

The O'Banion Model of Academic Advising: An Integrative Approach

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The authors examine the O'Banion model of academic advising before presenting a variation of it that is both nonlinear and holistic. Applying O'Banion's five dimensions— a) exploration of life goals, b) exploration of vocational goals, c) program choice, d) course choice, and e) scheduling options—to two case studies, the authors demonstrate how an advisor and advisee may cover all aspects of the O'Banion model in a natural, fluid manner.

Faculty and professional advisors have applied the O'Banion academic advising model for almost 20 years. The paradigm presented by Terry O'Banion in his seminal 1972 article, "An Academic Advising Model," continues to influence advising interactions and advisor training in colleges and universities throughout the country. In fact, O'Banion's article is one of the most cited works in the literature of the profession (Schein, 1994). O'Banion presented advising as a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment (O'Banion, 1972).

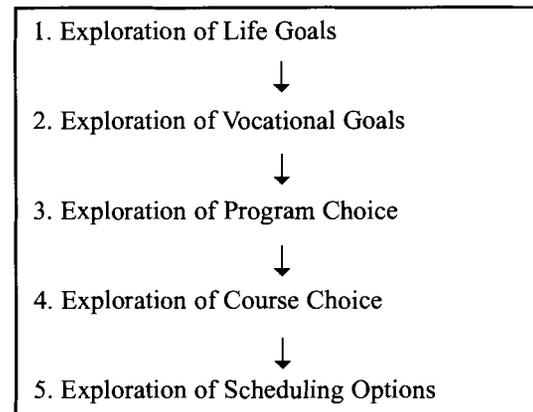
While few people question the underlying structural rationale for the O'Banion model, many—including O'Banion himself (1997)—feel the need to revisit, revise, and perhaps, recast the paradigm. Many changes have occurred in the academic advising field and in the nature of college students since 1972. Byrd (1995) observed that today's college population differs drastically from that of the 1970s in which the stereotypical student was male, white, 18 years old, living in a residence hall, and working very little, if at all. Today's student profile is heterogeneous, with only 20% fitting the 1970s norm. Many students, attending college after years in the workforce, have family and civic responsibilities and face considerable financial pressure. Many attend college on a part-time basis. More women, first-generation college students, and people of color are attending college today. Other populations currently enrolling include those from non-American cultures; people with disabilities; and lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals. Polson (1994)

notes that today more adult students are attending college; they present unique and diverse needs and benefit from advising that both apply and expand upon the original O'Banion model.

The Original O'Banion Model

In 1972 O'Banion outlined a method of academic advising that incorporates five elements of the advising process. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 Original 1972 O'Banion model.



As constructed, O'Banion's model reflected a linear progression. Advising began with the exploration of life goals and advanced sequentially through the other four dimensions such that initial O'Banion stages provided the basis upon which later advising decisions were made. In addition, the advising process was not confined solely to the advisor-advisee relationship but also rested with other components of campus life—such as the classroom teacher, and counseling and career development offices. As originally conceived by O'Banion, the first two dimensions of the model were most appropriately addressed by professionally prepared counselors in settings often not considered part of the formal advising process (e.g., summer orientation, career and personal development classes, and counseling service sessions). Only through following such a consecutive course could the student explore life goals well enough to make informed decisions about vocational choices.

Once the first two elements had been investigated, the student was considered ready to enter

the third dimension: exploration of program choice. Here, the model placed an emphasis on academic advising. Advisor and advisee discussed what had been learned and what decisions had been reached during life and vocational goals exploration. The advisor's knowledge of available and appropriate academic programs facilitated the decision making required for meeting the objectives identified during dimensions one and two. After the student chose a program, the advisor participated by sharing knowledge of class content, course sequencing, and instructor specialization to help the student proceed through the fourth dimension: exploration of course choice. The fifth element, exploration of scheduling options, could be appropriately addressed by a student assistant specifically trained to lead advisees through the mechanics of developing a schedule and registering for classes (O'Banion, 1972).

In constructing his paradigm, O'Banion emphasized that every institution should provide a variety of professionals, events, and activities that enable students to make educated choices as they sequentially progress through advising procedures. With his model, O'Banion intended to replace the contemporary advising practice where students often entered the process at the third, fourth, or fifth stage without having considered issues raised in the first two steps. Lack of reflection often led students to select inappropriate programs or majors, to perform poorly in classes with which they lacked interest or background knowledge, to repeatedly change programs or perhaps, to drop out of the institution.

In the years since O'Banion first proposed his linear model, many adaptations in higher education have become necessary. In addition to previously mentioned changes in the student profile of the 1990s, other modifications have influenced how students may earn academic credit. For example, Polson (1994) notes that a significant number of returning adult learners want to receive credit for prior learning experiences and to take classes at convenient times. Increasing numbers of students register for internships, correspondence courses, and classes delivered by technology.

Greater attention to learning theory has shifted some traditional classroom lecture practices to more interactive, discussion-driven experiences. Many students readily participate in classroom communities in which the instructor serves as guide or coach. Meyers and Jones (1993) emphasized that some of the campus changes result from educators trying to make learning more rel-

evant to diverse students. Since advising groups can be set up as supportive learning communities, Strommer (1994) believes the knowledge about active learning applies directly to advising. Individual advising sessions can operate as interactive opportunities for students and advisors to discuss and explore options.

While changes in student population and academic experiences are significant, perhaps the most noteworthy evolution has been the development of academic advising as a profession and with it, increased training for advisors in such areas as career planning and study skills. Grites (1994) and Titley (1994) noted that the extensive membership growth and increasing professionalism of NACADA demonstrate a change in advising. Rooney (1994) observed that many colleges and universities regularly conduct training for advisors and that ACT and NACADA jointly sponsor an annual intensive training institute. Gordon (1994) and Ryan (1995) each emphasized the importance of regular training and discussed possible topics that should be covered: advising and student development theory, interpersonal communication skills, career and study skills techniques, and referral information. Advising has become a complex profession in which the advisor works with the student in a variety of ways, fostering self-discovery and strong problem-solving skills transferable to all aspects of the student's experience.

Today, the advising field extends far beyond O'Banion's program, course, and schedule dimensions to include both life and vocational goal exploration. Consequently, many professional and faculty advisors are likely to be involved in all aspects of the advising process, ensuring that the five elements of O'Banion's model are integrated within most advising sessions. The process outlined below, while built upon the O'Banion paradigm, is a dynamic, fluid, interweaving of all five elements rather than a strictly cumulative, linear process. In the ideal situation, every advising session draws on aspects of each dimension, and all dimensions may be used as effectively in advising sessions with graduating seniors as with first-year students.

Reinterpreting O'Banion: An Integrative Advising Model

What follows is a modified version of the original paradigm and is called "the Integrative Advising Model." In the latter rendition, the advisors introduce dimensions of the model in an interactive way during initial advising sessions. If

possible, every advising encounter involves student exploration of life and vocational goals as represented in program or course selections. Instructors as well as advisors often serve a critical advising role for students and serve as facilitators, gently encouraging students into deeper self-exploration. Students are repeatedly coached to refine their understanding of life and vocational objectives and to choose programs and courses consistent with that understanding.

Since the process of self-exploration is ongoing, O'Banion's dimensions are reflected in a circular, overlapping pattern rather than in a discrete linear formation. The student stays at the center of the advising and learning experience and controls how much self-analysis occurs and how much he or she allows advisors, faculty members, and others to influence his or her choices. In the Integrative Advising Model, advisors and instructors encourage the student to examine what it means to be an educated person in a variety of contexts. The model presupposes that the advisee may change her or his mind about life and vocational goals numerous times and suggests that the advisor promotes activities that examine previous decisions and modifies program or course choice accordingly. For example, a student, because of life experiences or course interests, may rethink previous vocational decisions and thus, make program modifications several times before graduating.

The following case studies illustrate applications of the Integrative Advising Model. Figures 2–9 demonstrate the advising dynamic under circumstances described in the text. In keeping with a student-centered focus, the circle representing the advisee is darker than that representing the advisor. The overlapping portion of both circles reflects the interaction between advisee and advisor. Solid arrows indicate words or actions directly addressing a model dimension during the advising interaction. Dotted arrows indicate student awareness of a particular dimension though corresponding words or actions were not used in the advising session.

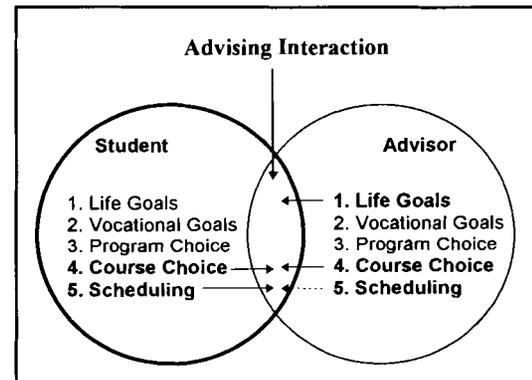
Case Study Number One

Lauren, a 30-year-old mother of 11, 8, and 4-year-old children, was a part-time, second-year, urban, commuter student who had yet to complete her general education requirements. Lauren was uncertain of her major. She worked half-time.

She made an appointment to see her academic advisor, Claudia, about course selection for the following term. Breathless, Lauren arrived 5 min-

utes late for the meeting. She apologized and explained that she had just come from her child psychology class where she had stayed to talk with the instructor about several interesting points raised in class. Her immediate concern was picking courses that would match her challenging schedule (dimensions four and five of O'Banion's model). Initially, she seemed unconcerned about the courses' content as long as the classes fit into appropriate time constraints. Claudia was aware of Lauren's desire to pick convenient classes. However, as a practitioner of the Integrative Advising Model, she also knew that reflecting on each dimension would increase the likelihood of making good course choices. To focus on appropriate class selection, Claudia encouraged Lauren to consider what she enjoyed both in and out of school so she might make choices that matched her interests (dimensions one and four). Lauren, who seemed eager to get her degree as soon as possible, was at first reluctant to think beyond the immediate practical problem of selecting courses. See Figure 2.

Figure 2 Initial interaction between Claudia and Lauren. Note that the solid arrows indicate dimensions initiated by both Lauren and Claudia and that only course choice was addressed mutually. The dotted arrow is an acknowledgment that Claudia was aware of Lauren's ongoing concern about course scheduling.



Claudia assured Lauren that it was possible to accommodate scheduling needs while choosing courses that would be intrinsically interesting and meet graduation requirements (dimensions one, three, four, and five). Although she understood Lauren's need to register for two courses right away, she also urged Lauren to take a journey through the catalog and write a wish list of classes they might discuss in future advising sessions;

Claudia hoped to see an interest pattern emerge (dimensions one and four). When asked what she could imagine herself doing in 15 years, Lauren was unable to respond immediately (dimensions one and two) because she had not often considered how her future might be affected by her current educational pursuits. See Figure 3.

Lauren thought that she might have an interest in psychology because she had found the child psychology course useful in her role as a parent. She revealed how the instructor had encouraged her to take more course work in the area and how he had given her a list of professional organizations and work opportunities for individuals trained in child psychology (dimensions one, two, and three). Lauren was visibly pleased that the instructor had taken an interest in his students, and Claudia listened closely to help Lauren connect her enthusiasm with her educational choices. See Figure 4.

The meeting continued with additional dialog about Lauren's interests. They also agreed upon a reasonable course of action to address both Lauren's short-term and long-term needs for course and interest clarification (dimensions one and four). They selected two courses for the following term, both appropriate for meeting graduation requirements as well as major prerequisites (dimensions three, four, and five) should Lauren select child psychology as a focus. At Claudia's suggestion, Lauren agreed to meet with a career counselor to discuss whether her interests and priorities were compatible with those of a child psychology professional (dimensions one and two). Claudia discussed the use of informational interviews, a strategy that Lauren really liked; consequently, Lauren set up an interview with the child care provider at the center her youngest child attended and another with her oldest child's teacher at his elementary school (dimension two). Before ending the 30-minute advising meeting, they scheduled a follow-up session in two weeks so Lauren could share her findings with Claudia. See Figure 5.

In keeping with good advising practice, Claudia jotted down information in the advising file about the nature of the session. She noted that the child psychology instructor had reached out to Lauren, providing her with useful information related to his discipline. She made a note to explore other course opportunities with Lauren at their next appointment. She wanted to encourage the advisee to study a variety of disciplines while being respectful of her stated interest in child psychology.

Figure 3 Claudia investigated Lauren's life and vocational goals. Also, note Lauren's implicit scheduling concerns as represented by the dotted arrows.

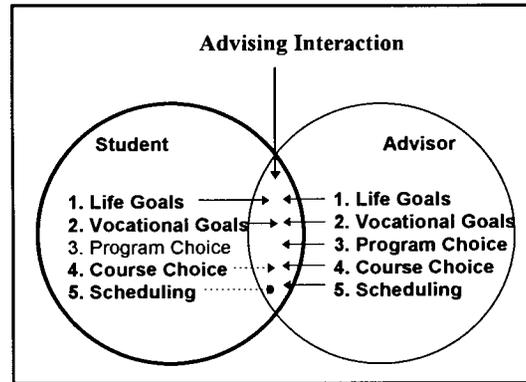


Figure 4 Lauren talks about her goals while Claudia pays careful attention.

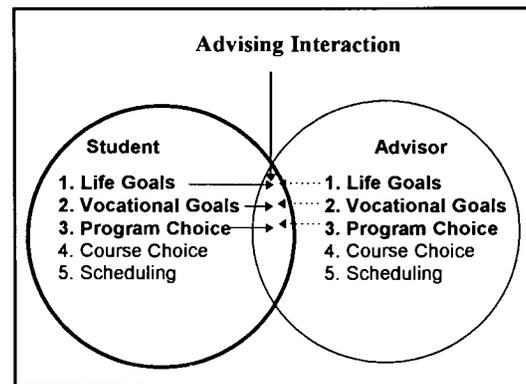
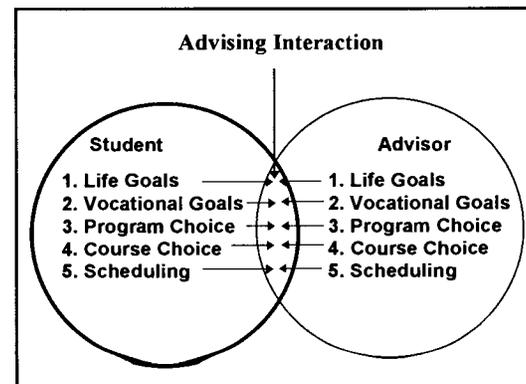


Figure 5 Summary of Lauren's advising session with Claudia. Note that all five O'Banion dimensions were addressed in an interactive, natural manner.



Analysis of case study number one. Claudia provided a good example of how advisors may apply developmental rather than prescriptive methods to advising interactions. She set off a dynamic process of self-reflection and clarification that could continue over a lifetime. She encouraged Lauren to explore what she enjoyed learning and encouraged additional investigation about options related to her interests in children and psychology. The Integrative Advising Model enabled Claudia to recycle through various dimensions and address both short-term, practical issues (course selection for a convenient time) and long-term, evolving issues (life and career goals ever in need of revision). This process would not have been possible had Claudia insisted on moving the session sequentially through the five steps. A linear application of the O'Banion paradigm would have made continuous self-reflection and course or program adaptation extremely difficult, if not impossible. In ensuing advising sessions, Claudia will match advice on program and course choices to Lauren's current thinking about her life and vocational objectives.

Case Study Number Two

In the first case study, application of the Integrative Advising Model was fairly uncomplicated since the student was amenable to reflecting on advisor-suggested issues. However, the model also applies to advising situations in which the student may not be ready for self-exploration.

Jerry was a first-generation college student working part-time at a local grocery. A 19-year-old sophomore, he was required to see his advisor at the end of the fall semester because he had been placed on academic probation. Jerry was majoring in accounting because his father, a pipe fitter, had said that most high paying jobs were in business. Jerry had received no academic advising since meeting with an advisor at new student orientation. He had chosen his courses based on recommendations from his father and friends in the residence hall and on scheduling considerations.

Consequently, he had taken many courses without the prerequisites. Because he had not seen the need for the general education requirements, he had focused almost exclusively on accounting and other business courses.

Jerry arrived at his advisor's office somewhat defensive. He came unfamiliar with his advisor, Don, and the general nature of the advising appointment. Don sensed Jerry's anxiety and tried to make him feel comfortable. After some initial conversation to establish rapport, Don explained

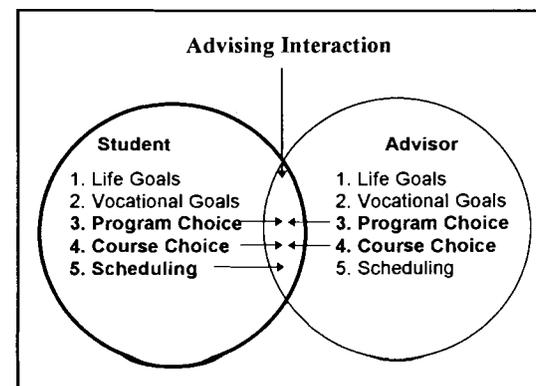
that he had requested the advising session because of Jerry's academic standing. He asked Jerry if he understood the Academic Progress Policy, had any questions about it, or needed further explanation about his options (dimensions three and four).

Although still defensive, Jerry said he remembered hearing something about the policy but was not sure how it affected him. Because of his work schedule at the grocery store and the other activities in the residence hall, he thought his grades were good enough. Don reviewed Jerry's course history with him and asked about each course in which he had received a grade of C, D, or F. He noted that in some instances, Jerry had not taken prerequisite courses (dimensions three and four). Jerry said prerequisite courses did not fit his schedule and some of his friends had said prerequisites were a waste of time (dimensions four and five). Don explained how prerequisite classes built knowledge and skills for future course work (dimensions three and four). Jerry shrugged. He said that he was in a hurry to leave the appointment and he asked how he could get off probation (dimensions three and four). See Figure 6.

Don expressed concern about Jerry's work schedule. He discussed ways that Jerry might overcome his academic difficulties, such as utilizing the college's tutoring services and attending study skills and time management workshops. Don explained how Jerry could use him as an advising resource for course and program information (dimensions three and four). Jerry agreed that proper advising might help him.

As the advising session continued, Don asked about the small amount of course work Jerry had

Figure 6 Don's attempts to address Jerry's long-term academic status were met with disinterest. Jerry's only concern was to get off academic probation.



completed in the general education area. Jerry adamantly defended his course choices and stated "that liberal arts stuff" could wait until he finished the business classes (dimensions three and four). His father did not see a need for liberal arts instruction and neither did he.

Somewhat surprised by Jerry's remarks, Don asked what he considered to be the purpose of the liberal arts curriculum and if he saw any connection between it and accounting (dimensions one, two, and three). Jerry was surprised at the questions because no one had ever mentioned a connection between his major and the liberal arts. See Figure 7.

A discussion ensued about how a liberal arts education could help Jerry in his major as well as in occupations and life in general. Don connected each area of the general education program to business. He asked Jerry to identify characteristics of successful business people and helped him see how study in areas of the liberal arts enhanced each characteristic. In a short conversation, Jerry got a glimpse of the liberal arts in a new way (dimensions one, two, and three). See Figure 8.

As the session was ending, Don drew the conversation back to Jerry's probation status. He explained that Jerry should take prerequisite courses and repeat courses with low or failing grades to raise his grade-point average (dimensions three and four). They reviewed the list of upcoming study skills and time management workshops and Jerry selected two workshops that fit his schedule (dimension five). Jerry filled out registration forms and gave them to Don. Next, they reviewed the class schedule and selected courses for the following semester. Following Don's recommendation, Jerry selected two courses from the general education offerings and two prerequisite courses needed for classes he had failed previously (dimensions three, four, and five). See Figure 9.

Before leaving Don's office, Jerry made an appointment to return and discuss what he had learned in the two workshops, and he agreed to give more thought to how the liberal arts and his interest in business might be intertwined. Jerry left the session with a new understanding of how advising was supposed to work and a much better idea of issues he should consider to be a successful college student.

Analysis of case study number two. Like Lauren in the first case study, Jerry entered the advising session with a clear agenda. He wanted his advisor to prescribe exactly what he should do to get off probation just as Lauren wanted Claudia

Figure 7 Don attempted to help Jerry broaden his perspectives on higher education. Jerry was still more concerned about his immediate situation.

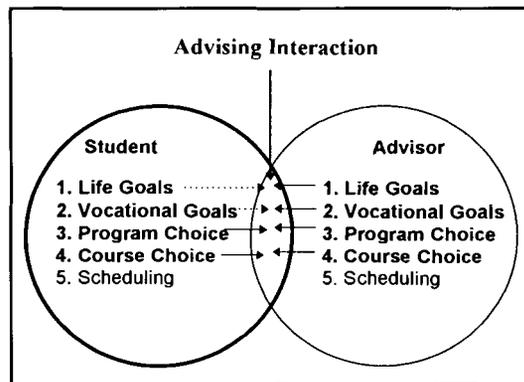


Figure 8 Don helped Jerry see connections between liberal arts education, his major, and the characteristics he considered important in life.

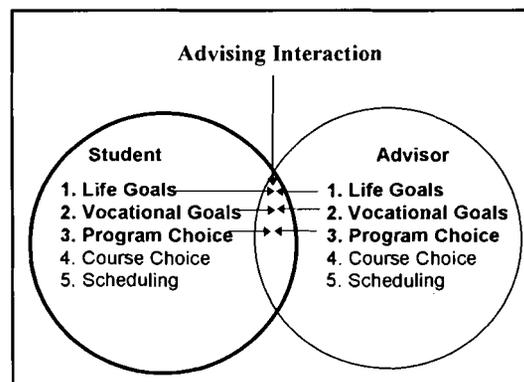
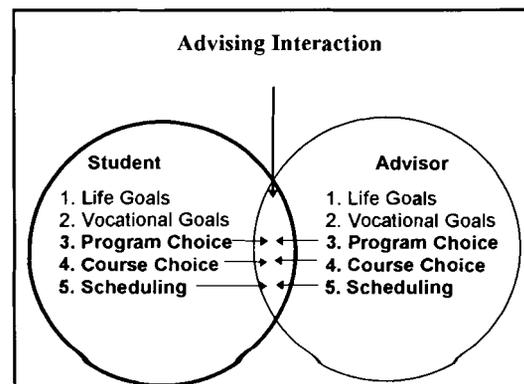


Figure 9 At the end of the advising session, Don directly addressed Jerry's immediate concerns. Jerry set up another appointment in which they will discuss vocational and life goals in greater depth.



to help her pick convenient courses for the next term. Fielstein (1994) and Grites (1994) observed that students commonly enter the advising relationship looking for specific kinds of help and agreed that developmental advising is important because it pushes the student to reflect on vocational and life goals. However, they also acknowledged that the student's immediate concerns must be respected before being placed in the context of larger concepts such as work and personal interests.

Don's initial challenge was to address Jerry's worries while coaching him to see his probation situation as a potential academic opportunity. In the meeting, Don attempted to raise Jerry's awareness about the link between liberal education and vocation. At first, Jerry was defensive and hostile, but Don calmly and deliberately raised issues that engaged Jerry. Don shared his expertise in a non-threatening way, establishing his credibility as an informed and caring advisor. Eventually, Jerry paid attention. Brown and Rivas (1994) noted that for some students to respond to and trust their advisors, they need to perceive the advisor as competent, knowledgeable, and "authoritative" (p. 110). Don's ability to connect liberal arts learning with accounting, to suggest specific prerequisites and general education courses, and to make concrete workshop referrals all impressed Jerry. He responded positively and began to consider Don's suggestions. Although Don dealt very little in the first meeting with Jerry's life or professional goals, he established a rapport with Jerry to serve as a foundation for future sessions in which they will more fully address all aspects of the O'Banion model.

Conclusion

The case studies presented are typical of many interactions between advisee and advisor. The student comes to the advising session with a stated objective, and the advisor, while acknowledging the advisee's articulated goal, encourages the student to think about personal and academic interests that may be incorporated into the student's educational and life schemes. Again and again, the advisor challenges him or her to consider choices and interests, modeling reflective behavior so the student may continually adapt evolving goals to the complex, ever-changing world. Every advising session provides the opportunity to engage in discussion and action related to dimensions of O'Banion's paradigm.

While student and advisor objectives differed in the two case studies presented, both were

addressed, at least partially, during the course of the sessions. The advisors were able to weave aspects of the O'Banion paradigm into the discussion. Continuing dialog was also built into plans for future meetings.

We find the Interactive Advising Model to be flexible and useful with diverse populations. Application of the linear model is often initially challenged by the new or undecided students who have little understanding of its first and second dimensions; they want to move directly to the fourth or fifth dimension. For advisors, the linear model often creates an awkward flow in the advising conversation. Thus, many advisors find the original O'Banion model difficult to put into practice.

In the first case study, the interaction between Claudia and Lauren might have transpired differently had O'Banion's linear model been followed. Claudia, eager that Lauren explore life and vocational goals before selecting classes for the next term, might have referred Lauren to related services for career or personal goal exploration. This intermediate step would have slowed down the advising process and undoubtedly frustrated Lauren. The advising session likely would have ended less amicably than the Integrative Advising Model meeting described. Each participant would have left the linear model session with an awareness that opportunities to share and address individual objectives had been missed.

Similarly, the session between Don and Jerry would have proceeded differently had Don not taken the time to help Jerry see a way out of his probation difficulties. Don was able to earn Jerry's trust by calmly demonstrating insight about Jerry's situation. Though not able to thoroughly address all of O'Banion dimensions during the initial meeting, Don laid a valuable foundation on which to build.

With the Integrative Advising Model, the advisor enters the conversation that the student initiates and then makes connections to all parts of the model without having to proceed step-by-step through a structured process. The advisor steers the conversation through appropriate model dimensions to help the student see how each decision affects subsequent alternatives. Whether the advisee is a first-year student or an upperclassman, the Integrative Advising Model engages the individual and helps her or him move along the developmental continuum while immediate needs are addressed (Crookston, 1972; Frost, 1993).

A developmental model of advising permits the advisor to help the advisee focus, through self-

reflection, on interests and goals. Such a model should utilize the dimensions of O'Banion's paradigm during formal advising sessions and even in most informal advising encounters. Incorporating the elements of the Integrative Advising Model into advising conversations enables the advisor to quickly assess the student's sophistication level at each dimension. Consequently, advisor and advisee work collaboratively to clarify and promote achievement of commonly understood expectations.

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Authors' Notes

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