

Most centers make a concerted effort to win over faculty and to maintain a good relationship with them. My impression is that the importance of counselling and advising as an integral part of higher education is less readily accepted in England than in the United States.

I have pointed out some of the differences and similarities between the two countries in the counselling/advising administrative structure and the types of problems encountered. The issue nearly everyone agreed to was that a prime function of the counsellor, advisor, or, whatever he or she is called is to act as a "listening ear."

My conclusion from this study is that advising and counselling problems and solutions have no boundaries. They truly have international dimensions.

Building Community in Freshman Year

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Those who perform the job know that academic advising is not very tidy work. While advisors have offices and appointment books, catalogs and files, their advice is often given on the fly; over the salad bar in the cafeteria; in the corridor between classes; and outside the sports center after a three-mile run. "Can I substitute a course on the Civil War for History 101?" "Does my AP credit in English get me out of Expository Writing?" "Do I really have to take calculus to get into medical school?" Advice on the run is not what the system envisions, but if the questions are neither troubled nor complex, and if the answers are thoughtful and thorough, students, who are notoriously reluctant to make appointments, may get some of the advice needed. They may be encouraged by the informality of the process to make an appointment to discuss the larger issues of their education at greater length.

Academic advising is never done in a vacuum. It is carried out in a particular environment that either supports the effort to advise students or works against it. If students and advisors draw lettuce from the same bowl, good advising can take place at lunch in a cafeteria, but if food fights are the normal order of business, it cannot. This article presents some thoughts about *building community through freshman orientation*, and in the process not only advising students about courses and requirements as they enter a college, but creating an environment in which all the efforts to assist students, academically and humanly, will have a greater chance of success.

I'd like to begin by recalling the second book of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen*. It tells the story of a knight, Sir Guyon, and his guide, a palmer, whose mission is to reach the Bower of Bliss, the beautiful home of the enchantress, Acrasia; capture the enchantress; destroy the Bower; and change back into men all of Acrasia's former lovers, whom she has turned into swine. It seems a large order, to say the least.

Nothing is easy in the world of romance. It takes 6,147 lines to get the job done. All sorts of strange and terrible things happen along the way. The knight loses his horse; he and the palmer inherit a baby whose hands are permanently stained with blood; they meet a monster called Furor and his mother, Occasion; Sir Guyon battles any number of evil knights and resists several temptations to dalliance; the palmer gets lost; Guyon is delayed in the Case of Mammon, the "God of the world and worldings"; he is educated in the House of Temperance; but finally he and the palmer reach the Bower of Bliss, the

renaissance version of a New Orleans bawdy house with naked damsels disporting themselves in a pool. (What used to be called "the good parts" are in Canto 12, Stanzas 5, 57, and 58.) But our heroes manage to resist all the lush temptations of the Bower (the Palmer makes sure Guyon keeps his eyes on the road), and they finally catch Acrasia and her latest lover in *flagrante delicto*, destroy the Bower of Bliss, and turn all the swine back to men.

So, as is always the case with romance, the quest is successful, the knight is victorious, and everyone is happy. Except for one person, who for me is one of the most fascinating characters in all of literature — a knight named Gryll who, as Spenser puts it, "repined greatly" that he was no longer swine. Sir Guyon curses the beastly Gryll; after all, he's just spent 6,140 lines trying to make Gryll a part of the community. The palmer, however, who as apparently been in the business longer than Guyon, simply shrugs it off and says (my favorite line) "let Gryll be Gryll, and have his hoggish mind." What can you do? Twelve cantos, 683 stanzas, 6,147 lines, two mixers, a wine and cheese, a barbecue, and Gryll still wants to be a hog. I used to think a lot about Gryll on the night before freshman orientation began. It's the *Gryll factor*; we never get them all, and that's one of the small bits of wisdom I wish to offer after three and a half years, 3,200 freshmen, and four orientation cycles, as Associate Dean and Principal Academic Advisor of freshmen at Fordham College.

The other small bit of wisdom is that we can never build a single community at Fordham College which enrolls 800 freshmen a year. What we do build is a number of small communities with intersecting memberships so that students (and faculty and administrators who advise them), by their participation in smaller, local communities, either become or feel they are a part of something that really doesn't exist — the "College" or the "University community." These local communities are everywhere; in the dormitories; in the classrooms; in the cafeteria; in the radio station and the offices of the newspaper; on the football field and in the intramural sports center; and in the honors program and the ROTC.

A lot of people say they love Fordham, and I often wonder what they mean. Nobody really loves the beautiful buildings, the lawns, the chestnut trees that line the walks, or the sleek black squirrels that are indigenous to that area of the Bronx. What they love are the people who are Fordham, the teachers, administrators, and students through whom, for them, Fordham College reveals itself and makes manifest what it professes to be. People who say they love Fordham, if we can believe the Duke, Thesius, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are all lunatics, for they "give to airy nothing" (what we call the Fordham College community) "a local habitation and a name": the guys in "A" House, Jim Kurtz in the Fine Arts Department, Jean Marie Brescia who runs the American Age Lecture Series. Try to organize a freshman event, for the entire class, all 800 of them, six weeks after orientation and you can't do it. They are too busy. But arrange an awards ceremony for students on the dean's list, an honors program reception, an open house in one of the dormitories, or a glee club concert, and people will attend.

Early in December the Fordham Club organizes a Christmas celebration at Fordham. It includes a tree lighting ceremony and a Christmas dinner for local senior citizens. A large number of people contribute a lot of time to these events, but many do not. (Gryll spends most of his time working in McDonald's perhaps earning money for next term's tuition,

perhaps not.) I'm not saying you can't build community; I am saying, however, that the college community is a fiction or a federation of smaller communities, and students tap into the imagined larger community by their membership in the smaller ones. The individual's temperament, interests, time, opportunity, and chance all determine where contacts will be made. It doesn't matter where, if students, faculty, and administrators can get to know one another and have opportunities of working together to further learning, human development, generosity, and a sense of justice. What this means is that those who advise students, faculty or administrators, must spend much time at many different events, affirming to local communities not just their value and importance, but their connection to the entire college they represent.

I tried not to be guided by all this wisdom when I planned and carried out the freshman orientation cycle at Fordham. The two students who worked with me on the orientation each year, the freshman moderators, always said they wanted to unify the freshman class and make it part of Fordham College. I listened to them and forgot about Gryll and the words of Thesius. We developed an orientation program that attempted to reach every member of the freshman class.

The orientation cycle began early in Fordham College. In February the Office of Admissions invited all accepted students to Fordham for class visiting days. Students who wanted to board were told to bring their sleeping bags and spend a night with students in the dorms. While the Office of Admissions saw this event as a way of increasing the size of the freshman class, it was also the first part of a six-month effort to advise students and build community that finally ended in early October. I welcomed the visitors each morning, and also accompanied them on their trips to the theater in the evening. Most people were trying to sell them on Fordham, but the visitors were making their own connection with the communities they would join in September. They were making friends, meeting the faculty members and administrators who would soon become their advisors, and gaining valuable information from upper-classmen. Important judgments were made during those days; roommates found each other, and teachers and courses were chosen on the basis of a single class.

The second step of the Orientation cycle at Fordham involved inviting incoming freshmen to visit the campus in small groups during the summer. These sessions were used to continue the process of advising:

- to explain the goals of a liberal arts college;
- to encourage students to take an active part in campus life;
- to tell them about the services we could provide for them; and
- to start them thinking about requirements, courses, and programs for the fall.

We did as much as we could in two hours, but we were never sure how much they would remember. How closely they listened on those hot days and nights in June and July. We were sure they met the three people who would be in charge of their orientation during September — the freshman dean and the two freshman moderators. Their faces would look friendly and familiar when the students arrived. For many of them, these three people would initially be their only link to the community, and often they would be a necessary and important, but temporary link.

In September, according to Fordham's tradition, the Jesuit community had a barbecue for the freshmen boarders on the night before orientation began. Except for the barbecue, October 1983

very Freshman boarder or commuter was invited and encouraged to attend every event during orientation week. Each day we tried to combine academic advising with social or co-curricular activities. On the first evening we had a Mass for freshmen, and then the 'resident's Reception. The President, by speaking to several groups of freshmen throughout the day, had become an academic adviser. He celebrated Mass and talked informally with many freshmen at the reception. His presence there was important; it seemed to say for a good many freshmen that Fordham was a concerned and friendly place.

The Orientation events included:

- a picnic,
- another barbecue,
- mixers,
- a club fair,
- a panel discussion on the City of New York,
- course planning sessions with faculty advisors and upperclassmen,
- meetings with advisors from the Placement Office and the Counseling Center.

The Orientation Program was designed to help freshmen become acquainted with Fordham College and provide occasions for them to meet and know one another, upperclassmen, members of the faculty and administrators who will serve as their advisors over the next four years. If they did get to know people during orientation, then they may get involved with others when school began. In the midst of all the excitement of orientation, the staff registered them in the right courses. The program allowed the staff to clarify for parents and students the goals and philosophy of the College.

A month after school began, the parents of the freshmen were invited to Fordham for 'Parents' Days' on two successive Sundays. A Mass was held for those who wished to attend, followed by a social hour with refreshments. Speeches were delivered to the parents by the President, the Dean of the College, and the Dean for Freshmen, and then smaller group meetings including some classes were conducted for the parents in Philosophy, English or History. The day ended with a champagne party which allowed parents, students, faculty, and administrators to talk informally. 'Parents' Days' was one of the best College programs at Fordham, because the parents left with good feelings about the place, and more importantly, the freshmen heard more about the process of their own education, and assumed the task of orienting their parents to their college. Guiding their parents around helped the students to feel a part of Fordham.

Did it work? Did we manage to build community with the orientation program described? It is a hard question to answer. Can the effects of such a large and protracted effort really be measured? The answer is yes and no. It is no if you are asking whether we reached our announced, public goal of unifying the freshman class and making it part of Fordham College. "Gryll," for example, never came to orientation. Generally, he was working full time as a waiter on Cape Cod and wanted to get an extra week's pay before school started. Or he and his old friends from high school were going to the Jersey shore for one last week in the sun. (These may be the peculiar troubles of a school in which almost half the students are commuters.) No, we didn't get everyone. On the other hand, the answer is yes if you are asking whether freshmen got to know one another and found ways of becoming involved in the academic and co-curricular life of the College. We didn't build one community with Freshman orientation, but we did make it possible for the freshmen to build

many communities themselves and to find their way into those that already existed. We could not do more than that.

One of the freshmen, about a week before finals, was asked what he thought of orientation, (figuring that if he said it was good, I could make the inductive leap and say how successful we had been that year). "Ah, orientation," he began, with a rapt look on his face. "You know, we were just sitting around talking about orientation the other night. We have all this work to do now, and were thinking how great orientation week was." With him, we succeeded, not because he had a great time during orientation week, but because he had a bunch of friends (as well as a dean) with whom he could sit around and talk about it. He had built a community of friends.

The next program describes one of the ways Fordham College attempted to build communities in its classroom. (We were successful.)

In the fall of 1976 Fordham College began the "Values Program." It had two goals: first, to create for students and their teachers a community in which teaching and learning would prosper; and, second, to develop students, through the curriculum, who would be able to recognize and grapple with the moral dimension of human life. Although there was a version of the program for juniors and seniors, only the one for freshmen will be described.

Courses for freshmen in the Values Program were offered in clusters or pairs, and students registering for one of the courses had also to register for the other. Teachers offering the introductory courses of the regular curriculum were expected to know what their colleagues were doing, to integrate the courses in the cluster, and develop some co-curricular activities for themselves and their students. Teachers volunteered to teach the courses and freshmen were encouraged to register for them during the summer orientation sessions, and they did so voluntarily.

The freshmen version of the Values Program was a great success. It created a genuine learning community for teachers and students, out of what ordinarily would have been two distinct courses with different students. The teachers had great fun working together:

- learning about each other's disciplines;
- sharing teaching strategies;
- sitting in on each other's classes;
- planning and taking part in trips to the theater, panel discussions, debates, and other special events; and above all,
- working for a change with another person to make teaching and learning an enjoyable, co-operative enterprise.

The students responded enthusiastically in the classroom and in their evaluations of the Program: 1) they talked more before and during class; 2) they were more at ease with each other and their teachers, and were more easily able to talk to them, not just about course work, but about larger educational and human issues; 3) they made friendships in the classes that lasted long after the semester was over; and they generally felt that clustering was worthwhile.

What we developed in the Values Program were small, local communities which made students and teachers feel they were an important part not just of the Program, but of the College as a whole. Of course, we stacked the deck: we asked for volunteers and got

thers who were interested in clustering. (We called them hard-core clusterers.) Students who chose to take the courses were generally more serious and better motivated but not necessarily brighter. (Gryll rarely took clustered courses.) Finally, we gave teachers money for class lunches, trips to the theater, parties, panel discussions — whatever they felt would foster academic excellence and a sense of community among the students.

The experiment worked. The clustering of courses was so successful that under the terms of the new curriculum of Fordham College, which took effect fall of 1980, all freshmen now take two clusters, one in the fall and one in the spring. Although the Grylls are the world — among the faculty and students (both, by nature, very soft-core clusterers) who must teach and take clustered courses, the system continues to be successful in fostering a sense of community in the classroom.

As I look back over what I have written here, I realize I have said a great deal about Fordham College, and I hope that my experience there, particularly with the Values Program, might be of some help to others who must find ways to build community or communities in their own institutions and in the process create an environment that will support the effort to advise students well. If the experience of Fordham proves not to be helpful, then I ask that when faced with cynicism, indifference, pessimism, selfishness, or intransigence in your own institution, you not despair, but rather, like the palmer, shrug your shoulders, remember Gryll, and continue the quest. It's the only way to live.

Rewards for Academic Advising: An Evaluation

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The Academic advising profession does not rank high on the rewards ladder in higher education. Evidence for this assertion is abundant. An increased interest to improve academic advising renews concern for the plight of the advisor, and prompts more questions about the topic.

The Final Report of A National Survey of Academic Advising concludes that there is little reward or recognition attached to the successful delivery of academic advising.¹ In an attempt to identify research priorities for academic advising on behalf of the National Academic Advising Association, Polson and Cashin requested descriptions of things which might improve the respondent's advising program. In an open-ended format the largest number of responses dealt with improving the rewards for effective academic advising, either directly through pay raises or indirectly by weighing advising more significantly in promotion and tenure decisions.² Teague and Grites concluded that faculty cannot be expected to perform advising adequately without appropriate recognition and support.³ Dressel asserts that actions that can be taken to improve faculty advising systems include reducing the teaching load for faculty who become advisors, and an acknowledgment of that service at time of promotion and salary decisions.⁴ Borgard, Hornbuckle, and Mahoney state that if teaching, research, and service are to be the benchmarks of faculty professional and personal advancement at a particular institution, the relative merit of advising within this structure must be defined. Faculty need to understand to what degree performance in advising is related to review for salary, tenure, and promotion.⁵ Kramer said changes in the institution's reward and incentive structure may be required if the institution's operational goals become, in part, the faculty's professional and personal goals.⁶ The literature cited contains other instances documenting the low reward level for academic advising.

¹ Carstensen, Donald J. and Constance Silberhorn, "Final Report: A National Survey on Academic Advising," American College Testing Program, Iowa City, Iowa, 1979.

² Polson, Cheryl J. and William E. Cashin, "Research Priorities for Academic Advising: Results of Survey of NACADA Membership," NACADA Journal 1 (1981), pp. 34-43.

³ Teague, Gerald V. and Thomas J. Grites, "Faculty Contracts and Academic Advising," Journal of College Student Personnel, 21 (1980), pp. 40-44.

⁴ Dressel, Fred B., "The Faculty Adviser," Improving College and University Teaching, 22 (1974), pp. 57-58.

⁵ Borgard, John H., Phyllis A. Hornbuckle, and John Mahoney, "Faculty Perceptions of Academic Advising," NASPA Journal 14 (1977), pp. 4-10.

⁶ Kramer, Howard C., "The Advising Coordinator: Managing from a One-Down Position," NACADA Journal, 1 (1981), pp. 7-15.