

From the Co-Editors: Academic Advising for Liberal and Practical Education

The *NACADA Journal* is devoting the majority of space in its 2009 issues to reflection on NACADA's evolution as an association and a field in higher education. This overview of NACADA's history should remind everyone that its foundation was solid and its growth and influence in higher education has been profound.

From the time Harvard College was founded in 1636 through the end of the 1800s, colleges offered a classical liberal-arts curriculum. The courses in this curriculum were designed to develop ministers, lawyers, and doctors for an emerging society. Typical courses included Latin, Greek, and mathematics, but no electives (Morison, 1946, p. 12). "In classical antiquity, the term [*liberal*] designated the education proper for a freeman (Latin: *liber*, 'free') as opposed to a slave" (Wikipedia, 2009b). Liberal education was intended to develop the intellectual and ethical capacities of individuals. In modern institutions, students taking the liberal education curriculum typically take courses in a wide range of fields that include art, literature, languages, philosophy, politics, history, mathematics, and science. These are often grouped into the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Students are to be generally educated and to acquire a transferable set of intellectual competencies "such as communication, and analytical and problem-solving skills" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009). In short, as a result of a liberal education, students acquire the intellectual capacity and knowledge to live the life of the mind.

The trend toward more specialized curricula, the purpose of which was to teach students practical skills directly applicable to the workplace, was started in the 1870s when electives were first introduced. The inclusion of electives in the curriculum also began to produce specialized advising programs at Harvard, The Johns Hopkins, and Kenyon colleges (Kuhn, 2008). In 1891, Andrew Carnegie called attention to a different curricular trend when he "congratulated the graduates of Pierce College of Business for being 'fully occupied in obtaining a knowledge of shorthand and typewriting' rather than wasting time 'upon dead languages'" (as cited in Powers, 2009). This aspersion of the classical liberal curriculum reflected Carnegie's desire for colleges to provide a more relevant and practical education that could be directly applied to the improvement of society.

While still reflecting the need for students to have a general education to develop such academically oriented skills in reading, computation, and general knowledge of the world, recent trends in higher education suggest an increasing emphasis on professional, vocational, and technical education. For some time, colleges and universities have offered majors in nursing, education, and business administration, which prepare students to enter professions or employment in business or industry. More recently, corporate and for-profit (proprietary) institutions have emerged, unabashedly promoting the employability of their graduates. Corporate institutions such as Hamburger University and Toyota University offer courses and degrees that are customized and closely linked to the company's strategic mission (Wikipedia, 2009a). The need for more specialized education in the business world has been propelled by advancing technology, globalization, and the shift from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy. Generic continuing-education programs offered by universities could not deliver classes tailored to the mission-specific needs and worldviews needed by employees from different companies (Corporate University Enterprise, 2009).

While this massive change in the nature of higher education institutions was taking place, the student body, too, was undergoing a shift from traditional 18-year-old students who entered college right out of high school, to ever-increasing numbers of nontraditional students who delay enrollment in college after graduation from high school, work full-time while enrolled part-time, are financially independent, have children, are single parents, and either do not complete high school or complete it with a General Educational Development (GED) credential or other certificate. Proprietary schools as well as traditional colleges and universities offer courses during evenings and weekends to cater to these types of students. Moreover, increasing numbers of students are enrolling simultaneously in two or more institutions to achieve their personal educational objectives within the prerogatives of their employment and personal lifestyles.

The trend toward curricular relevancy and practical application in the workplace has been exacerbated because of the recent downturn in the world economy. Even though we empathize with our students' desires and need to get jobs, we think they need to acquire reading and computational skills as

well as a healthy amount of general knowledge so they can function well in personal, social, and business contexts. These basic academic skills are fundamental to a liberal education and undergird success in all studies and occupations. The ubiquitous nature of technology requires all professionals and workers to be able to read, compute, and communicate in oral and written form; only those who master these skills will be able to obtain an education that is practical, utilitarian, and directed at a career.

What are the implications of this socioeconomic climate for advisors' work with students regarding the liberal and career aspects of their education? Should advisors feel good about directing students to a trade school where liberal education is minimized (if existent)? Can advisors be authentic if they advise students to sit in large lecture halls taught by a graduate assistant? Does the content of a course outweigh who is teaching it? Should students be advised to encounter the best minds on a campus? When the grade and credit shown on the transcript are the same, is there a difference between taking history of the United States in a large lecture class taught by an apprentice faculty member and taking it in a seminar format from a senior scholar of history who lives and loves his subject matter? The answers to these questions reside in the confluence of an academic advisor's beliefs, institutional curricular offerings, and student abilities and interests. In this climate of change, the practice and process of academic advising will help shape the

education and character of students.

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