CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Delivering One-to-One Advising:
Skills and Competencies

Rusty Fox

The joy of advising, the deeper sense of why many choose to advise is the human element; being witness to that sacred moment when a student, "really gets it," really risks, really faces something challenging, or really succeeds! Whether you are a faculty member, an administrator, or a full-time advisor, it is that unique, rare moment, shared personally, one-to-one, that brings academic advisors back day after day. It's also the core of what's best about holistic academic advising. The significance of academic advising is evident in various forms, formats, and styles. However, the crux of it, the heart of good academic advising must always include at least a component of advising that occurs one-on-one between a student and a caring, competent professional. This chapter, then, is an exploration of that significant component.

THE ADVISING RELATIONSHIP MATTERS

Academic advising is a recognized discipline requiring significant relationship-building skills. It is neither a registration nor a counseling function, though it works in close proximity with both functions. It is not a data-entry job or simply about scheduling classes, though those tasks are required components. Carol Ryan (1992) identified the parallels between academic advising and classroom teaching and how many professional skills each have in common. Others write extensively about the impact it has on retention. Academic Advisor is a professional position, regardless of title, requiring an awareness of basic
student-development theory, communication techniques, and problem-solving skills. Beyond any personal value inherent in academic advising, research also shows that advising is likely one of the most significant factors in increasing student retention as well.

When considering the responses from all institution types in the 2004 ACT survey of What Works in Student Retention? (Habley & McClanahan, 2004), Academic Advising is listed in the top three categories of interventions responsible for "the greatest contribution to retention." The survey verifies that, "academic advising, including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff, integration of advising with first-year transition programs, academic advising centers, and centers that combine academic advising with career/life planning," were among the most important things all institutional types could focus on to impact retention of students.

In the early 1970s, working independently of each other, Drs. Terry O'Banion (1972) and Burns Crookston (1972) began exploring the concept of a more developmental approach to academic advising. What collectively came from their individual starts was a definition, a broader conceptualization, and eventually a movement that would enhance the role and the understanding of the role of academic advising at colleges and universities nationwide. While a focus on the content of each advising session was crucial, each understood the importance of the relationship between the student and the advisor. It was from this core shift in our thinking about academic advising that other related concepts began to develop.

INFORMATIONAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND RELATIONAL ROLES

One such concept became more clearly defined in the mid-1980s, when Dr. Wes Habley (1986) outlined a framework for three major components central to the quality academic advising experience. Habley defined those as Informational, Conceptual, and Relational, and explained how there were essential components of the advising session. (See also Chapters Twenty and Twenty-one.) This approach, which explained that building relationships one-on-one with a student might be significant, became further differentiated by considering information, previously the sole component, as only one of three interconnected parts. Conceptually, the advising session had to include the bigger picture, first for the student within the academic world and then the world of work, and secondly for the advisor, who benefited from seeing the student through student development and learning theories. Finally, this broader construct of advising included the definition of a third component, Relational, which emphasized how the presence of an interpersonal relationship between advisor and advisee impacted the student's understanding, his or her ability to assimilate information gained, and the learned skills of how to apply some of this new knowledge in the world outside of the advising session.
ADVISORS ALREADY KNOW WHAT TO DO

It could be argued that in many cases advisors already know what needs to be done. At least in part, there is an innate sense in advisors of just wanting to help students. There is a natural valuing of student learning and genuine pleasure when a student learns a new, practical skill.

However, if innate skill and current knowledge are tweaked just a bit, then mixed with theory about student’s development and blended with new skills about building an environment where risk and learning are encouraged, this creates a strong basis for establishing a helpful advising environment. Reviewing what is already known, consider for a moment a few examples of comments or questions which could work to establish this foundation with advisees.

Take a Genuine Interest in Students

It could easily be argued that the most important characteristic to search for when hiring an academic advisor is their genuine desire to help students. If that is missing, sharing information, relaying concepts, or attempting to build a constructive relationship are not likely to occur. The concept of relationship-building and demonstrating care and concern is not new. Ender, Winston, and Miller (1982) were writing two decades ago that the best models for academic advising are grounded in the theory discussed here and have a foundation based on a caring relationship with the student. Among their seven conditions essential to advising, they assert that advising must, “concern itself with quality-of-life issues,” and that it, “requires the establishment of a caring human relationship,” and necessitates advisors being “models for students to emulate, specifically demonstrating behaviors that lead to self-responsibility and self-directedness” (p. 7). However, all this is not enough. While there does need to be a genuine desire to help, there also needs to be a clear understanding of what behaviors are helpful and how to recognize and foster them in students. There must also be professional level skills that promote growth. Specific tips for communicating interest and concern are: (1) set the welcoming tone of the session with the very first interaction in greeting the student, and (2) demonstrate a genuine smile, make eye contact, and approach the student as though you have been waiting to see him or her. Briefly ask how the student is, and actually wait for a response.

Focus on Student Needs

What are a human’s basic needs? Food, shelter, clothing, and safety. Each of these is essential to survival. Basic needs must be considered before being able to address other needs—these core needs have to be in place. Likewise, it could be argued that there are psychological needs that are basic to our survival and health. Assessing and addressing issues of psychological need are the responsibility of a professional counselor; however, awareness is completely appropriate and in fact useful for a faculty or professional advisor. Perhaps issues such as belonging, mattering (Schlossberg, 1989), the need for involvement (Astin, 1985), and the need for inclusion are helpful in student advising. It is critical that people know their personal value, that there is a purpose to being here or that our existence is of value.
This is evident even in the most simple of childhood nursery rhymes, "little Jack Horner sat in the corner." All Jack wanted was to, "put in his thumb, pull out a plum," and say, "what a good boy am I." Jack wanted someone to notice him and what had been accomplished. There was a desire to be recognized for an action that had been taken and the positive result it produced. This is a rather basic need for all people. It is so basic that the importance of it is often forgotten. However, without fanfare, without high praise, with just simple recognition, when a small accomplishment or a small positive action of one of our advisees is recognized, the result is much the same. The student wants to be noticed for being a "plum of a guy." When the placement test is taken and the score places him into freshmen English, the power of simply saying, "Hey congrats on your score, that's sometimes an intimidating process," often is transformational. Besides building a relationship with him, it tends to cause him to trust the advisor more because someone picked up on something significant to him. Someone recognized in him something important. In essence, someone recognized that the student himself was important. It does not have to be monumental. It does not have to include search for deep meaning; simple recognition is a powerful way to build trust between an advisor and an advisee. Notice what the student brought to the session. Though it may seem simple, say, "You've brought your degree plan with you today." Or say, "You have a backpack full of books with you today, don't you?" Then note how the student responds. "You've mentioned a visit to the math lab. I think we talked about that a little last time as well?" Besides being validating to the student, it is a great way to begin a conversation while placing the focus on the student. Specific tips for attending to student needs are: (1) though the agenda is to create a degree plan, address an academic problem, or begin career exploration, first validate whatever issue the student starts the session with, even if only quickly; (2) give the student a chance to set the direction for the session; and (3) assist by restating what was brought as the primary issue. If rambling or off-track, it is perfectly fine to redirect with a statement such as, "Okay, now let's take a look at your plan for the fall. How can I help you get ready there?"

Involve Students in the Process of Academic Advising and Learning

When possible, give the student a chance to discover or uncover the direction or answer needed. Give choices or options wherever possible and even if small in scope. "You could take your history now or next semester. A lot of our students prefer to take 1301 in the fall, but what is your sense?" Try to frame a statement in the form of a question. Instead of saying, "What you want is a degree plan in Business." Instead, try saying, "It sounds as if a degree plan in Business might be exactly what you are looking for. What do you think?"

Guide Students through the Process, Rather Than Simply Directing

Interestingly, students will bring completed degree plans that are clearly understandable, and say, "I just wanted to go through my degree plan with
COMMUNICATION BASICS

Advising as a Transaction

In the annals of speech communications theory there is a model referred to as the Transactional Model (Heath & Bryant, 2000). This model is useful in that it simplifies and explains the basics of communication, and how communication involves not only the sender and receiver of information, but also the encoding and decoding of the message. It includes the contexts in which the message is both sent and received, and the impact of interpretation by the received, as well as the influence of feedback on the sender. This model illustrates the impact of outside noise on communication. While noise can mean literal audible distractions, it also means unspoken thoughts, opinions, fears, and previous conversations—anything that is distracting to the sender or the receiver of information.

The way this model may be of use to academic advisors is as a reminder that the context is often forgotten or muddled in noise. The noise is what surrounds the communication, the impact of students trying to translate what the advisor is saying into words or awareness that the student already has in place. The noise many students experience is also the noise of fear. Not knowing what to expect, or making the assumption that everyone else is smarter. How many students think that everyone is capable of college except for them and that they only “lucked into” college? Still other noise can be the opinions of new boyfriends, the advice of old uncles, and the concerns of complex histories in which the student remembers failures and frustrations.

In addition to external noise, another factor impacting clear communication between advisor and advisee is interpretation. Sometimes this is literal, meaning that dialect, accent, or even language may impact the information shared. But the other impact of interpretation is how students attempt to understand what is being said in the context of their lives and their experiences. If certain words are unfamiliar or a concept foreign to them, students try to assimilate those words through their own experiences thus far. Students will try to make it fit within the world they already know. Therefore, the context surrounding the communication is significant. The noise that can interfere with a student receiving the advisor’s message is powerful. The challenges of students’ interpretations of the message through the limits of their current knowledge and experience are dramatic. As academic advisors, it is helpful to consider how the receiver might perceive the information and how the information fits
within their current experience or level of knowledge about a college. This is
done through genuine connection, active listening, involving the student in
the direction of the session, and building a professional relationship between
academic advisor and advisee.

Active Listening: The skills of active listening are deceptively complicated.
Most of daily conversation consists of dialogue, not monologue. The moment
someone begins to speak, the listener’s brain begins searching for common
material that fits with what the sender is discussing. The typical first response
is not to note what has been said, but to immediately compare with current
knowledge so the point can be shared in conversation. For example, a student
may say, “Wow, my history teacher is tough.” The other’s brain starts search-
ing at the speed of light, and finds history, history classes, difficult teachers,
previous experiences with difficult teachers, specific stories of previous expe-
riences with difficult history teachers, and then responds, “Yeah, last year I had
Dr. Keller, and his class was killer!” What has occurred is not bad. In fact, in
the context of daily conversation it is the more appropriate response. However,
it is dialogue. It is focused on both parties, and its intent is to share a topic,
rather than to fully communicate and address one person’s specific topic.

In the context of an academic advising session, the goals are student-
focused. The goal of the conversation is to learn as much as possible about
the student’s immediate need as quickly as possible in an effort to either
explore, challenge, or address that need. If an advisor can become more
active in listening, the dialogue can be shaped in the beginning to generate
more productive information coming from the student. Active listening means
the student presents information. As a way to verify understanding, the advisor
gives the information back to the student, verifying the advisor’s understand-
ing. The student processes the response, and then gives the message back to
the advisor again with clarification. It some respects, it parallels the Delphi
Method of research, in which experts are asked their opinions, the research
summarizes all the opinions and reports back to the experts (Franklin & Hart,
2007). The experts, in turn, share the information again, including what was
accurate, but clarifying where information was missed or is wrong. Active list-
ening is about getting to the truer message through focusing on the student,
clarifying the questions, and validating the student’s communication. It is a
useful tool for academic advisors.

Attentive Listening: If the power of good attentive listening is ever ques-
tioned, all one has to do is to try it. Dedicating the focus solely on the other
person, asking about his or her day and waiting for a response, restating key
points of the conversation, and not interrupting with a personal story, will
make the power of this technique quite evident. So much of daily conversa-
tion is dialogue. One person tells a story. Then, taking turns, the other person
tells his or her story. For daily conversation this works, but in an advising sit-
uation there might be better approaches. If an advisor occasionally makes use
of the skills of good attentive listening and reflection when working with a
student, there will be transformation in the communication pattern, and likely
in the level of work coming from the session. It is amazingly validating to
have the focus solely on the student. Because it occurs so rarely in daily life, the impact is significant. This simple technique will expedite the advising session, will validate the role of the advisees in planning their academic careers, and will energize the advisor.

Listening for Patterns: Students often tell what is most important in circuitous ways. A long story may be told to one’s faculty advisor about Great Aunt Kate to get around to the fact that her Botany course is closed. Sometimes a long story is a sign the student is having difficulty focusing on an issue. However, if the same story is told each time, it may be that the student is conveying a bit more meaning in the tale than the advisor recognizes. As academic advisors, attempting to analyze and interpret the meaning behind each conversation is not necessary and is not within the advisor skills set. There are hundreds of psychological theories that still argue over the root of meaning and which interpretation is most meaningful. Instead, the advisor should simply point out the pattern and seek guidance from the student on possible meanings. For example, if the student always grins when telling a certain tale, and it occurs the same way repeatedly, there may be more to the story than the story itself. It is likely significant to the building of that relationship if the academic advisor simply says, “The last three times you’ve talked about Chemistry you have almost grinned. Isn’t that interesting?” Again, as in previous paragraphs, it signifies that the advisor has been listening, that core needs are recognized, and that the student matters. It also means that perhaps helpful information will be given back to them that can apply to their interaction, and their journey through advising. This works because the student better hears the message, knows the advisor also hears it, and can begin to truly address core issues of planning for success in college. Another tool is the unfinished sentence technique. Start a sentence addressing a key issue, but then leave it for the student to finish. “Goodness, you are only five classes away from graduating! Man, I bet that’s . . . .” Usually the student will complete the sentence with a true emotion or thought. If they are not able to, the advisor can prompt with a few words such as, “exciting, scary, thrilling, freaky?”

Paraphrasing: Often underestimated, one of the more complex and high-impact skills is assisting students with academic advising, which appears to be the most simple. The skill of paraphrasing what students are saying is surprisingly important. First, paraphrasing verifies that the advisor has correctly understood what the student has said. Secondly, paraphrasing assists the student by clearly reframing or presenting again what appears to be the issue at hand. While it seems rather simple, skillful paraphrasing involves quickly sorting through multiple issues and identifying the most important ones needing to be addressed in that particular advising session. When done correctly, paraphrasing redirects the content of the session toward the issues most vital to the student’s success, while still involving the student in the choice of content for the advising session.

When attempting to paraphrase what the student presents, the advisor must first attempt to pull out two or three key issues that have been presented. At times, this may actually mean interrupting a student who has gone
on for some time or has presented many issues at once. It is appropriate for an advisor to say, "Let me stop you for a moment. I want to be certain I understand. The main issues we want to address today are . . . ."

Likewise, paraphrasing allows the advisor to check his or her assumptions with the advisee. What may appear to be an obvious conclusion to the advisor may not be accurate at all for the advisee. An illustration of this would be a student who after five semesters decides to change her major and says, "Wow, I guess that's really a dramatic change isn't it?" If the advisor says something like, "I know you must be concerned about how many hours you may lose." By contrast, the advisee might say, "Gosh no. I am so pleased to finally have figured out the direction, it doesn't matter if it takes an extra year. It is so significant and new to finally feel I am on track with my degree plan." Instead, the advisor could choose to paraphrase slightly and seek clarification from the student. "Wow, you said that change of major seems rather dramatic. What about that change is the most intense for you?" In this case it would redirect what might have been fifteen minutes exploration of electives and how courses transfer, into fifteen minutes of discussing who to speak to in the new academic division major, and what the Career Center could offer in service learning or information about the career field.

THE FIVE C'S OF THE SKILLED ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Several key concepts have been discussed related to quality academic advising. The importance of being a facilitation expert and not relying on content expertise only has been explored. Basic student-development theory has been considered, and the use of involvement and mattering to assist students in skill building and personal development has been discussed. New advisor skills such as active listening, models of communication, and listening for patterns have also been reviewed. As each of these issues and skill sets is considered, perhaps the most concise way to clearly define tasks of academic advisors would be through the following five C’s of a skilled academic advisor. The skills and competencies needed to establish a quality ongoing relationship with an advisee are:

1. Competence
2. Confidence-building
3. Cordial
4. Credible
5. Creative

First, the advisor must be competent. Knowledge of the academic discipline, the institutional policies, and the application of degree plans, course content, transferability, and degree planning are at the center of the informational component of advising, a foundational piece in the advising process. Secondly, an advisor must be a confidence-builder for students. Through effective
questioning, skillful reflection, and modeling appropriate behaviors, the advisor should assist students in gaining both confidence and understanding of self within the academic environment. The ability to act cordially and with a modicum of kindness to students is a foundation on which trust and confidence begin to build. There is a statement, attributed to multiple sources, that applies here: People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. A student knowing she is of value to someone significant at the institution, an issue communicated through a cordial and supportive style, is at the heart of her being involved, connected, willing to take risks, and ultimately being successful in college. An additional factor, credibility, is of equal if not greater importance. Academic advisors must continually work to be well informed, connected to key personnel on campus, and respected for their work as an advisor. Faculty advisors recognize that their role as advisors must parallel their academic role in credibility. When a student learns that his or her advisor is someone of skill and authority and is respected among peers, that student is more likely to ask the questions that need to be asked and to trust the answers given. And finally, an academic advisor of high caliber must be someone of great creativity. Finding ways to assist students in exploring issues previously not considered, to attempt actions that were previously too scary to attempt, and to link students to resources and personnel that are new and unknown, requires that advisors be clever, quick, creative, and always exploring new ways of assisting students.

An additional “C” might also be that the skilled advisor includes culture as an important consideration. Brown and Rivas (1992) assert that a developmental approach, which uses the power of the one-on-one relationship between advisor and student, is instrumental in working with students from minority cultures. Some students from minority cultures face unique problems when attending college because they often lack a family history in or specific understanding of the higher education environment. Valdez (1993) explains these students directly benefit from the type of orientation to the academic environment found in the one-on-one interaction with their advisor. Fewer students now follow the traditional path, or resemble the traditional student, of only a few decades ago. Many students are more dependent on financial assistance, work while attending school, transfer between institutions, take longer than the traditional four years to complete college, commute from home, or return to college later in life. So the definition of a traditional student is changing as well (McLaren, 2004).

Each student brings her own personal culture to the advising session as well; not just her ethnic background, her family values, and her people’s mores, but also her personal history, individual beliefs, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, personal level of understanding, and the influence of her circle of friends. The competent, credible faculty advisor, the caring creative professional advisor, will incorporate what the student brings from her culture to the advising session. The advisor will make use of the history introduced, and will validate the family patterns and beliefs that may impact the student’s academic experience.
Skills beyond Empathy and Compassion

With these values and desires in place, the building of a strong professional relationship with students, and maximizing the dynamic of the one-on-one advising relationship, can begin. Perhaps it is a lack of confidence on the part of the academic advisor that is the greatest challenge at this juncture. Good skills are essential to good advising. In fact, to be a skillful academic advisor, Dr. Charlie Nutt (2000) suggests that there are four key skill sets required. Specifically, an academic advisor must possess: (1) knowledge about the specifics of the academic programs and the curricular requirements of their particular institution; (2) knowledge about the institutional resources available to students; (3) facility with good communication skills of subtle nonverbal cues the student may be giving that could indicate that important information is not being disclosed; and (4) strong skills with open-ended questions that encourage freer communication with students and indicate a sense of interest on the part of the advisor.

Each of these skills is central to supporting students in their exploration of career and life planning, degree plan, course selection, and even scheduling classes. Empathy and compassion are helpful when used in concert with Nutt’s four components. Empathy and compassion are also significant when addressing issues of diversity, difference, and individual personality factors and choices. As students learn more about themselves, and then try to match that awareness with what is being learned about the world around them, the academic advisor plays a key role in considering how a student fits in that diverse world, how the student would like to fit, and how each can make changes to adapt themselves or portions of that surrounding environment.

Role Change: Information Expert to Facilitation Expert

For many academic advisors, knowing the institution, the degree plans, the course content, the transfer guides, the key people, and even the details of entry-level cut scores by discipline is central to the sense of being a good advisor. This massive base of knowledge comes from years of experience and a sincere dedication to absorb important minute details. In truth, this content is vital to advising students in the exploration of degree plans, course selection, and even career fields. However, knowledge in this area alone is not enough. Advising is not just course selection and degree planning. Advising is not a data-entry or clerical job, though it often includes these skills. Advisors have to make information meaningful to students. Academic advisors teach students about how information is relative to the learning environment and then applicable to the world outside the institution (Gordon & Habley, 2000). In truth, through advances in technology, a lot of content is already accessible to students. Some students literally grow up at their computer, many coming with highly advanced technological skills and often teaching the advisor how to access some of the core advising content.

As many as nine components have been identified as necessary to build this relationship between advisor and advisee, "prepping, attending, bonding,
disclosing, laughing, counseling, normalizing, coaching, and continuing” (Smith, 2005, p. 9). When incorporated, student responses indicate that a “personalized relationship does impact students in a positive manner” (p. 4).

Academic advisors and other student affairs professionals need to connect with students on a personal level in order for [sic] optimal outcomes. Educational personnel who work with students need to realize the power contained in forming “personalized” relationships and strive to attain such to benefit their student clients. (p. 2)

So the expertise of today’s academic advisor has to include facilitation of information and not just possession of it. This means a likely change of role from a repository of data to an agent of facilitation. One who takes the data and makes them interesting, useful, and personalized for the student is the key to meaningful academic advising. This often is a challenging transition for advisors, who were viewed as the repositories of information and facts. Change occurs here through new programs and incentives linked to the role of facilitation agent.

Diana Boyd McElroy (2005) notes that there is a “paradox” in working with at-risk college students. Students at risk are most in need of support but are most likely to feel disconnected from the college. When the student finds a connection and senses their importance to the institution, their cognitive and affective development is stimulated, and the student becomes more likely to develop support resources and increase their potential to succeed. This occurs through stronger involvement and reliance on other people and functions at the college. A skillful academic advisor recognizes that this need for mattering and involvement is at the core of their interaction with students.

Nancy Schlossberg (1989) writes on the theory of Marginality or Mattering. She explains that students, such as those new to college, may experience “uneasiness” as major life transitions are experienced. At these times of transition, success or failure is strongly influenced by a feeling of whether or not one belongs in the environment. Through attention, a sense of importance to others, a sense of being appreciated, and ego-extension, or a sense of identifying with others, students succeed in part because of a feeling of value to others and the institution. Likewise, Alexander Astin’s (1985) theory of Involvement explains that a student succeeds when becoming a more active participant in the college environment. Issues such as mattering and involvement can be easily overlooked, or assumed to be addressed by someone else at the institution. In truth, however, a skillful academic advisor is the perfect professional to facilitate the assessment and subsequent planning for students related to both of these skills sets. As a facilitation expert, this means that the academic advisor asks students for input on what brings them to college. It means explaining choices available to students and involving them in their planning. Plug and play, the old information-based paradigm, even when it seems the obvious choice, must give way to a more developmental or teaching-based process of assess, understand, and apply.
ADVISING . . . OR IS IT?

This discipline is called academic advising. Advising conjures up a wise old sage, directing the youth on the way to go. It creates a picture of the expert lecturing to the novice. This term tends to direct our thinking and set up a scene in which the advisor has the content and the knowledge about the right way and the student has the responsibility of listening and learning the rules of how to succeed. Perhaps then, advising is a misnomer. While an advisor does direct a student toward certain degree plans and through the maze of institutional policies and procedures, more often the advisor is listening attentively for patterns, facilitating the student’s self-awareness through reflection, and incorporating new information into the student’s learning. Creating a student-led experience in which students are exposed to ideas, information, and skills and choose for themselves how to apply this information is unique to the academic advising session, and is an instrumental piece of preparing them for success in college.

The challenges to building a strong relationship between advisor and student often cause institutions to resort back to the old and convenient model of academic advising as providing information and scheduling only. Virginia Gordon (1994) writes about the reasons or excuses that prevent colleges from making full use of this more developmental format. She explains that,

1) advisors do not have the time to become involved in the type of advising that requires frequent contact with one student, 2) Advisors do not have the background or expertise to handle the type of personal relationship required, 3) Students perceive that advising involves only scheduling and registration, 4) Many administrators neither understand nor support developmental advising and do not make funds available, 5) and Advisors lack training to help them acquire developmental advising expertise. (p. 71)

In a survey of faculty completed by Fox Valley Technical College (Perry, 2001), an institution with an advising history that includes multiple national awards, the majority of faculty state that advising is “necessary and beneficial,” and that “direct contact with students presented them with the opportunity to have a positive impact on the student’s educational experience.” Their faculty recognized the importance of the advising relationship and already sensed much of what they needed to do. However, they also pointed out the need for their instructional administrators to “recognize the importance of advising, and provide more time for advising” (p. 5). Knowing of these concerns, college and university administrators responsible for advising face the challenge of educating their colleagues and clearly communicating the worth of advising to their own campus communities. Tinto (n.d.) explains that, “students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic, social and personal support.” He goes on to say they are also more likely to succeed if institutions “involve them as valued members of the institution.”
Framing, Guiding, . . . Advising

An academic advisor will adopt many roles over the course of a career. Seldom do advisors strictly advise in that directive, instructional, authoritative manner one might anticipate. Instead, the academic advisor serves as a tour guide, hand in hand with the student exploring the catalog, the schedule, the student handbook, the meaning of the placement-test scores, and the resources available on campus—usually, symbolically taking the student to where the student needs to be, but sometimes literally walking with the student to meet the coordinator of the math learning lab or to make an active referral to a career counselor. The academic advisor serves as a facilitator as well. As a facilitator, the advisor takes the information brought by the student, incorporates the content learned with the advisor, and combines both to create a plan of action. Reminding the student of the awareness found and the issues reviewed together, the advisor guides the student through the process and facilitates the process when it becomes challenging. The advisor at times will serve as an interpreter as well, being careful to explain what certain scores mean, why certain prerequisites are necessary, and how certain majors may fit best for a particular student. Advisors will interpret the process for students, explaining when anxieties are normal, and how to cope when professors’ behaviors are disturbing. Then the advisor helps the student put a plan into action. Often acting as a coach, the advisor does not just help the student create a plan, but encourages the student to enact the plan. This is done with very specific goals and very specific steps required of the student to accomplish short-term goals. As the student is guided, facilitated, coached, and supported, the student learns to assess on his own, and question on her own, and to begin to integrate learning into a larger career and life plan for him or her.

The reality of life on many of our campuses is that there is never really enough time to do all that is wanted with a student or to participate in the full conversation desired. However, there is some time, and there are interventions that can be made. Be genuine. Demonstrate care. Communicate that advising is far more than scheduling classes. Listen attentively. Redirect through paraphrasing. Facilitate learning about the academic environment on the part of the student advisee instead of simple rote memorization of lists or course schedules. There are specific skills and techniques that can be learned and used that make a powerful difference for students. Commit to learning three this month, trying two next week, sharing one with a colleague over lunch. Excellent advisors are made when the most is made of that little time, one-on-one.

References


