

What do advisors really do? When we look over the lists of the tasks we perform, we see that many of the things we do are mundane and boring . . . keeping track of students' progress toward graduation, monitoring grades and eligibility, holding ten-minute conferences with advisees during enrollment crunch time, and handling paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. And to what aim? The big picture is not always clear. Ask your supervisor, "What is the institution's commitment to advising, and what does the institution expect advising to accomplish?" The answers to these questions do not always fit our ideas of what advising should be.

In one advising center for undeclared liberal arts students, the dean's instructions to the director of the center were clear: "Get them into declared majors as soon as you can." There was no talk here of developmental processes, and consequently no budgetary provisions were made to adequately staff this unit to go beyond basic advising processes: helping students choose courses to pave the way for choosing a major. I am sure that this anecdote has parallels throughout the country. Advising is seen, in many institutions, as a bookkeeping task to monitor students' progress and to get them graduated. In fact, some might even see advising, as it is currently structured, as a luxury item. Many upper-level decision-makers were educated during eras when students made their own decisions and secretaries kept track of progress toward graduation . . . and these students graduated, didn't they?

Some advising systems can highlight increased retention rates, and some systems can show a strong role in influencing increased student satisfaction with the institution, both of which have economic impacts that sway administrators to support advising. These are the lucky few that were probably constructed to achieve these results. But for most advising operations the long-term payoff is hard to measure. When good advising happens, only infrequently does it show up on any ledger sheets. It may not even show up for years after graduation. Having to rationalize the importance of advising is a frustrating task, especially when advisors know that good advising is an inherent facet of a good college education.

But the crucial issue for advisors should not

be rationalizing their existence. And it must not be the process of getting the check marks in the proper boxes and, consequently, certifying graduation. The crucial issue is to help students optimize their college experiences. Their years spent in college should be spent making optimal use of their abilities and their institutions' ability to educate. To that end, advisors are guides. And as guides, advisors must have administrative support. Advisors must have the time and ability to teach these students to construct personalized road maps to their own educations—and this takes time.

It takes time, in the first place, because students do not always see the need for advising. Student development theorists may construct models that describe students as performing sets of tasks and moving through stages of cognitive development, but students do not describe themselves in these ways. They are just young adults who are in the process of growing and who are dealing with all sorts of things. And for us, it sometimes appears that these students are using random processes to deal with their issues. Although they eventually sort things out, many of these students waste their college opportunities because college is not set up to accommodate their seemingly random ways.

Campuses are somewhat orderly places. They are usually divided in ways such that different offices take care of different issues. "Intellectual" and "personal" development, for instance, are usually parceled to academic and student affairs offices. But most people do not parcel out their personal and intellectual issues. Most people want things to make sense and fit together. So, when a student is taught about organizational behavior in class and gets leadership experience as a floor officer in a residence hall, the connection between theory and practice is usually lost.

And here is where our real job begins. How can we help students integrate their total college experience into a personally meaningful and intellectually fulfilling experience? How do we meaningfully acquaint students with new experiences so that they challenge their personal visions and reexamine their values. And how do we begin to introduce the word and meaning of the word "intellectual" into their lexicon?

It is a tall order for a ~~profession~~ that is grow-