public	Semi-Private	Private	Private
Length	2-10 Min.	5-20 Min.	20-60 Min.	Multiple Sessions

Figure 1: Basic types of Academic Advising."

from there adjust 1) skills of advising personnel, 2) time available for advising/counseling (scheduling of individual sessions), and 3) physical resources such as information desks, telephones, private offices, or counseling areas. Further, we can standardize the definition of the **advising/guidance** subprocess so that we can schedule a more comparable evaluation and documentation of services rendered. This evaluation and documentation is important in an era of accountability and declining fiscal resources.

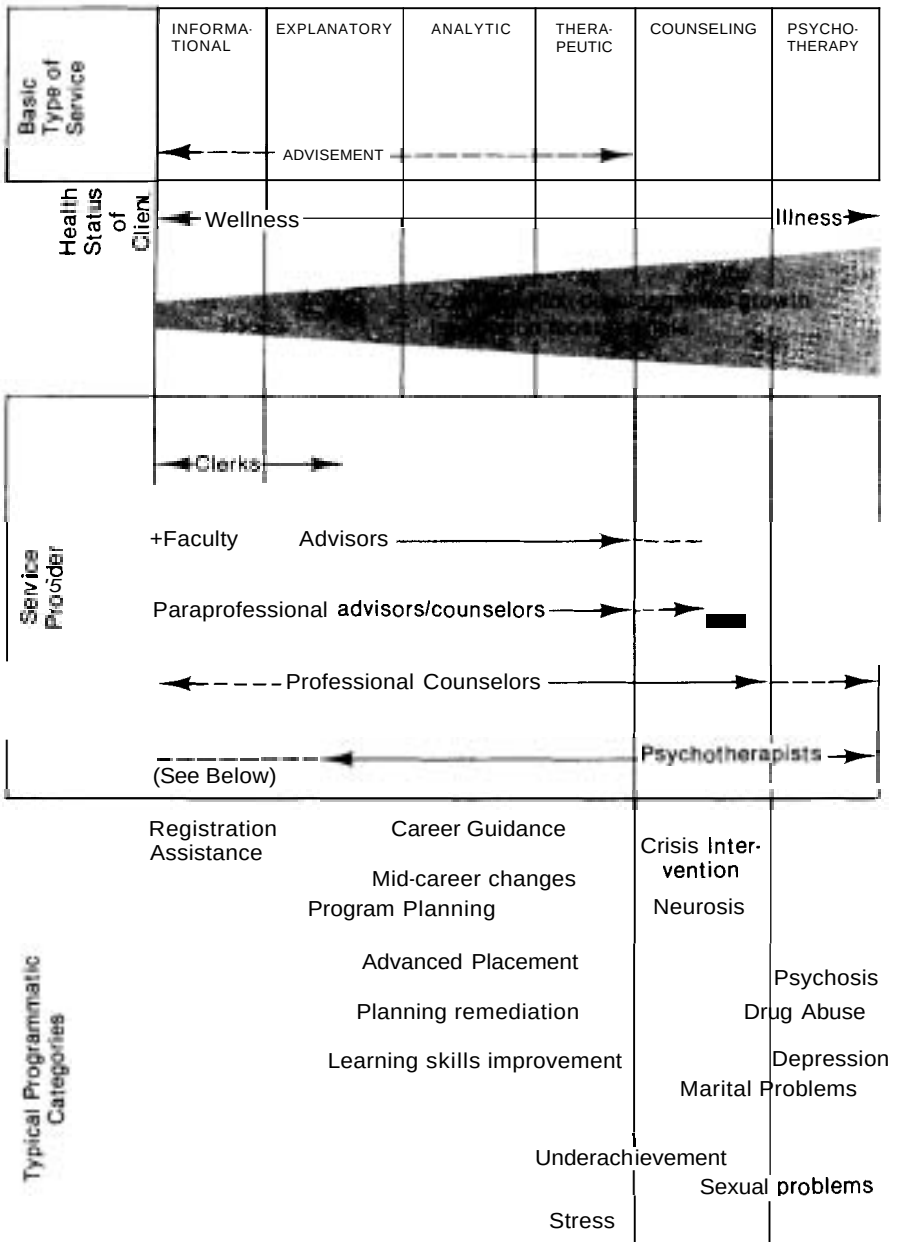
Most importantly, however, if we overlay the Potter Model with a developmental approach, we begin to see linkages between advising, counseling, psychotherapy, and the end goal of the educational process, "maximizing the student's development."

Figure 2 displays a continuum ranging from informational advising (the least complex and least personal type of advising) to psychotherapy, a service which attempts to ameliorate mental illness or improve mental health. Most institutions of higher education attempt to provide this array of services to their students. As indicated in this figure, a number of diverse professionals and paraprofessionals are utilized to provide these services. As Mash states, "Within each educational institution the matter of 'who does the advising' must be a secondary consideration to the more important issue of 'how best can we do it here.'""

"Potter and Shane, op cit.

"Mash, (1978)

Academic Advising in Higher Education



*Dashed line denotes an expanded service based upon unusual qualifications for this service provider.

Figure 2; A Continuum from Informational Advising to Psychotherapy

An underlying assumption is that the student (client) controls the level of activity along the continuum; he displays his needs through a series of behavioral cues. The service-provider responds to these cues based upon his own level of expertise, his ability to read accurately these cues, and his willingness to enter into a helping relationship with the student/client at the level demanded by the student/client. Research needs to be done on the degree of match between displayed cues (needs) and responses of the service-provider. I believe, however, that service-providers can become more sensitive to cues students display, and can learn deliberate responses and strategies which work toward maximizing the individual student's development, regardless of the student's age.

11. *Understanding the Process of Development*

Unquestionably, college students in the 1970's and 1980's come in all ages. The day when a college campus consisted of the enclave of eighteen to twenty-two year olds has passed, probably forever. The advisor in the collegiate setting must skillfully deal with individuals from eighteen through late adulthood (but, I hope, not senescence) because people within this age span now attend college.

The dichotomy between advising "traditional age college students" and adults is artificial. While at least one author (Farmer, 1971) says that advising of adults differs, I believe we need a more holistic philosophy, i.e., that advising needs of a particular college student (of whatever age) is unique and rests upon the programmatic developmental, and intrapersonal needs of that individual at that particular moment.

Several underlying concepts pervade all developmental approaches. Bocknek¹³ has identified these concepts:

A) ***Development represents a thrust.*** There exists an inevitable, inexorable pressure to change built into the cells of all life; this pressure certainly manifests itself in human experience, and it occurs throughout the life span.

B) ***Growth is the law of life.*** People change because they are living organisms evolving from birth to death.

C) ***Development is always directional.*** Development is neither random nor haphazard nor reversible.

D) ***Growth unleashes new potential.*** Each new period brings resources not previously available and discovery of new capability or potential.

E) ***The adult life span contains its own challenges and resources.*** Most prominent among these special attributes are the growing sense of one's own mortality, the imminence of one's death, and the historical perspective of the older adult.

F) ***Cultural expectations and demands upon the individual change as one proceeds through adulthood.*** These cultural demands may be at variance with internal personal developmental imperatives. Thus, some adults may opt for ***identityforeclosure***, which occurs when the developing person accedes to the

¹³ Bocknek, (1977)

Academic Advising in Higher Education

demands or rewards of his/her environment to meet certain role expectations rather than press toward continued growth of self. Such foreclosure can result in blunting of personality, apathy, discontent, and vague dissatisfactions so frequently seen in adult years."

Beginning research is underway identifying the phases of adult development. While we debate whether adults progress through stages, phases, or seasons," apparently, according to several experts, the adult experiences, transitions from one comparatively steady state to another, and these changes, while they may involve psychic pain and social instability, can reintegrate personality forces at a higher level of functioning and self-actualization than experienced during the preceding time. According to Schlossberg, one of the leading researchers in this area, 'Levinson' envisions "development as the evolution of life structure, which has both internal and external aspects; and the determinants of development are also both internal and external."¹⁶ Thus, the advisor/counselor working in the arena of higher education can, and should, become a positive "external force" in shaping optimal adult development.

Certainly, the advisor/counselor working in the higher education setting routinely deals with many adults using "going to college" as a means of attempting to ameliorate developmental stresses or crises. Therefore, the necessary ingredients for facilitating maximum developmental growth should optimally be in place in the collegiate setting: service providers possessing skills to facilitate growth; an institution committed to individual development and growth; and client/students seeking ways to grow and change.

III. *Applying Developmental Insight to the Advising-Counseling Processes*

Utilizing the Potter Model of basic types of academic advising, we can illustrate opportunities for the kind of advising and counseling able to facilitate maximum developmental growth in the age range of typical students/clients found in higher education settings. These illustrations derive principally from my experience and should be provoking thought rather than read as the final word; solid research is yet to be done in this area.

1. Informational Advising. Potter defines this type of advising as focused upon data, not the student, with the purpose of informing the student. Usually the nature of this advising is a unilateral presentation (oral or written) in response to a question directly asked by the student. By definition, then, this type of advising is circumscribed narrowly, usually is short, and typically is performed by clerks or secretaries.

¹⁶Bocknek, p. 93.

¹⁷Nancy K. Schlossberg and Alan D. Entine, *Counseling Adults*. (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1977), p. 16.

¹⁸Schlossberg, p. 13.

NACADA Journal

Opportunities for developmental growth-facilitation are admittedly sparse in this type but they do exist. Since informational advising is characterized by communication going only one way (from advisor to advisee), the *nature* of this one-way communication becomes critical, if informational advising is to encourage growth. Communication must convey (either explicitly or implicitly) respect for the advisee's autonomy, respect for the advisee's decision-making capabilities, correct and thorough information, and (if they exist) a clear display of options from which the advisee can choose. As its intent, this respectful, option-displaying advising session should reinforce or enhance the advisee's decision-making skills. Let us consider the following example:

Student: "What are the pre-requisite courses for getting into the College of Nursing?"

Advisor: "Here is a list of the eight courses required. You can see that some courses are offered only in one semester while others are offered in two or three semesters. You can use this information to plan your schedule." (Comment: The information was direct, and left space for the student's decision-making.)

Consider another example of this type of advising which apparently does not encourage growth:

Student: "What are the pre-requisite courses for getting into the College of Nursing?"

Advisor: "If you would only read the catalog you wouldn't have to ask that question. Since you are here, I'll plan next semester's schedule for you." (Comment: The not-so-subtle message here? The student has asked a dumb question; this raises the student's level of anxiety and guilt. The advisor then continues to increase the student's dependence by controlling the decision-making process. This particular kind of response apparently humiliates especially the older, more autonomous adults who view it as infantile.)

2. **Explanatory Advising.** This type of advising seeks to clarify and to explain. Explanatory advising is characterized by a discussion (two-way communication) focused on the institution, its expectations, rules, and procedures. The atomistic, narrow perspective of this type of advising usually deals with a student's questions concerning one specific university procedure. The time required for this type of advising generally ranges from five to twenty minutes, and it should occur in a semi-private setting. Consider the following example:

Student: "I'm interested in learning more about the College of Nursing."

Advisor: Discuss the College's philosophy of nursing, the clinical requirements for the degree, the process for applying to the College, the requirements for entry, the student's chances for admission into this fairly competitive College. (Comment: This interchange could encourage developmental growth or inhibit it. As in the previous example, the dif-

ference probably lies in the degree to which the advisor treats student as an adult, able to make his decisions).

3. Analytic Academic Advising. Analytic advising deals primarily with analysis and synthesis of options and elements in a student's educational milieu. It seeks to develop student insight, and it focuses not upon the institution or procedures, but upon the student as a student. It utilizes a holistic perspective rather than an atomistic perspective. This type of advising usually requires from twenty to sixty minutes and needs a private setting." In our experience, the greatest amount of advising occurs in this category, and according to ninety-eight percent of freshmen we queried, they see it as either "extremely helpful" or "helpful."

In this author's experience, the more non-traditional the college student, the more likely we become involved in analytic academic advising. A group I had had the most experience with is the registered nurse returning to the collegiate setting to earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing. RN students are typically mature women, usually between twenty-five and forty-five years old, with heavy family responsibilities and long, successful employment histories in the health care system. Coming back to school inevitably means a serious disruption of the RN student's life cycle, but she is typically committed to entering college, sometimes in the face of active resistance from her family or employing institution. The initial interview with this type of student is usually all analytic. The advising session usually begins with a short data-gathering time during which we become better acquainted with each other and briefly review requirements for graduation from the BSN program, and review options available for working nurses. Then we focus upon the student herself and how her life will change by returning to school. Does she expect to leave her job? Does she expect to enter a different type of nursing when she finishes college? Is her final goal actually a masters degree in nursing? What impact will returning to school have upon her family, and will she (and they) have the resources to cope with this stress? In other words, we attempt to help the RN student gain insight as to what impact returning to school will have upon her life — both in short and long-term perspective~'~.

Developmental themes characterize this type of session. Astin has noted that many adult women participating in education are searching not only for integrity and a denial of despair (as are adult men) but also frequently are looking for identity.²⁰ I find that only partially true: apparently, most RN's have firmly established an ego image of themselves as nurses (when they first arrive at college), completely independent of the role of wife and mother, which apparently is the genesis of the

¹⁹Donea L. Shane, "A Survey of the Effectiveness of Freshman Advisement." Summer, 1978. (Unpublished).

²⁰Potter and Shane, pp. 8-9.

²¹Potter and Shane, pp. 10-11.

²²Helen S. Astin, "Continuing Education and the Development of Adult Women," N. K. Schlossberg and A. D. Entine, *Counseling Adults*, (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1977), p. 136.

NACADA Journal

lack of identity seen in many adult women entering higher education after age twenty-five or thirty. Astin also notes that women's coping style in general during the mid-life years distinctly differs from that of men. Although men become more affiliative as they mature, women show increased needs for independence, tend to become more outward and assertive, and tend to remove themselves from the nurturer's role. RN students frequently express their desire to break out of stultifying jobs, or assume increased responsibility in jobs available to them only if they obtain higher credentials. Many return to college because of a major turning point or role change life has handed them: the husband dies; divorce is imminent; children have left home or have finally all entered school.

My experience with men coming to the College of Nursing for advising strongly supports the idea that men, during their mid-life crisis and mid-life career changes, become more affiliative. Among men in mid-life crisis I have advised, including teachers, physicists, mountain climbers, and engineers, all have expressed their growing desire to find a profession in which they can interact in meaningful ways with other people, and in which they can be helpers.

How can advisors encourage developmental growth in this type of advising? A review of several writers suggest these advisor behaviors:

A. Establish a common purpose or goal of the advising session with the advisee.

B. Establish a working relationship. (Malone suggests self-disclosure, warmth, enthusiasm, openness.)"

C. The advisor should communicate clearly that he perceives the advisee as an experienced adult.

D. The advisor should exploit the expanded time perspective of middle adulthood by explicitly using the advisee's previous experiences and successes.²²

E. The adult possesses more self-knowledge than does the adolescent. He can tell you accurately his special abilities, his weaknesses, and what he wants from you and from life. Listen and respond."

F. Because of the adult's relative long life history, he will respond to advising in terms of his own experiences. Farmer says that if restricted growth characterizes the adult's history, he may tend to protect and defend his values, roles, and time-perspective. If the adult has enjoyed a positive history of growth, he may possess greater potential for action. Farmer speculates that these differences may relate directly to ways the adult previously solved developmental problems related to independence and ego protection. The advisor should expect a response congruent with the advisee's history.

²²Violet Malone and Mary Ann Diller, *The Guidance Function and Roles in an Adult Education Program*, (Washington: National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education, 1978).

²³Bocknek, p. 90

²⁴Farmer, p. 35.

G. Even though women in general possess little sense of controlling their own lives, it is hypothesized that women returning to school feel an increased degree of control. This hypothesis is probably **not** true of women who feel forced to return to school because of exterior forces, i.e., the need to work because they unwillingly were divorced, or working women pressured by employers to increase their educational credentials." The advisor should point out areas the advisee can control. because in either case, control is an important part of reinforcing adult behavior.

H. For some people, their perception that time is running out drives them back to school. "If I don't do it now, I'll never do it." This consuming sense of urgency may border upon desperation at times. For other adults, returning to school apparently causes them to believe they have unlimited time to explore a new adventure. The advisor should be aware that the younger adult almost universally thinks he has unlimited time to accomplish his goals, while the older adult may feel severely constrained by time. These differences may affect, significantly, the educational program planning process, and the final plan that emerges from advising sessions. The issue of time needs exploration with every student, and the advisor should obtain a clear sense of the advisee's perception of time at that moment; it is probably most developmentally sound for the advisor to flow with the advisee's time sense, rather than attempt to impose some other structure.

4. Therapeutic Academic Advising. This final type of advising deals with values, commitments, and emotional preferences rather than with logical options or with rational educational strategies. Emphasize student self-acceptance, rather than cognitive clarification or thoughtful insight. Even though the term "therapeutic" might mean to many that such advising intends to intervene in a situation where the student exhibited some sort of pathology related to his health status, we clearly differentiate between therapeutic advising and any treatment for mental or emotional illnesses. Any student exhibiting behaviors such as intense or long-term depression, unusual or persistent sadness, or any other behavior indicating he no longer copes adequately with stresses of his life, has lapsed into a need for counseling or psychotherapy as we define it, and would be referred to a service-provider prepared to deal with emotional illness.

Therapeutic advising sessions are relatively rare. (See Table 1). Advisees with whom one engages in therapeutic advising sessions are undoubtedly under pronounced stress, but are still coping with these stresses, and are searching actively for effective coping mechanisms. I believe the key clues to understanding therapeutic advising are values and commitments.

To return to the example of the registered nurse student, the focus of therapeutic advising sessions usually relates to reviewing with her the depth of her commitment

²⁴Nancy K. Schlossberg, Lillian E. Troll, and Zandy Leibowitz, *Perspectives on Counseling Adults: Issues and Skills* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1978), p. 106.

TABLE I
Percentage Distributions of Types of Advising
In One Office During Twelve Months

Type of Advising	Percent of Total Advising Sessions 12-Month Period One College Advising Office
I. Informative	35.7
II. Explanatory	5.0
III. Analytic	58.2
IV. Therapeutic	1.1
TOTAL	100.0

to returning to school. Is she willing to pay the price now being extracted? Does she, in fact, value a baccalaureate degree as much as she values what she is being forced to give up in exchange for it? Does she possess the strength to withstand the severe ego-threatening aspects of returning to school?"

Developmental themes we hear most often during therapeutic advising sessions include the following:

A) Searching for Identity. While this theme occurs most often in working with eighteen to twenty-two year olds, it occurs in older returning RN students whose ego identities as nurses are challenged by returning to school. It occurs usually a year after they have returned to campus. "Was I ever a good nurse? I must not be a good nurse because coming back to nursing school is so hard for me and so different from what I expected. Just what kind of nurse am I?" Eighteen to twenty-two years-olds do not appear as distressed by this searching as do older students.

B) Confrontation with one's own mortality. In my experience, this theme occurs most frequently in the thirty-five and over adult, a mid-

¹¹D. L. Shane, "The Returning to School Syndrome: A Framework for Understanding the RN Enrolled in Baccalaureate Nursing Program;" S. Mirin, ed., *Teaching Tomorrow's Nurse* (Nursing Resources, Inc., 1980).

Downloaded from https://prime-pdf-watermark.prime-prod.pubfactory.com/ at 2025-10-19 via free access

career changer. "What have I accomplished in my life that is really important? Before I die, I want to . . ."

C) A sense of nearly overwhelming stress. While all adults feel stressed to some extent, the advisee during a therapeutic advising session usually expresses a feeling of being "on the brink." "If one more thing happens to me, I just don't know what I'll do." A seemingly endless litany of minor and major disasters pour forth, all complex and intertwined. This developmental theme a college student of any age can express, but in my experience it occurs more often in the older student. What advisor behaviors can encourage developmental growth during this type of advising? The following strategies I have gleaned from my own experience, and from other writers in the field:

- 1) The advisor should observe closely the advisee for signs of emotional ill-health, and refer him to a campus or community source equipped to deal with this health status, if the advisor is not prepared to cope with counseling/psychotherapy.

- 2) Suggest an on-campus peer group which the advisee can join, or develop a similar strategy for peer support. We have started a required course for RN students dealing only with their **returning-to-school** emotional difficulties. This course intends to convey to the RN student that her ego-threats, stresses, and identity crises are **predictable**, expected outcomes of returning to school and that she is not unusual, weak, sick, or a bad nurse for feeling as she does. We believe a measure of the success of this strategy is that not a single RN has dropped out of our program after she has completed the course.

- 3) Provide means for the advisee to learn more about adult development. As in suggestion 2 above, it may help adults undergoing a crisis in role transformation to know that their feelings are not unique, that other people share them, and that such feelings follow a **pattern**.²⁶

IV. Conclusions

It is possible to differentiate among advising, counseling, and psychotherapy. Undoubtedly the literature in the field would be substantially neater if this differentiation scheme were adopted widely. The field of academic advising in higher education is beginning to emerge. As Abraham Maslow, a seminal writer in the field of human development, has stated, "The far goals for adult education, and for other education, are to find the processes, the ways in which we can help people become all they are capable of becoming." "The far goal of academic advising we could not state better.

²⁶Nancy K. Schlossberg, "The Case for Counseling Adults," *Counseling Adults* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company), p. 84.

"Abraham Maslow, *Proceedings of the Conference on the Training of Counselors of Adults* (New England Board of Higher Education, Chatham, Massachusetts, May, 1965), p. 205.