

Advising is Teaching: Advising, Accountability, & Assessment

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Advising is...

In the fall of 2006, I boldly went where no other “non-faculty” academic advisor at Seward County Community College had gone before; I joined the teaching scholar learning community. Why? One word: CURIOSITY. I wanted to test the catchy academic advising slogan, Advising is Teaching. I kept asking myself, if advising is teaching, then what links the two domains? What tools can we use to showcase these similarities? And how do we obtain buy-in from all stakeholders, especially students? As an academic advisor and a teaching scholar participant, I made it my charge to find this essential element.

During the first teaching scholar session, the differences between a “non-faculty” academic advisor and a “faculty” academic advisor were noticeable. These differences were not negative, nor did they highlight the importance of one profession over the other. However, I must admit I thought that the faculty members had an edge. For example, faculty members knew the courses they would redesign as their project and why. As an academic advisor, I did not have a structured course to redesign. I listened intently to my experienced colleagues and mentally marked one common denominator among them all: ASSESSMENT.

Following the initial session, I felt like an “at-risk” student: UNDERPREPARED. At that point I decided to dedicate myself to the experience. I spent countless hours reading the provided textbook: *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* (Fink, 2003), researching best practices in academic advising (NACADA), and attaining external resources on assessment methodologies. The studying and research paid off because the next few sessions were much easier. And, the common denominator continued to be communicated: ASSESSMENT. This time around I realized there are no major dissimilarities between advising and teaching. Advising is Teaching, and this is why.

Accountability

Neither assessment nor evaluation is a new practice in the field of education, although with the current focus on accountability there is, and will continue to be, a paradigm shift (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). How does the issue of accountability influence academic advising, since advising is teaching?

The following are two examples of the positive impact accountability will have on academic advising. The evaluation components of advising will no longer be systematically-driven, meaning possibly less weight will be placed on the procedural aspects and more on the contents (i.e., as outlined by the campus advising syllabus). For accountability, advisors (especially administrators of academic advising) should begin to examine and address the possible loopholes between the institutional and advising missions, the stated student learner outcomes, and the current assessment techniques. One example of a student learner outcome is “students will show respect for self and others.” Students will demonstrate an educational gain by scheduling appointments, arriving at advising sessions on time, and being prepared for sessions by completing all assignments, including referrals.

How can advisors express the significance of these outcomes to students? What tool(s) can advisors use to monitor students’ progress or regression? After brainstorming the aforementioned questions, I began the backward design phase of my project, as described by Dr. Fink (2003).

Assessment

“As implied by the label, the designer starts the process by imagining a time when the course is over, say one to two years later, and then asking: What is it I hope that students will have learned, that will still be there and have value, several years after the course is over?” (Fink, 2003). Fink’s quote is also applicable to advising. Advisors do not have the luxury of teaching structured courses, but we do facilitate advising sessions. Just as assessment is critical in teaching, the same is true for advising. The ultimate goal of assessment is to determine if students attain an educational gain. Confirmation is visible when students apply skills learned during the first semester during subsequent semesters.

Based on the information I gathered and the knowledge I gained from the text, I created an academic advising rubric. I hope that this rubric will assist all advisors with the concept of Advising is Teaching.

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What is an academic advising rubric?

An academic advising rubric is a basic, user-friendly matrix that assesses three competencies: Timeliness, Preparedness, and Communication-Written and Verbal. It is based on a four-point Lickert scale.

How can advisors use the academic advising rubric with students?

Advisors should:

1. disseminate the academic advising syllabus,
2. discuss the mission and goals of advising,
3. provide the students with a visual aid, i.e., the rubric,
4. explain how the rubric works, and
5. make sure that students understand how each component (e.g., mission, syllabus, and outcomes) is connected to the rubric.

The academic advising rubric can be utilized after each advising session, and it does not require a lot of time.

Recommendation: Students should know up front that this is how their progress will be monitored.

Why use the academic advising rubric?

Advisors can use the rubric to:

1. evaluate students' performance (similar to employee evaluation). Advisors are preparing students for the future, in particular, the workforce. One significant factor about the workforce is evaluation.
2. close the feedback loop between advisor and advisee. According to Fink (2003), feedback should be: Frequent, Immediate, Discriminating (based on criteria and standards), and done Lovingly (or supportive). This is known as the FIDeLity feedback loop.
3. coordinate program evaluations and rubric data. After three to five years of usage a cross-analysis could be conducted on student satisfaction and individual evaluations.
4. communicate the significance of ACCOUNTABILITY. Providing the students with a visual aid and conversing about the level of responsibility, in relation to the rubric holds students accountable for their performance, or the lack thereof.

To view a copy of the academic advising rubric I designed, go to

<http://www.sccc.edu/academics/assessment/Resources/Rubrics/documents/cldadvrubric.pdf>

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References

National Academic Advising Association. (2007). www.nacada.ksu.edu

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Retrieved from the World Wide Web at www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports.html.

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