

Advising College Students in the 21st Century

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At the beginning of the new millennium professional advisors are challenged to examine the theory and delivery of services to students. Professional advisors must adapt to changes in institutional and student needs and take full advantage of available resources. This article suggests that effective advising practices can be found on a continuum from prescriptive advising, developmental advising, and counseling. Technological tools of positive intervention with students, such as Web sites, listservs, and E-mail, are related while knowledge of developmental theories and the use of narrative, knowledge of defense mechanisms, and reframing are discussed in detail.

Comic-strip legend Walt Kelly (2001) coined the phrase, "We are confronted with insurmountable opportunities." Professionals working in higher education can identify with such a statement. Academic advising is a profession in constant flux and is designed to meet institutional and student needs. Often such needs are poorly defined, and they are always changing. Popular media have referred to today's students as the "microwave generation," "now generation," and "me generation." All these descriptors reflect the fact that traditional-aged students are accustomed to fast, efficient service. With smaller budgets available for institutional objectives, accountability is in greater demand. As a result of student-centered programming and institutional limitations, advisors are expected to offer students substantive information while taking student environments and life goals into consideration, keeping abreast with theories of advising, and incorporating new technological advances with more traditional relationship skills. Advisors have a greater opportunity than ever before to improve the services they provide.

While the most recent change to advising delivery involves the use of technology, change has permeated advising services since the inception of higher education. According to Wimbish (1995) administrators, faculty members, and staff were jointly responsible for student advisement in the first U.S. postsecondary institutions. By the 1930s, the tasks delegated to staff in what is now called student services were assigned to individuals such as the dean of women (men). Students were seen as children and the early deans acted on behalf of parents. Changes in societal expectations in the late 1960s

stimulated colleges to abandon the policy of *in loco parentis*. At the same time, a number of developmental theories emerged that advocated the "whole student" approach to college education.

Developmental Theories of Advising

E. H. Erikson's Development Theory

E. H. Erikson (1963) outlined eight stages of development from birth to death. Erikson explored the relationship between an individual's development and his or her social context. He emphasized the development of the ego, which is "that part of the personality concerned with directing action, coping with the external world and integrating competing urges within the self" (Stevens, 1983, p. 1).

E. H. Erikson focused on integrating the complex interactions that underlie behavior and experience. He encouraged others to understand behavior through the exploration of three sets of factors. First, one must understand somatic or physiological processes (temperament, physical condition, and intellect). Social context, which is the meaning and import provided by the culture in which the individual lives, is another important factor to understanding behavior. Erikson also proposed an understanding of ego process or identity, which is the way an individual resolves conflicts and makes sense of events and of self. At each stage, an individual has the opportunity to resolve a developmental dilemma, and each end of the resolution continuum is labeled by a stage.

Table 1 describes E. H. Erikson's eight stages of development. Each stage has the potential for remaining unresolved in part or in whole over the lifespan. However, at each stage, persons have new opportunities for healthy resolution of previous stages. Although the stages are sequential, they are far less discrete and definitive than each label suggests. According to Erikson, each phase of development is interdependent: "If, for whatever reason, the expression of one (stage) is flawed, then the others are likely to be affected too" (Stevens, 1983, p. 17). Unsuccessful completion of any stage leaves gaps in development. Rather than looking like building blocks, development stages more closely resemble the flower petals that radiate and overlap from the central core. Gaps recur throughout development if issues remain unresolved.

Community college advisors frequently see stu-

dents who lack healthy resolution of stage four, industry versus inferiority, when students failed to gain confidence as a learner early in her or his academic life. This stage can be especially challenging for some members of minority and lower socioeconomic groups if they experienced early negative expectations. However, academic success can result in a healthy resolution of stage four development. In addition to advisor support and encouragement, which can impact a student's persistence and resulting success, advisors can help students explore irrational personal beliefs about self-perceived inability or academic inadequacy.

Chickering's Vectors of Development

E. H. Erikson (1963) influenced the work of A. W. Chickering (1993), who subsequently identified seven vectors of development. Table 2 describes those vectors. Chickering was also influenced by N. Sanford (1967), who argued that student growth requires a balance between challenge and support. If the challenge is too great, the student is overwhelmed and gives up. If too much support is given the student may be debilitated by dependency. Erikson stated that an individual under stress, at any developmental stage, may regress to a previous,

more comfortable stage of development. The balance between challenge and support is best identified by an advisor who, with knowledge of developmental theories, can offer students information and options within the student's level of functioning.

Colleges and universities enroll students at every stage of development. However, postsecondary advisors tend to assign concepts of E. H. Erikson's stages five (identity versus role confusion), six (intimacy versus isolation), and seven (generativity versus stagnation) to the students who they advise. This kind of misapplication of developmental theory is often characterized by the assumption that development is a lockstep process with age and stage permanently paired. Practitioners of this incomplete developmental approach believe that advisors can develop an understanding of individual behavior by knowing the individual's age and circumstance. However, Erikson makes clear that to recognize development gaps, advisors must understand all stages of development.

Technology can be a major help to advisors treating students at various stages of development. Students who are mature educationally and emotionally can take advantage of independently

Table 1 E. H. Erikson's stages of development

Stage	Descriptor	Developmental Crisis	Positive Resolution	Negative Resolution
1	1 year	Trust vs. Mistrust	Trust in people and environment	Lack of trust in people and environment
2	1–3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Pride in self and ability to make decisions	Doubts about own abilities and decisions
3	3–6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Taking self-responsibility	Feelings of unworthiness and irresponsibility
4	6–11 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Pride in accomplishments	Feelings of inadequacy
5	Adolescence	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Basis for clear adult self	Over identification or loss of identity
6	Early adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Ability to love and develop close friendships	Isolation and self-absorption
7	Middle adulthood	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Interest in giving back or guiding the next generation	Stagnation or interpersonal impoverishment
8	Mature adulthood	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Dignity and contentment with the life led	Fear of death and running out of time

accessed Web pages to obtain well-constructed, consistent, and generic advising information. Other students may benefit from an advising chat room in which an academic advisor logs on at a scheduled day and time. Streaming video, telephone, or personal E-mail may be useful for students who require one-on-one interactions with advisors.

Tenets of developmental advising can be incorporated into most, if not all, distance advising formats. In-person contact will always be the preferred advising format for some students, and some issues, especially those that are emotionally charged, are more difficult to address at a distance. However, whether via technology or in-person, every student should be approached without assumptions, such as those based on age, concerning his or her emotional development.

Stages Not Ages

Biological changes govern development much more in early maturational stages than they do in later years. No one should assume that an individual, especially an adolescent or young adult, is in a certain psychosocial stage because she or he is of a particular age. Psychological changes and environmental demands of the individual have been so varied that a global estimate of developmental gains and deficits by adulthood cannot be determined. Tremendous differences in development among adults can usually be considered nonacute struggles with gaps in development that do not require counseling.

Most adults understand (whether or not they have ever heard of E. H. Erikson's developmental stages) an infant's anxiety if separated from his or her parent. However, fewer people may understand

the process of separation and individuation, which may be dealt with in different ways throughout each developmental stage.

Separation and individuation are frequently encountered by traditional-aged college students. Therefore, professionals working on college campuses have seen students struggle not only with questions such as "Who am I?" "What do I want to be?" and "What do I want to accomplish?" but have also observed student desires to conform, find a place in society, or free themselves of their own isolation.

Nontraditional students also face separation and individuation, but they may display these issues in a little different way than do their traditional-aged counterparts. The 35-year-old woman, returning to college after the end of a 15-year marriage, may be processing the same developmental issues as her 20-year-old classmates. Advisors should not assume that any student has attained a certain level of development because the advisee is of a certain age.

J. Arbuckle and D. Gale (1996) were surprised to find that both traditional-aged and nontraditional students reported strong similarities in life circumstances and reasons for withdrawing from college. The authors stated, "Recent social changes resulting from increased diversity (race, socioeconomic class, culture, gender, academic preparation, family stability, sexual orientation, mental/physical health, etc.) are challenging the idea that adult experience can be categorized into systematic stages" (p. 21). They concluded, "Human development does not occur on the same chronological time line for all individuals, and is thus not determined in age and stage order." (p. 25). They suggested that transitions recur throughout life and

Table 2 A. W. Chickering's vectors of development

Vector	Descriptor
Developing Competence	Intellectual, physical, and social competence
Managing Emotions	Awareness of feelings and appropriate expression of feelings
Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence	Emotional independence and interconnectedness with others
Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships	Tolerance for personal and cultural differences and value of commonalities
Establishing Identity	Establishing sense of self
Developing Purpose	Setting educational and career goals and identifying a meaningful lifestyle
Developing Integrity	Humanize and personalize values; establish congruence between beliefs and behavior

"Growth relative to psychosocial task development never achieves closure" (p. 25). Their findings are consistent with developmental theories such as those of E. H. Erikson (1963) and A. W. Chickering (1993).

Neither can advisors determine the degree of a student's academic risk based on the advisee's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or familial educational level. However, advisors trained in development theory can help students integrate their individual life cycles with life goals. In addition, information independently available to students on the World Wide Web, such as frequently asked questions (FAQs) and workshops on tape, can stimulate students' development regardless of physical age.

Prescriptive Theory of Advising

B. B. Crookston (1972) described prescriptive advising as focusing on authority-based answers to specific questions. Advisors who use a prescriptive advising approach do not take total individual development into consideration. Instead they focus on institutional authority. While information, such as course prerequisites, deadlines for withdrawing from class, and other specific college guidelines, is important, a direct human connection is not required for its transmission. Advisors can convey it easily by FAQ Web sites, informational on-line videos, and Internet accessible catalogs. Listservs can be set up to send information of interest to students in specific majors.

Prescriptive advising is unlike developmental advising, which Frost (1991, p. 363) described as "concerned with human growth, cognitive, affective, career, physical, and moral personal goals and objectives. It is a goal-related activity in which goals are collaboratively established to provide direction for planning academic, career, and personal growth." Based on development theories put forth by E. H. Erikson and A. W. Chickering, the nucleus of developmental advising was defined to include a personal relationship between the student and advisor. Proponents of developmental advising advocate that advisors relate to students in a holistic way, integrating academic, career, and personal goals into advisement, rather than focus only on academic or career goals.

In the best interest of professional advising, as well as the best interest of students, as much substance as possible should be brought to the connections advisors make with students. The professional advisor is one of the first and one of the last college representatives to whom students speak in their college careers. A positive compassionate tone with an expectation for student success

is set by professional advisors in the initial meeting. The student returns to the advisor if she or he is frustrated, angry, or loses hope of reaching academic goals. Through the interview, professional advisors can discern the student's current developmental stage and offer suggestions that may stimulate student growth. However, advisors who use only a prescriptive advising approach do not address developmental issues.

Because of its impersonal nature, much of prescriptive advising can be handled easily through the latest technological devices. Therefore, advisors who offer only a prescriptive approach may find themselves replaced by electronic media. Although challenges are associated with distance education and associated electronic formats, some degree of developmental advising can be achieved through technology. Web pages and E-mail do not lend themselves well to developmental advisement, but referral sources and general mental health tips may be offered to the general student population through such formats. Telephone contact can, with skill, be an important developmental interaction. Tone of voice, response time, and content of the verbal interchange give very potent information about a student. Through videoconferencing, advisors can be as developmental in their approach as they are in person-to-person interactions. Workshops and newsletters with Internet access, advising manuals for students (giving services and formats offered in advisement), presentations over cable television channels, and real-time chat rooms are less personal but may focus on developmental issues. In addition, information offered by technological means may stimulate some students to seek a more personal connection with an advisor.

The Advising Continuum

Butler (1995) suggested that a continuum of services, from academic advising, counseling, and psychotherapy, is offered to students, and that the methods of any two types of these services overlap. He said (p. 110), "The services provided by academic advisors and counselors may overlap and involve similar techniques and focus on similar student concerns. Nevertheless, there are notable differences, not only in their goals and purposes . . . but also in the nature and types of services they provide."

Prescriptive advising, developmental advising, and counseling may also be viewed on a continuum. Just as colleges and universities adapted to changing needs of students and society in the 1960s and 1970s, advisors have the opportunity to add new skills and new delivery formats to meet the changing needs of students at the turn of century. Many

institutions decrease budgets as they pressure directors and supervisors to verify the cost effectiveness of services provided. Advisors can respond by reducing services to students or by creating new venues and systems of delivering services more efficiently. The challenge is to incorporate systems that give advisors and students opportunities to develop relationships with one another. Now is the time for professional advisors to advance the expectation of student-advisor communication beyond prescriptive information. Creamer and Scott (2000, p. 340–41) stated,

Compared to prescriptive advising, developmental advising requires advisors to be knowledgeable on a broader range of topics. This is because the developmental approach is intentional about inviting the student to discuss the setting of personal, career, and life goals rather than just the requirements of a particular course or degree. This is an area in which the advisor's, the student's and the supervisor's expectations may clash because not all advisors consider it in their domain of responsibility to discuss such an in-depth range of issues with students.

In addition to varied views of the advisor's purview, differences in nomenclature and job description vary among institutions. Therefore, the range of the advising continuum may also vary among colleges and universities. Four-year colleges and universities often employ academic advisors to talk with students about degree plans, course requirements, and enrollment; educational counselors to discuss study skills, test anxiety, and tutoring; career counselors to assist students in career exploration; and mental health counselors to talk with students about personal and emotional concerns. The latter are typically licensed psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, or licensed professional counselors; the requirements for any type of licensure varies from state to state.

In contrast, many community colleges employ student development counselors or advisors whose primary responsibility is assisting students with academic issues and questions. However, they also guide students in career exploration and are contacted for crisis intervention and referral services. Short-term counseling may also take place with student development counselors qualified in such areas. These institutions may be among the first to embrace technology by offering career information, study aids, and advising information on the World Wide Web. Just as they frequently offer students many options in class times (evening, weekend, and distance formats), community colleges also

offer students varied advisement options (in-person, telephone, E-mail, fax, or self-advisement).

Regardless of the extent of the continuum practiced at an institution, academic advisors need good communication skills (O'Banion, 1994), and each advisor must master a significant cognitive knowledge base to be functional in his or her role. O'Banion (1994) listed five dimensions in the process of academic advising: exploration of life goals, exploration of vocational goals, program choice, course choice, and scheduling courses. Advisors new to the profession may function mostly on the prescriptive end of the advising continuum. As students access more prescriptive information via the World Wide Web, the student's expectation of advisement will be raised. Students will reasonably expect advisors to help them apply college policies to the students' individual lives and goals. This expectation will in turn motivate effective advisors to develop better interview and communication skills. Experience with students and exposure to how developmental tasks affect individual functioning can lead advisors to a more developmental perspective of advising. With additional training, an advisor may become credentialed in counseling to be even more capable of helping students with personal issues.

All points in the continuum, from prescriptive advising to developmental advising and counseling, benefit students. However, the closer the needed services fall toward the counseling end of the continuum, the less likely electronic formats will be useful to the students. Sometimes students need only cognitive information (for example, "How do I add a class?"). However, some of those students seeking answers to relatively simple questions, for example, via a listserv, also need an emotional connection, whether in the form of reassurance, positive reinforcement, or inspiration. While dispensing information through electronic formats allows students greater flexibility and independence, information delivered more personally by an advisor offers more opportunities to address issues and questions students may never have known to ask.

Developmental advisors can stimulate student growth by questioning students about their goals and progress and by listening, not only to what students say, but how they say it. For example, following a very damaging tornado, professional advisors at a midwest community college contacted all students by telephone who were directly affected by the storm. Students were given the opportunity to tell their stories of loss, escape, survival, or were allowed to simply vent emotions. Students were given direct referral information

and asked about their needs. No official piece of mail, Web announcement, or individualized E-mail could have conveyed the level of concern expressed by advisors. Nor could student needs have been assessed as accurately. Although less dramatically overwhelmed than those affected by tornadoes, students who meet with advisors before dropping a class or performing other important tasks often benefit from additional information provided by the advisor. Sometimes in a face-to-face meeting, the advisor is in a position to help advisees address developmental gaps that may be affecting their academic success. Advisors may occasionally use tools often employed by counselors to assist their advisees.

Counseling Tools for Advising

Developmental advising involves developing and maintaining an authentic relationship with the student. Carl Rogers (Evans, 1981, p. 156) described authentic relationships as “interpersonal relations in which communications are real and complete, rather than phony or partial.” Communication in an authentic relationship is “a means of telling it the way it is, with feelings, ideas, gestures, speech, and bodily movement all conveying the same message” (p. 156). Authenticity leads to a genuine relationship rather than one built on superficial social roles. The developmental advisor, like the counselor, seeks an authentic relationship with an advisee.

Developmental advisors, like counselors, engage students in questioning short- and long-term goals, promoters and impediments to success, and the rationale behind goal-related decisions. Developmental advisors can use existing school resources, such as tutoring, career exploration tools, and counseling referrals, to support a change in students’ self-perceptions. Students often come to an advisor when they are struggling with academic or life problems that are impeding academic success, and students are sometimes self-deprecating in response to the stresses of college, home, or work challenges. Like counselors, developmental advisors emphasize the positive strengths, abilities, and skills of students rather than focus on limitations or failures. They relate problems to predictable developmental life cycles where difficulties in living can be expected to occur. Developmental advisors use a solution-focused, future-oriented approach to student behavior rather than a problem-focused, historical orientation. They employ indirect and direct suggestions, encouraging students to develop problem-solving skills in which they can create a positive expectancy for change. Although advisors

do not diagnose or engage students in individual counseling, they can use some counseling tools to effectively help advisees.

Defense Mechanisms

In addition to developmental theories, advisors need to be knowledgeable about the use of defense mechanisms, which are adaptive techniques everyone uses during times of stress to deal with anxiety, aggressive impulses, and frustrations. Knowledge of defense mechanisms serve developmental advisors, not so they can interpret such information for students, but so the advisor can recognize ongoing dynamics of student experiences. In addition to denial, a form of repression, individuals use regression, sublimation, displacement, reaction formation, and isolation to cope with problems.

One of the most commonly used defense mechanisms is projection, where one’s own characteristics, feelings, or impulses are attributed or “projected” onto another person. Therefore, developmental advisors must possess self-awareness to differentiate between students’ perceptions and possible projection. Otherwise advisors may respond defensively or, at best, miss important information students offer. Regardless of the level of effectiveness of the defense mechanisms a student uses, advisors must assume that the defense worked at one time or it would not have been preserved.

Reframing

Developmental advisors can use verbal tools to turn negative self-evaluations into neutral or positive messages. One such tool, commonly used in counseling, is reframing, which involves restating the description of a situation to put it in a different perspective. For example, an older student going to college for the first time may lament the time that he has lost. A developmental advisor may reframe the situation by pointing out the student’s heightened motivation and sense of purpose that enable him to succeed at a higher level than he may have reached at a younger age. Advisors must remember that to implement successful reframing and other techniques, they must first be willing to hear fully what students are attempting to convey.

Narrative

Narrative is another tool developmental advisors can use to assist students. It is a technique that requires careful listening, and the listener must guard against imposing a value judgment or imply agreement or disagreement with the telling of the individual story.

Because all stories are told from a biased perspective, developmental advisors must listen to the point of view of the student. An angry student demanding that the advisor waive a prerequisite to a course may tell the advisor how everyone in the institution has put roadblocks in her way. While the prescriptive advisor can only restate school policy and offer options listed by the institution, developmental advisors can directly address the student's frustration. The advisor can show appreciation of how hard the student is willing to struggle for her education. Reassurance can be offered to the student so that she sees that someone at the institution is on her side. The prerequisite may not necessarily be waived, but the advisor can use appropriate counseling tools to diffuse anger and become a collaborator with the student to redirect the advisee's energies in a positive direction.

M. Erickson (Rosen, 1982) made use of stories to assist people in developing adaptive skills. C. J. Kershaw (1994, p. 146) wrote, "The story has the healing power to allow a person to reorganize internal categories and retrieve resources that are needed for whole functioning." How many students have said, "I can't do math" or "I'm not good at taking tests"? For example, Sara came for advisement because she wanted to withdraw from a developmental math class. Sara said that she had never been able to calculate math problems effectively. She reported working hard on her homework, but her schedule of work and children did not permit her to take advantage of the math lab. When the advisor asked if she had talked with her instructor, Sara said that her instructor had told her that she was doing fine. Responding to inquiry about her grades, Sara said that she had earned 92 and 88% on the two tests she had taken in the semester. In response to positive feedback on her accomplishments, Sara began to cry. When the advisor asked about the tears, Sara was very apologetic. With the advisor's encouragement and openness to hearing her feelings, Sara told her story. As a Native American child she had not been given positive information about her academic skills. Community college was her first experience with what might be considered a successful school experience. Her emotions ranged from disbelief to relief. Sara did not need to be referred for counseling. As a matter of fact, a counseling referral would likely have reinforced Sara's self-perception that something was "wrong" with her. By listening to her story, the advisor gave Sara the opportunity to rewrite her story and change her life telling. Everyone has a story to tell. However, the advisee may choose to tell all, part, or none of her or his story, in no small measure

because of the response from the advisor.

Listening and Encouragement. Developmental advisors are editors and co-constructors of life stories. They assist students in turning negative information into positive information. They help students explore alternatives to their story. A. Adler's (1958) theory of personality development provides information on how discouragement influences behavior. Developmental advisors can offer an antidote to discouragement by listening fully to students' stories and teasing out the positive threads of hope.

Also, developmental advisors should provide comfort and support. Many problems have no solution, and sometimes students need a temporary shelter, a safe place where they can be heard without being judged. In addition to building rapport with students, these interactions may support some students who would not otherwise persevere through the perceived roadblocks in reaching his or her goals. These activities also raise the expectation of professional advising beyond simply prescriptive advising.

Only through direct conversation with each student will issues reach the awareness of the advisor. Advisors should not interrogate students concerning their development, but they should be open to hearing developmental dilemmas students choose to disclose. Once hearing the information, the advisor who is equipped with knowledge concerning typical development can clarify with the student those issues that are most prominent. Those who have established a relationship with students are in a position to make an informed referral, if needed. A student is also more likely to follow up on the referral in part because she or he was engaged in an authentic relationship with an advisor.

Listening for Hidden Messages. Too often non-advising issues are ignored by advisors. The following story was told by a faculty advisor as an example of how much pressure he was under to change students' grades. It provides a dramatic example of how an advisor, who was clearly unskilled in developmental advising, failed to help a student in a potentially life-threatening situation. A student came to her faculty advisor and asked that the grade of B be changed to an A on a paper she had written. The student explained that she was not asking for a permanent grade change but that she needed the paper to reflect a cosmetic change. She told the faculty advisor that her husband hit her whenever she brought home a grade lower than an A. Because her husband would recognize her writing, the student asked her faculty advisor to mark

the changed grade. The faculty advisor, using a prescriptive format, informed the student of school policy and his own perceived legal requirements to accurately reflect grades. He focused entirely on his own ethics and the potential liability he would incur and subsequently refused her request.

This young student received an answer to the veiled questions she was attempting to ask: Is violence acceptable and is my value only in what I can produce? She left her faculty advisor's office with no referral and no interruption in her life story. Students give advisors opportunities to discuss an almost endless number of agendas. Advisors are limited primarily by their own comfort level. Appropriate training can not only increase advisors' knowledge of developmental theories, but training can also increase their comfort levels in dealing with all aspects of student development. By knowing options and appropriate interventions, advisors can increase their comfort and skill when dealing with students' life issues.

Advisors miss opportunities to intervene with students when they ignore all but academic information students present. Nutt (2000, p. 222) supported this point by saying, "Advisors often make the mistake of referring students on the basis of the advisor's own feelings or views rather than clearly listening to the students or asking effective questions to determine what the students' problems or issues may be." Some advisors feel discomfort when students reveal any but the most superficial information about themselves. However, if they are to help students acquire self-trust concerning their selection of a major or life direction, advisors must trust in their own abilities to accurately recognize developmental stages and assist students in their overall development (academic, career, and inter/intrapersonal). Engagement in and ownership of professional and personal development is not just good modeling for students, it can increase the advisors' capacities for change and subsequently stimulate change in advisees.

If they want to interact with students in authentic relationships and insure that their professional positions cannot be replaced with a computer, advisors must be aware of issues with which they feel uncomfortable. Gaps in the advisor's development may be unearthed when a student stimulates feelings of inadequacy in the advisor. Anytime strong emotions are elicited by a student, advisors are well-served by spending introspective time to understand the interaction. Advisors may have difficulty assisting a student in furthering his development if the advisor has not walked that far on life's devel-

opmental path.

Advisors also need accurate information on referral sources within the office, campus, and community. Referrals should be offered to students who are having thoughts or feelings of hurting themselves or hurting others, if they are in relationships in which they are being hurt (physically or emotionally), or if they have knowledge or involvement in any minor (child) being harmed. Students whose current behavior or mood are adversely affected by past history may also be offered referrals.

Listening and Crisis Intervention. Unlike the student whose veiled request for a grade change hinted at a need for in-depth help with her husband's abuse, a student who has established a good working relationship with her advisor may give the advisor direct, unsolicited, information about her family. In one example, a student said to her advisor, "I've been having some trouble. It worries me a lot. My husband beats our kids. He's never really hurt them, but he leaves bruises. We move a lot, so by the time the neighbors report it DHS (Department of Human Services) can't find us. I just needed to tell a friend and I know I can trust you not to tell anyone." Unlike the advisor who followed the prescriptive approach, the developmental advisor responded with, "I'm glad you came in. You're right. You can trust me, but I think you really trust that I will report this. I know you love your kids and you don't want them hurt anymore." The advisor talked with the student about community resources, options, and life decisions before calling the appropriate authorities to report the abuse while the student was still in the office.

Another student sought out an advisor because her grades were falling. She was considering withdrawing from all her classes. As the advisor inquired about the student's situation, the student revealed that she was caring for an elderly neighbor. Although she was not a family member, the neighbor had been like the father she had never known. The student tried to convince the neighbor to contact his grown children, who lived out of state. However, the man refused, not wanting to burden them. The student expressed the feeling that she had no options. Because the neighbor was not eating, was prone to forgetfulness, falls, and other problems, the student had gradually assumed the role of caretaker. The advisor offered emotional support to the student and reinforced her caring nature. At the same time, the advisor offered the student a referral source. A professionally trained social worker was available through a state agency to visit the neighbor's home.

The neighbor was convinced by the social worker to contact his adult children, who then assisted their father in appropriate care.

A student who was on academic probation was required by the college to have advisor approval before enrolling. The student made a lot of jokes about his life. He said that within the previous week his live-in girlfriend had left him, he had lost his job from company downsizing, and he had totally destroyed his car in a recent accident. The student made all the events sound funny, but he added in a softer voice, "It'll be over soon." In a compassionate way, the advisor asked for clarification. The student seemed surprised but made clear he was only making reference to the end of the semester. Through this encounter, the advisor proved that he was available to talk with the student about any issues.

The Continuum in Practice

At the dawn of this new millennium, professional advisors are wise to embrace the opportunities to advance the profession by replacing inefficient services with Web-based information systems. At the same time, advisors and students are best served by weaving technology into the threads of developmental advising by using streaming video, personal Web pages for advisors, and real-time chat rooms to build relationships with students. Developmental advising can be creative and include diverse tools. Like other professionals have successfully done, advisors should be able to operationalize the many different theories of developmental advising. Advisors must not assume that only one application exists for any theory. According to Creamer (2000, p. 18),

Given the scope of the academic advising phenomenon, advisors may be required to understand many theories—not only one or two—in order to grasp sufficient knowledge to be useful in advising students. Sound theory provides plausible explanations of a complex phenomenon. It distills the phenomenon to its essence and makes systematic observations about apparent relationships or underlying principles. Good theory is also useful in practice; it illuminates complex circumstances and makes puzzling things understandable.

In addition, advisors must not allow themselves to become so comfortable in their own knowledge and self-awareness that they cannot adequately listen to new stories from students and apply appropriate developmental theories to their situations. The first step in building more substance into advising

is to encourage advisor self-awareness. By opening themselves to authentic relationships with students, advisors allow themselves to be positively or negatively stimulated by their own developmental issues, which can also lead to self-development. Evans, Forney, and Guido-Di-Brito (1998, p. 67) supported self-development of professionals by suggesting, "Professionals in the field must be concerned with setting the stage for and taking action on their own identity development as well as that of the students they serve. To do less undermines the learning process and deprives us all of being the best we can be." Each advisor must make a decision about her or his own limits based on training, background, and inclination to obtain information and training needed to use developmental theories in advisement.

Developmentally trained advisors are essentially life strategists. They encourage self-reliance in students by helping students set realistic goals and make informed, responsible decisions. They also help students develop thinking, learning, and life management skills both for the present and the future. Therefore, a successful advisor will use many tools available on the continuum of advising strategies: electronic communication, building authentic relationships, and using counseling tools to render assistance that will enable advisees to reach their full potential.

Summary

In the dawn of a new millennium, academic advisors have unprecedented opportunities to further define their profession and expand their expertise. By fully understanding theories of development, defense mechanisms, reframing, and narrative tools, advisors will add intervention skills they can apply with students experiencing a variety of educational problems. By using technology to provide more accessible information and as an alternate format for building relationships with students, advisors raise the expectations of the services that professional advisors can offer students.

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