

アカデミックアドバイザーとのインタビュー記録 —学部生支援の方法を求めて—

Seeking Ways to Support Undergraduates: A Note of Interview with an Academic Adviser

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Abstract

In the United States, academic advising of undergraduate students is usually performed by special officers or titled academic advisers. This note is an excerpt from an interview with an award-winning veteran academic adviser. It is hoped that this note will inform professionals performing academic advising in higher education.

Keywords

academic advising, higher education, expert practice

Excerpt of Interview

The interview was conducted on June 18, 2014 for about 90 minutes. The excerpt comes from the first half of the interview session.

R = Researcher

P = Participant

R: Think about the last academic advising session you engaged in and tell me specifically about that one.

P: OK. Yesterday, I was involved in a new student orientation advising freshmen who are coming for the very first time on campus to enroll and are going through orientation and then they are advised to go to register for their first semester of classes. It was pretty easy, she was prepared... the freshmen are supposed to come prepared with a list of possible courses that they are interested in and some questions, I had a new advising colleague observing our interaction so that she could learn more about advising styles before she sets out to advise students by herself later this week. So it was pretty straightforward because the student knew what she was interested in. So we would look at the classes she was interested in and pick out times that worked together kinda like putting together a puzzle. Classes that fit together time-wise and met degree requirements that she was required to fulfill. Yeah, that was the very last student I advised for.

R: So the schedule is pretty much based on the list

of courses she brought?

P: Yes, a list of courses that fulfill various requirements that she knew she needed to fulfill which, her being a freshmen, there were quite a few. So, for example, she needed a math class to fulfill the math modeling class she was required to fulfill. And there are pretty much only two courses that fulfill that, either Finite Math or Calculus. So we looked for a Finite Math course that fulfilled that. We talked about foreign languages because every student in the College of Arts and Sciences has to take a foreign language. So I introduced her to all the options of foreign language of which there are many on this campus but she still decided to take French which was what she was familiar with from high school. And then we talked about an entry level Biology class for her to begin her major interest. We talked about another interest of hers, which was Sociology, so we picked a class out for that. Then she needed an Arts-and-Humanities class to fulfill the four Arts-and-Humanities classes that all College of Arts and Sciences have to take no matter what their major is. So she had some listed and so we talked about those and found one that fit with the other classes, time-wise during the week. So we put together a list of five classes that fit together fairly easily. I had an appointment with a couple of students before her where a student was completely unprepared, had nothing listed and it took me a whole hour with her to... piece together a schedule. That was unusually frustrating. But this student was pretty easy and it was a good conversation.

R: Was she a typical student or super excellent?

P: She...um, the orientation in the summer is a 6-week program and generally the students that sign up earlier and come for the earlier dates tend to be more prepared... on top of things. Students who show up later in the summer aren't so prepared. The classes' selection isn't as good

because classes are closing because people have been signing up for them. But for this time of the summer, she was pretty typical.

R: Does everyone need to visit you?

P: That's a good question. And really on this campus, it depends on the department. Since I'm the only advisor for a couple of departments I don't require them to see me, although I invite them to make an appointment to come see me. I'd really like to see all my majors once a semester but that doesn't generally happen. There are students out there who feel like they have a good handle on things, some do some don't. And sometimes the ones who don't, I don't find out until closer to their graduation time when it might be a little late for me to help them as well as I could if they came to me earlier. Other departments like Chemistry require them to see them every semester, and they have two or three advisors over there. But I guess my philosophy is that these are grownups and they're required to take responsibility for their own degree requirements. I'm here to help them and I let them know that often. But it's up to them to set that appointment up and come to see me.

R: Do departments like Chemistry require students to see them every semester or just during the Freshmen year?

P: Some of them all the way through. Particularly because a lot of those students aspire to medical school. So they do need to keep on track taking the appropriate classes and getting the appropriate grades in proper sequence so that they can be ready to apply to medical school and take the MCAT exam for medical school and things like that. The majors I advise for are not so structured. They have more leeway to take things at different times. I'm here to let them know what would be the best thing to do but it's not like trying to get ready to go to Med School.

R: So what kind of advice do you usually give them?

P: I try to let students know... all students have to take math, either Finite or Calculus and I urge students strongly to get that done early in their college careers, I'm constantly harping on that. You still have math, it's not going to go away if you keep putting it off. If you need to, take a preparation course before you take that. Even though it's not going to count for credit, you have to take that preparation course so you don't fail the course that you need. So I'm always on that. Also, the language requirement means they need to reach four-semester language proficiency. So I try to direct them. I'm an advocate for the lesser-known courses on campus. In high schools students can usually take Spanish, German, sometimes Latin, Japanese, or even Chinese... but there are lots of other languages taught here that students can take and find interesting and engaging... so whether it's one of the African languages or Central Asian languages or even the American languages like Haitian Creole, I'm always letting them know about those options and that they need to get started and those sequences have fall-spring sequences, they can't just start them anytime. Some of them have summer intensive classes. So I'm always urging students to get started on those and also discover something they might not have even thought of. I always enjoy helping students discover new things. And after that, just making sure that they're taking the core courses for the major. Or if they're interested in studying abroad... how they can fit that in and still get all their other requirements done. There are certain classes that only meet in the fall or spring semester that are required for their major so I let them know that and how that works.

R: You said it is fun for you to tell students about

opportunities they didn't know about, where do those possibilities come from?

P: Yes, I'm constantly making mental notes of classes that students speak of positively... so that I can suggest those to future students. For example, I'd heard from colleagues that Dutch is one of the easiest languages for an English speaker to learn because structurally the sound-wise it sounds a lot like English and it's pretty easy for an English speaker to learn. Then I've also heard that the instructors are very good, very compassionate. So I've directed several students towards that department and the students come back and thank me and say, "Yeah, you were right, that was great!" Same for the African language classes. The Hungarian teacher here is a friend and I've directed students to her class. So it's a part of what I heard and a part that I really know people. So that's how I directed students. I know the Spanish and French program we have here are really good but I've heard it is very rigorous and some students are just not ready so it wouldn't be fun for them to go into that. So some students jump in and out and say AHH so I give them a different way of fulfilling the same requirement in what might be a much more pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. My son, for example, had taken Spanish in his high school, not taught very well, and was changing his major so he was coming into the College of Arts and Sciences and had to do a foreign language so I suggested an African language because I knew it was a small class and I thought it'd be more interesting for him, and he ended up minoring in it because he thought it was fun and interesting and... it kept him wanting to keep taking it through the fifth semester. So those are things I enjoy doing.

R: Interesting, I had assumed that you'd give advice based on student's future career, but you also consider the class atmosphere and structure.

P: As far as career is concerned, what I always tell students about foreign languages, for example, is that whatever you're going to be doing you'll be learning about people and the one thing you'll be learning in foreign language or you should be is about people and culture. So in my mind, it really doesn't matter what people and culture that is, you're still learning about people in a different area of the world. Sometimes I'll direct a student towards a foreign language if it is based on where they want to end up, sometimes I'll direct a student to a language because their grandma spoke it but they were never able to communicate with grandma in Polish or whatever... and I always think that's a great reason to pick up a language, because they have a personal stake in it. As far as careers go, students have no idea where they'll end up, so to me it seems presumptuous to say, "Oh you should do this." I used to advise for Criminal Justice and kept hearing this rumor through students that they were advised to take Spanish because someone said all Criminal Justice students had to take Spanish, and I thought that was insulting and had... disturbing connotations and was not true. So I told my colleague, the liaison in the university division for the Criminal Justice department and I told her to please tell her colleagues that it is not true that Criminal Justice students have to take Spanish. Don't have them even think that. So yeah, students have no idea what will end up being useful.

R: So do you advise for the Math department or language requirement for everyone or do you also give advice for specific major...

P: I advise for three departments, Criminal Justice, Folklore and Ethnomusicology, and Linguistics, so when students go from the university division to the College of Arts and Sciences with one of those majors then I am their advisor for their major courses. So they come to me for advice

about electives, the upper level electives, and who teaches them, if their ready for the 400-level classes and things like that. Oftentimes they have more than one major, so I help them, along with their other major advisor, how they can take things in order so they can graduate in four years and study abroad and fulfill major requirements, and that's a constant conversation because I usually have at least one student in each major abroad at any one time, usually more than that. One to ten students who are studying abroad at any one time. And so we usually have that conversation before they leave, the overseas study office usually requires them to meet with their major advisor to make sure that the courses they're taking will fit into their major, that they're not just taking stuff that won't count or will not be helpful in them completing their degree, so I'm constantly talking to majors that are getting up to graduation, as well.

R: Do you change your ways of advising for newcomers vs. seniors?

P: Um, I think my manner is maybe pretty similar. Some of my students that I've been advising over the years I've gotten to know very well so I maybe I'll be a bit more casual with them, than with a newer student. Some of them have gone on to become people I would consider friends and I keep in touch after they graduate... I have actually helped a few of my Alumni get into graduate school, whether it was a letter of recommendation or their statement of purpose letter and they ask me to edit it. I've done that several times. And then they'll get back to me and say, "Oh I got into a graduate school." So for me, I characterize advising as being a Super Mom with answers. So I feel like some of these young people are like my kids, sometimes I have to be... I'm polite, but I have to be frank with them about... that this plan is not going to work or that sorry you didn't do well in this class,

you'll need to retake it for your major, or any number of scenarios that happen, particularly with students that are having trouble getting requirements completed. Like I said, I have to have some frank conversations and I feel it's my duty to give them honest answers... you know, trying to soften the blow sometimes and talk around problems does not help them. Letting them know, "this is the issue, this is what will happen if you don't do this, and this is the situation you're in now, let's see what options we can find." I've had way too many conversations like that. But that's, you know, part of my job.

R: Yeah, being honest seems to be an important part of your work, but I guess many people are scared or have trouble, but you can get lots of students like that. How do you deal with that difficulty?

P: Well, I had a student come to me in the fall that had ever gone to see an advisor in our department, and should have at least a year or so before, but he came to me and his program was a bit of a mess in a couple spots and I had to tell him honestly, "if you came to us sooner we could have helped you find better choices but now here's what you need to do." And I'm like, "you still do have choices" but he didn't like those choices. And I'm like, "Well ok, this is what you'll need to do." And he saw me a couple times in the fall and walked out angry both times but I had been honest with him. He had gone to another advisor, like two years before and mistook her advice, but didn't come to us to get better advice. So he was angry because he thought he was misadvised but he couldn't remember who it was. So I was like, "Can't help you there." But he came to see me a third time in the early spring semester and took my advice and was in a couple of classes I'd suggested and was happier. And he was like "This is the best semester I've had" and thanked me and that was the first time he'd thank me. So I felt good that I

didn't get angry at him in the fall when he was getting angry at me but just trying to be level and fair and trying to explain what was going on... but he finally came back to me and expressed that I had helped him. I've made the mistake of getting angry and in arguments with students before and found that that is not fruitful and it didn't make me feel very professional. I felt indignant that they were getting angry at me, and now I realize that they'll either learn or they won't, all I can do is set it out for them and help them realize that I'm helping them. I've been an advisor for seven years. I learn new stuff almost every day, but I think that I'm becoming a better and better advisor even though I've already won awards for advising, I still think I'm becoming a better advisor.

R: What makes you a better advisor? Maybe experience?

P: Yes, yes. And being willing to learn from my colleagues. I enjoy mentoring new colleagues and I've been put in that role more and more recently and that's something I enjoy. Like I said, I've been an advisor for seven years and it's been the fastest seven years I've worked because it's been fun. It's an enjoyable job to go to everyday.

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