

### A Developmental View of Academic Advising As Teaching

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Historically, the primary focus of both the academic advisor and the vocational counselor has been concerned with helping the student choose a major or an occupation as a central decision around which to begin organizing his life. The emergence of the student development philosophy in recent years necessitates a critical reexamination of this traditional helping function as well as the assumptions which undergird it.

In the mid-60s a developmental definition of mental health was set forth as the ability to engage in and utilize tasks for personal growth; hence, a developmental task is any experience that contributes to the development of the individual (Oetting, 1967). Since these developmental tasks often center around helping the individual live effectively within a rapidly changing society, developmental counseling or advising helps the student become aware of his own changing self (Ivey & Morrill, 1968).

Of equal importance is the ability of the counselor or academic advisor not only to recognize the need to change himself if he expects to keep in tune with students in a changing world but also to develop the sensitivity to perceive these self-changes as they occur.

There are two basic assumptions from student development theory that provide the framework for this article (Crookston, 1970):

First, that the higher learning is to be viewed as an opportunity in which the developing person may plan to achieve a self-fulfilling life; that the perspective of work and professional training more properly should be placed within the development of a life plan instead of the current tendency to prepare

one's self for a profession and then build one's life around it.

Second, that teaching includes any experience in the learning community in which teacher and student interact that contributes to individual, group, or community growth and development and can be evaluated. Although faculty are the formally designated teachers, under certain circumstances the student or others in the community may be the teacher and the faculty the learner. Within this context, the student cannot be merely a passive receptacle for knowledge, but must share equal responsibility with the teacher for the quality of the learning context, process and product.

It follows that developmental counseling or advising is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills. Not only are these *advising* functions but, deriving from the above assumptions, they are essentially *teaching* functions as well. Within a behavioral context the advising or teaching function is based on a negotiated agreement between the student and the teacher in which varying degrees of learning by both parties to the transaction are the product. Within this developmental framework, the nature of the relationship between the academic advisor and the student is of critical importance in distinguishing those dimensions of this relationship that are developmental from those that are not. Two contrasting behavioral styles of relating to the student are presented and described below.

#### **The Prescriptive Relationship**

The traditional relationship between the academic advisor and the student may be described as *prescriptive*. As implied by the term itself, the relationship is obviously based on authority; the advisor is the doctor and the student the pa-

tient. The patient comes in with some ailment. The doctor makes a diagnosis, prescribes something, or gives advice. Therefore, if the student follows the advice, the problem will be solved and all is well! In this context the advisor presumably "teaches" and the student "learns."

It cannot be denied that many faculty see the prescriptive relationship as highly convenient and desirable. Not only does it allow the professor to profess what he knows but it also makes for a tidy relationship with the student in which the advisor may remain relatively uninvolved, if not aloof. From the viewpoint of the advisor, the assumption underlying this relationship is that once advice is given his responsibility is largely fulfilled; now it is up to the student to fulfill his responsibility by doing what is prescribed.

To no one's surprise the assumption many students have about the student-advisor *relationship* coincides with the concept the advisor has under the prescriptive approach, but is in marked contrast in reference to *responsibility*. While the advisor believes that carrying out the advice is clearly the student's responsibility, the student views himself as going to an authority figure with a problem and getting the answer. The decision (prescription) is the advisor's, so if the advice turns out badly the student doesn't feel responsible; he can place the blame on the advisor. Obviously, differing perceptions concerning not only the relationship but the degree of responsibility to be taken by the parties involved can lead to misunderstandings that put a strain on the advisor-student relationship.

This discussion is not intended to imply that there are not sound decisions made through advice-giving; obviously there are, the most common of which are specific problems that can be responded to with direct answers or information. Too often, however, the specific problem presented is only symptomatic, in which case the advice given is not likely to be helpful.

### **Developmental Relationship**

In contrast with the authoritarian quality of the prescriptive relationship between academic advisor and student in which the advisor advises and, presumably, the student acts on the advice, the developmental relationship is based on different values and principles. The most important of these is the belief that the relationship itself is one in which the academic advisor and the student differentially engage in a series of

developmental tasks, the successful completion of which results in varying degrees of learning *by both parties*. These developmental tasks include reaching an agreement on who takes the initiative, who takes responsibility, who supplies knowledge and skill and how they are obtained and applied.

Table 1 compares 10 central components of the relationship between the academic advisor and the student that differentiate prescriptive and developmental approaches to advising. These dimensions are abilities, motivation, rewards, maturity, initiative, control, responsibility, learning output, evaluation, and the relationship itself.

### **Abilities**

There are abundant data related to student abilities, even prior to the establishment of a record with the college. Achievement, intelligence and interest tests, and a host of other batteries can be applied to measure various aspects of individual abilities or achievements. The prescriptive advisor tends to make judgments on past records as well as interpreting test scores, not as predictors in relation to large populations, but as the prediction holds for the individual student. As Pericles viewed Athens "not as she is, but as she may become," the developmental advisor looks to potential within the perspective of performance. Thus, records and tests are regarded as an indication of some things that are known about the student, but the student's potentialities for growth are yet to be discovered.

### **Motivation**

To the prescriptive advisor, students naturally dislike work, which makes it necessary to control, direct, or issue incentives that will encourage students to produce. In contrast to this traditional view of human behavior, the developmental advisor believes that students can find satisfaction in work accomplishment, stemming from a natural striving toward self-enhancement that is goal-related. This goal must be self-committed rather than imposed by others.

### **Rewards**

The prescriptive advisor often views the student's motivation to produce as limited largely to achieving a high grade, gaining credit for the course, or obtaining a degree in order to realize a certain level of income, or as avoidance of pa-

**TABLE 1**  
**Contrasting Dimensions of Prescriptive and Developmental Approaches to Advising**

<i>In term of</i>	<i>Prescriptive</i>	<i>Developmental</i>
Abilities	Focus on limitations	Focus on potentialities
Motivation	Students are lazy, need prodding*	Students are active, striving*
Rewards	Grades, credit, income	Achievement, mastery, acceptance, status, recognition, fulfillment
Maturity	Immature, irresponsible; must be closely supervised and carefully checked*	Growing, maturing, responsible, capable of self-direction*
Initiative	Advisor takes initiative on fulfilling requirements; rest up to student	Either or both may take initiative
Control	By advisor	Negotiated
Responsibility	By advisor to advise By student to act	Negotiated
Learning output	Primarily in student	Shared
Evaluation	By advisor to student	Collaborative
Relationship	Based on status, strategies, games, low trust	Based on nature of task, competencies, situation, high high trust

\*After McGregor's (1960) x and y theories.

rental censure or withdrawal of privileges. These assumptions are held particularly by the generation of older faculty raised during the pre-World War II era where there was great emphasis on achieving economic security and upward social mobility. In contrast, developmental advisors recognize that in the current college generation there is a tendency to reject the economic security and social mobility goals of their parents in favor of the rewards of personal growth, self-fulfillment, and humane commitment. Moreover, there is the tendency to gain intrinsic satisfaction from goal accomplishment, rather than being motivated to achieve for status or prestige.

### **Maturity**

While the prescriptive advisor views the student as immature, irresponsible, needing close supervision, and often incapable of making sound decisions, the developmental advisor sees the student as growing, maturing, responsible, and capable of self-direction. In behavioral terms this means that the prescriptive advisor

will follow students closely, making sure that they comply with requirements. Inviting a relationship where the advisor increasingly is viewed as a consultant, expert, or collaborator, the developmental advisor moves to shift the responsibility to the student while working to provide the student with problem-solving and decision-making skills.

### **Initiative**

To the extent there are requirements that must be fulfilled in doing his job, the prescriptive advisor takes the initiative. The rest is up to the student to advance the relationship or avail himself of any expert assistance the advisor might provide. The developmental approach calls for shared responsibility for initiating behavior. Either the advisor or the student may initiate an interpersonal contact or a task related to any decisions that might be made.

### **Control**

The benevolent paternalism of the prescriptive advisor is expressed through control over

the relationship with the student. In general, if the advisor feels secure in his relationship with the student, is relatively unthreatened, and is inclined to trust the student, he may wish to delegate some control to the student. On the other hand, if he is insecure and does not trust the student, he is likely to exercise firm control. Many advising systems require an approval signature from the advisor on such items as the course of study for each term, dropping a subject, course changes, or withdrawing from school. Despite good intentions that often motivate advisor "approval" requirements, such as forcing some advisor-student interaction where it might not otherwise occur, the result is more likely to reinforce the student's perception that his freedom to exercise options and take responsibility for them is being controlled. This situation also complicates any efforts of an advisor to move toward a developmental frame of reference and make it believable to the student who is often quick to note any incongruence between what the advisor says and what he does.

If unburdened from all but the most essential bureaucratic control requirements, the developmental advisor finds the issue of control principally one for negotiation with the student. Since the development of mutual acceptance and trust is important, who has control should be less of an issue in this situation.

### **Responsibility**

Here the prescriptive advisor is caught on the horns of a dilemma. He feels some responsibility for the student to get "good" advice and also to meet requirements. On the other hand, since he feels that the student must take the responsibility to act on the advice, the advisor finds it difficult to handle the situation in which the student does not act accordingly. If possessed of strong parental attitudes (as many are), the advisor might well decide to go ahead and get the job done for the student, reserving for a later encounter a stern lecture on the student's failure to take "adult" responsibility.

The question of responsibility to the developmental advisor is, again, largely a matter for negotiation with the student. The advisor is fully aware of the responsibilities delegated him as advisor and those expected from the student, both of which he makes clear to the student. This clarification, leading to agreement on who is to do what, is followed by an exploration of areas for joint participation and responsibility.

In addition to a decision on who is to take responsibility for what, there needs to be some mutual accountability for each fulfilling his end of the bargain. Failure of either party to do so results in a confrontation and a consequent redefinition of relationship.

### **Learning Output**

The prescriptive advisor views learning output in traditional terms: It is the responsibility of the teacher to teach, the student to learn; therefore, the advisor does not expect to profit particularly from the relationship with the student. The developmental advisor sees learning as a shared experience and recognizes that the student is not likely to learn from the relationship with the advisor unless the advisor himself is also open to learning.

### **Evaluation**

Again, the prescriptive advisor perceives evaluation in traditional terms. Since the teacher "knows," he also knows whether and what the student has learned. Learning may be measured objectively and is imparted from the teacher to the student. Developmentally, evaluation is a collaborative exercise in which a decision is made on the manner in which evaluation is to take place and the responsibility each party has to the process.

### **Relationship**

Most critical of all is the nature and quality of the relationship existing between the advisor and the student. The prescriptive relationship demands respect for authority and the higher status of the advisor in the academic hierarchy and deference to his superior knowledge and status. Because of this status differential and the preoccupation with it, the relationship is often based on interpersonal games, role expectations, strategies, and, consequently, low trust in the relationship itself. There is less likelihood of openness and extensive sharing of data in the relationship; rather, the parties concerned are more likely to be formal and guarded.

The developmental relationship is based on the nature of the task, knowledge of the differential skills and competencies of the parties concerned, and some agreement through negotiation on the terms of the relationship itself. It is possible that some students are comfortable with the faculty member as an authority figure and

would wish to maintain a dependent relationship. According to the advisor's style and his own particular degree of comfort in such a relationship, an authority-dependency relationship may initially be quite satisfactory to both. Regardless of the relationship to be defined, the goal is toward openness, acceptance, trust, sharing of data, and collaborative problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation.

## Discussion

Perhaps the greatest difficulty is found in the differential meaning that faculty and students attach to the term *advising*. Many faculty restrict the definition of teaching to subject matter presented in the classroom or laboratory that produces credit. Advising, therefore, is peripheral to teaching as the central mission; it is an added burden, an extracurricular, nonteaching activity. Expectations around the functions of the advisor are confusing. One message says that the faculty member is to "advise" while it is the student's responsibility to avail himself of this service. At the same time, as noted earlier, there are certain built-in expectations or requirements (course selection, sectioning approvals, signatures, etc.) for which the advisor is supposed to take the responsibility for student compliance. Consequently the advisor may see himself as little more than an administrative control agent, a perception with which the student readily agrees.

The student also reacts to the confusion between what the advising concept purports to be and what it really is. Presumably an advisor is a person whose "advice" may be accepted or rejected at the option of the student. In reality, this option does not, in many instances, exist. The student often must go to the advisor to get his sanction or approval. Hence, from the student's view, the advisor controls the relationship as well as any resulting decisions, in spite of the advisor's conscientious efforts to advise and to place the responsibility for decisions on the student. This ambiguity must be clarified early in the development of a relationship between the advisor and student. In fact, the developmental advisor makes the establishment of the relationship the first order of business with the stu-

dent. Who takes the initiative in making contacts, getting data? Who takes the responsibility for making decisions? What are the limits, controls, and other reality factors that must be understood by both parties? What do both parties need to know about each other?

These and other questions must be dealt with and mutually understood. Too often both parties launch into a relationship assuming both have the same idea of what the role of each is to be in the advisor-student relationship. The result is often counterproductive, if not total disaster. Taking time to discuss and agree on interpersonal and working relationships and conditions can help avoid the conflict that is inevitable from untested, disparate assumptions.

## Summary

This article applies student development concepts to academic advising. The decade of the 60s is described as a critical period of transition from the traditional prescriptive relationship of the teacher with students toward a developmental definition that is rapidly gaining acceptance in higher education. A key developmental concept is the university viewed as an intellectual learning community within which individuals and social systems interact in and out of the classroom and utilize developmental tasks within and outside the university for personal growth. Advising is viewed as a teaching function based on a negotiated agreement between the student and the teacher in which varying degrees of learning by both parties to the transaction are the product.

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