

## **What Is An Academic Advisor**

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College academic advisors perceive themselves and are seen by students in various ways. Advisor self perceptions stem from a variety of factors including: (1) how advisors interpret their advising role; (2) what training and/or guidance are provided to advisors; (3) what expectations administrators and colleagues have for advisors; and (4) what recognition/rewards are available for competent or exemplary advising. Student advisor perceptions arise from perceptions of: (1) advisor interest in the advising task and in individual students; (2) advisor competence; (3) advisor availability, patience, and preparation; and (4) advisor personality.

Advisors need training and guidance to do their job competently. Neither faculty nor staff advisors come to the task naturally able to advise competently. Advisors need to learn the content and procedure of their task; they need to acquire and refine their interpersonal skills; and they need to learn how their role fits into both the institution's mission and in students' lives. Such advisor preparation demands resources [ie: money, time, and patience]; trying to advise without adequate preparation portends nightmarish results for students. Students need and deserve competent advising. Not all faculty are suited temperamentally for advising. Such faculty and their students would both be well served by being alternately assigned to other duties.

Advisor/advisee partnership can range from a formal impersonal, infrequent, uninspiring exercises to informal, friendly, frequent, rewarding and enjoyable relationships. The responsibility for the outcome is mutual between advisee and advisor. Neither party should allow the other to abrogate, truncate, or neglect good advising. Advisors need to firmly but tact-fully demand that students enter the advising arena prepared, focused, and alert. Advisees must demand that their advisors be informed, available, prepared, focused, and alert. Advisors serve a multiplicity of functions, all of which are important to students' progress while attending college.

Advisors are resource people. They are expected to know the school's rules, procedures, time tables, and policies. These need to be transmitted to students, when possible, before trouble occurs. Advisors need to be aware of program, policy, and procedure changes. They are expected to keep abreast of graduate school possibilities for interested students; advisors need to be aware of current employment demands, available positions, and job market trends.

Advisors are student advocates. They are there to intercede whenever students need help in negotiating bureaucratic red tape or arbitrary or capricious instructors, administrators, or staff members. Students in need of assistance need someone to point the path to appropriate help and to see that relevant aid is offered without hassle or trial. Students deserving exceptions to normal rules or procedures need advisors to grease the wheel, when appropriate, for such action. Students must come to see their advisors as being interested in their personal welfare above rules or procedures when at all reasonable. Advisors are intended for seeing that rightful outcomes are made possible.

Advisors are referral resources. Advisors must be cognizant of campus and community resources available to students having needs beyond advisors' skills. Students need advisors whom they can trust. Advisors need to be able to competently refer students to other professionals who can help or guide the students to solve non-academic difficulties they may be experiencing. Student academic performance is inexorably tied to how the rest of their lives are progressing. Students' teacher, peer, family, romantic, and work relationships; their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health; their out-of-class activity; financial well being; test anxiety; home sickness; and post graduation anxieties are all germane to an advisor's role. Many of these circumstances require referral to other professionals, but it is the advisor's initial understanding, empathy, and competent referral that is the key to student well being. Students who do not really know, trust, and frequently interact with their advisor seldom seek the help they need and deserve.

Lastly, advisors are friends. Students typically enter college fearful, lonely, away from home, confused, in a strange environment, and in need of an anchor, their advisor, to provide stability, assurance, consistency, an outlet for frustrations, someone to hear them out and to answer questions, and a source of confidential guidance, affirmation, and support.

College administrators need to make advising an important, monitored, rewarded activity. Administrative ignorance or neglect of advising will usually mean that many students will receive less than they deserve from their college education. Good advising is a team effort: administrators, faculty or staff advisors, and students. Advising is a key component of a college career.