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DEVELOPING THE ADVISING "TOOL KIT"

As an advisor, you may have heard one, or both, of these statements: It has been said that 1) anyone can advise; or, more generously, 2) anyone can advise *if he/she* is given a copy of a *university/college* catalog. Most advisors know, however, that this is not *exactly* accurate. In *most* cases, it *isn't even remotely* close to the truth. Here, the author shares with us his reactions to what many of us would consider a challenging statement: "All I need is a copy of the catalog to advise my students!"

As Penn State moved toward a calendar conversion, from terms to semesters, it was clear that the impact on advising and academic information would be enormous. That perception was not shared by everyone, however. In fact, one faculty member sitting at our monthly Calendar Conversion Committee meeting announced: "Advising is not that difficult; anyone can advise. All I need is a copy of the catalog to advise my students."

His announcement sent me back to my desk where I began rummaging through my collection of manuals, fliers, guides, checksheets, catalogs, and handbooks. I expanded the search to include electronic, audio-visual, and video information sources. I assembled as much of this information as could be reasonably carried, packed it into a box, and presented it—at our next Calendar Conversion meeting—as the Penn State Advising "Tool Kit."

A quick reading of the Advising Tool Kit outline on the following pages will demonstrate that not since the late 1950s—the beginning of the Information Age—has the statement

Anyone Can Advise

accurately reflected the educational activity that we now call advising.

If you have encountered these notions at your institution, you may want to develop, for discussion on your campus, a version of the Advising Tool Kit. Depending upon the size, complexity, and missions of your institution, the Advising Tool Kit may be large or small. It is my guess, however, that if you look closely at academic advising in your institution, you will discover that advising has become a more comprehensive, more complex activity than ever was dreamed of in the 1950s.

I am not recommending that you actually assemble and distribute Advising Tool Kits to advisors on your campus; I am suggesting, however, that you develop an inventory consisting of each and every item that contributes to your total advising program. Good places to start are your own desk and your advising file. After that, think about the advising information that you need or use from the following: admissions/recruiting offices, records/registrar's offices, college offices, departmental offices, and special programs offices (such as Black Studies, Women's Studies, Scholars Program, etc.).

The point to be made by developing a campus Advising Tool Kit is that advising and advisors are becoming increasingly integral to the entire educational mission of our colleges and universities—from recruitment and admissions through declaration of major and graduation; from conveying the values of general education and higher education to helping students to build academic plans and professional goals. The Tool Kit is not a resource to be used regularly in your advising roles with students. It is, rather, a tool that can be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators to raise their levels of understanding about advising and to demonstrate how comprehensive, complex, and important advising has become in our colleges and universities.

Freshman/sophomore advising (premajor advising), in particular, is a complex advising process that includes broad responsibilities to communicate to students the academic mission and goals of the college/university, the organizational structure of the college/university, the meaning of higher education, and the purposes of general education. In addition, the advising process involves helping students evaluate their academic abilities and interests and develop their educational plans, as well as to interpret academic policies and procedures, to be informed generally about all colleges and majors, to be informed specifically about programs and majors in the advisor's college, and to provide the academic information, materials, and referrals needed by students.

In addition to the broad responsibilities inherent in advising and the specific resources enumerated in the Tool Kit, an academic advisor may have to cope with

- **more than 1,000 changes annually in the catalog;**
- **hundreds of programs, majors, minors, and options;**
- **continual revisions in curricula, course offerings, academic policies, and procedures;**
- **periodic changes in general education or core curricula;**
- **freshmen: 79% of whom admit uncertainty about their choices of majors; 82% of whom expect to change majors; 75% of whom decided on their probable field of study within the last year of high school, or are still undecided.**

A SAMPLING OF CONTENTS

THE PENN STATE ADVISING TOOL KIT

Taking Penn State as an example of a large university advising system, the resources listed represent only a fraction of the possible handouts, checksheets, curriculum guides, program descriptions, course descriptions, catalogs, brochures, handbooks, calendars, bulletins, memos, and computer codes that constitute the information skeleton upon which advising is constructed.

- Current *edition(s)* of The Pennsylvania State University Bulletin, Baccalaureate Degree Programs.
- Current *edition(s)* of Penn State Harrisburg, the Capital College Bulletin.
- Current *edition(s)* of The Pennsylvania State University Bulletin, Associate Degree Programs.
- Current edition of Policies and Rules for Students.
- Fall Semester Schedule of Classes.
- Spring Semester Schedule of Classes.
- Current edition of The Pennsylvania State University Academic Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual.
- Current *curriculum* guides such as College of Business Administration Curriculum Guide.
- The Pennsylvania State University Advising Handbook.
- Current college advising handbooks such as the College of Education Advisor's Handbook.
- Current handbooks for individual majors such as Handbook of Information for Undergraduate Computer Science Majors.
- Handbook for Honors Advisors, University Scholars Program.
- Current *informational* brochures describing majors, minors, and programs such as Black Studies or Science, Technology, and Society.
- Current edition of Course Selector.
- Current edition of Independent Learning Catalog.
- Continuing Education fall semester course offerings.
- Continuing Education spring semester course offerings.
- Continuing Education summer session course offerings.
- Current TIPS (Telephone Information for Penn State) brochure.
- Current Faculty-Staff Supplement to the University Bulletin.
- Guide to Counseling and Advising Services at University Park.
- Paths (a DUS guide for exploratory students).
- Student-Athlete Handbook.
- Current edition of The Orientation Express.
- Easy Access (a directory of services and resources).

- Master Teachers, The Pennsylvania State University.
- General information, memos, and notes concerning enrollment-controlled majors.
- Various brochures, handbooks, and handouts from other Penn State campuses.
- Lists of course offerings at other Penn State campuses for each semester and for summer.
- Study Abroad brochures describing programs and application procedures for Penn State students.
- Penn State Faculty/Staff Directory.
- Penn State Student Directory.
- Various communications from the records office describing registration procedures, advance registration, and changes in procedures.
- Communications from departments informing advisors and students about new courses, changes in departmental policies or procedures, and descriptions of courses.
- Supplement to the Schedule of Classes, announcing courses added and canceled, as well as changes in course times and locations.
- Copies of official forms such as schedule adjustment, deferred grade, withdrawal, change of major, advanced registration.
- Access to student folders containing transcripts, copies of official actions such as deferred grade requests, withdrawal, current class schedule, and advisor's notes.
- Academic calendars for fall, spring, and summer sessions.
- Summer Session Bulletin.
- Current roster of advisees.
- Variety of student services information such as brochures, newsletters, and fliers from offices such as Financial Aid, Career Development and Placement, Returning Adult Students, Women's Resource Center.
- Access to AIS computer terminals.
- Guide to AIS codes for screens ranging from admissions actions to cumulative courses and grades, as well as current class schedules.

Estimating conservatively, 1,000 pieces of discrete information would be needed to meet the program, course selection, and academic policy/procedure needs of students admitted to a typical Penn State freshman class. If you are shocked by this number, don't be. Construct your own Advising Tool Kit and be prepared for a surprise.

BOOK REVIEWS

Richard A. Kaplowitz, *Selecting College and University Personnel: The Quest and the Questions*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, No. 8, 1986, 113 pp., \$10.00.

Those of us who work as academic advisors, whether that position is a full-time or part-time responsibility, know that people working in an educational setting must be inherently people-oriented. Thus, Richard A. Kaplowitz's *Selecting College and University Personnel* would naturally attract the attention of one working in such an environment.

The title of this work raises interesting questions once the book has been read. A heroic theme is hinted at in the almost archetypal subtitle, *The Quest and the Questions*. This theme is touched upon from time to time in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion. However, the book's title is something of a misnomer. Perhaps a more descriptive title would be *Selecting High-Level Administrators and Faculty*. The author indeed concentrates almost exclusively on the process involved in hiring presidents, deans, and faculty heads.

Of course, such prominent positions are extremely important. Presidents, deans, and faculty heads set the tone and measure the pace by which their campuses will be judged by the academic community and the local population. Nevertheless, the emphatic title, combined with a text studying a small (but vital) number of positions, denies the importance of other staff requirements at an educational facility. The NACADA audience, with a healthy interest in the role of the academic advisor, might feel that the advising position is slighted by the exclusion of any personnel consideration beyond the aforementioned job titles.

As far as studying the ideals and the problems (the quest and the questions) of hiring suitable personnel for highly placed positions, Kaplowitz does a thorough job. Clearly organized chapters present a step-by-step guide to the hiring process. A linear progression is described. After ascertaining the need, phases of the process might include organizing a search committee, planning the recruiting strategy, considering an independent consultant, posting the advertisements, checking the references, and interviewing the candidates. Kaplowitz looks at desirable leadership qualities, although he states that the unique campus situation may determine what those qualities are. Delicate nuances within the selection process, such as seemingly contradictory requirements as confidentiality and "sunshine" laws, are explored.

Kaplowitz presents a thoroughly researched work on the literature of hiring college and university presidents, deans, and faculty heads. His book will assist those in the position to hire such personnel, and the concluding reference section will help those interested in researching existing literature.

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