



**SOUTHEAST MISSOURI**  
STATE UNIVERSITY · 1873

**Chapter**

**2**

ADVISOR HANDBOOK

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Southeast Missouri State University

# Relating with Students

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# Relating with Students

“Once a relationship is established, advising can truly begin.”

## Three Categories Essential to Effective Advising

The National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) Faculty Advisor Training Package identifies three content categories essential to effective advising: *conceptual, informational and relational*.

- **Conceptual** involves understanding the roles and expectations of advising or the concept of “my job, your job” in the advising relationship.
- **Informational** promotes knowledge of the policies, procedures, programs and the appropriate use of campus resources.
- **Relational** elements are the qualities and skills an advisor must demonstrate when relating to advisees (Kerr, 1996, p. 20).

## Relational Qualities for Advisors

- Displays a concerned and caring attitude toward advisees.
- Establishes rapport by being approachable and accepting.
- Takes a proactive role by initiating regular contact with advisees, realizing the importance of frequent contact in developing a relationship.
- Available and flexible to accommodate advisees' schedules.
- Understands the needs of SPECIAL POPULATIONS.

## Relating with Special Populations

Special populations of students exist in every college and university. Advisors must develop an awareness of their unique characteristics and needs.

### Returning Adults/Non-traditional Students

According to Skorupa (2002): When we think of adult learners and how to approach them as advisors and instructors, several aspects of their adult status usually come to mind. Among these are the facts that adults play multiple roles in their lives, that they often have anxiety about

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returning to school, and that many times they are experiencing some sort of life transition at the time they decide to return to school. One characteristic of current and prospective adult students that is often overlooked is the fact that they are consumers and are generally looking for the most out of their time and money.

Muench (1987) in a paper, *A comparative study of the psychosocial needs of adult men and women students in an adult degree program*, says:

Non-traditional students need many different kinds of support and assistance from family, friends, and institutions of higher learning. Research evidence suggests that "both sexes have difficulties juggling the roles of student, worker, and family member. Adult students need help in building their self-confidence as students, in acquiring or refreshing study skills, and in managing their time and other resources while in school. In addition, adult students benefit from opportunities to interact with their peers and need to be actively involved in the educational process through sharing their relevant work and life experiences.

### *Characteristics*

- May be highly diversified in background, needs, abilities, interests.
- May have high purpose and motivation.
- May lack confidence.
- May be uncertain about how higher education works.
- May have unrealistic goals.
- May be in transition.
- May not understand the aims and purposes of general education.
- May be anxious to complete general education quickly.
- May be apprehensive about being compared to traditional students.
- May have clear need to balance several life roles.
- May have prior college experience.
- May need practical orientation.

### *Advising techniques*

- Treat like adult consumers.
- Help develop a sense of belonging, confidence and self-esteem.
- Provide avenues to realize their potential as students.
- Assist in contacting campus resources (counseling, career services).
- Teach them to use the university system and how to effect change.
- Introduce them to adult student services and organizations.
- Learn their family obligations.
- Learn their work schedules and obligations (Skorupa, 2002).

## **Student Athletes**

Student athletes are a unique population with a significant time commitment outside the classroom. According to Kerr (1996):

### *Characteristics*

- May be under-prepared academically.
- May have unrealistic career goals.
- May be academically unsuccessful if unsupported.
- May be required to comply with external and team regulations.

*Advising techniques*

- Begin support services with first-year students.
- Be aware of constraints of participation in athletics.
- Establish academic support and intervention systems.
- Teach problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Encourage academic commitment equal to athletics.

**Students of Color**

According to Blane Harding (2012) in his article “Advising Students of Color” diversity and multiculturalism continue to constitute important and salient issues on campuses across the United States. These concepts are widely defined and include such areas as sexual orientation, religion and socioeconomic status. Although each of these are important factors that contribute to individual and group identities, race and ethnicity can still be dominant and problematic to students entering our institutions. College and university personnel have designed numerous programs and support systems for students of color and in order for these systems to be effective there has to be greater understanding of demographics of these students. We can no longer look at broad categories such as African American, Latino(a)/Hispanic, or Asian American because these groups are as different as they are alike. They should not be categorized into a single group.

*Characteristics*

- May have low academic skills due to K-12 educational training and experience.
- May lack role models on our campuses.
- May have difficulty assimilating to campus, lack of “fit”, and feeling of isolation.
- May have low self-concept based upon previous academic experience.
- May have family and/or financial pressures due to socio-economic circumstances.
- May have limited coping skills.
- May be unaware of support systems on campus.

*Advising techniques*

- Consider cultural factors in interventions with students.
- Remember differences are just that and not deficiencies.
- Meet students where they are and allow them to tell their own stories.
- Examine our own cultural baggage and consider our possible cultural privileges.
- Keep in mind each student’s level of cultural identity development and their degree of acculturation.
- Be willing to learn from diverse students and utilize their experiences in advocating for changes in the ‘system’.

**International Students**

Advisors cannot merely increase awareness and knowledge about those from other cultures. They must also recognize themselves as cultural creatures and realize that they must first know themselves to appreciate the cultural lenses through which they interpret others (Cornett-DeVito & Reeves, 1999).

*Characteristics*

- Academic and career concerns primary.
- Prefer practical experience in career areas.
- Concerns: language, finances and relevant programs.
- Non-Western students revere instructors as authority.

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- Many from developing countries.
- Limited community and campus resources.

### *Advising techniques*

- Translate collegiate and US cultures.
- Familiarize self with student's academic preparation.
- Encourage involvement in campus community.
- Design academic plan relevant to student's home country.
- Encourage open view about US lifestyles (Kerr, 1996, p. 187).

## **LGBTQ Students**

Cari Moorhead (2005), Associate Dean, Graduate School, University of New Hampshire wrote: We are all composed of multiple specificities, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, etc. As academic advisors, we can support student development by being conscious of our own embedded cultural assumptions and values and the ways in which those are exhibited by us personally and by our institutions.

### *Characteristics*

- May feel marginalized and experience high rates of discrimination (Lindenberg, 2012).
- May experience isolation and rejection from family and friends.
- May be unaware of campus resources.

### *Advising Techniques*

- Be aware of your language. Reduce isolation by using inclusive language and content in our offices and in our interactions with all students, e.g., ask if there is 'someone special' in their lives rather than assuming heterosexuality, i.e., boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Find out what resources are available on your campus for LGBTQ students (Moorhead, 2005).

## **Pre-professional students**

Pre-professional students are those who hope to attain advanced degrees in highly specialized and competitive fields such as medicine and law. Students entering college with declared pre-medical majors often feel a sense of commitment to their chosen profession (Shaffer and Zalewski, 2011) but they may not fully know the importance of professionalism and preparation in achieving their goal. Students may not understand the amount of science classes required to successfully apply to medical school. Likewise, they may not understand the importance of community service or the strong communication skills needed to become a physician. Academic advisors can guide pre-health science students throughout their college careers by helping them develop and refine academic, affective and communication skills that are important in medical school.

### *Characteristics*

- May not be degree-seeking.
- May have limited understanding of profession's demands.
- May have limited information of professional preparation.
- May have a narrow focus of alternatives.

### *Advising techniques*

- Select electives to complement pre-professional goals.
- Suggest early contact with the school to which they are transferring.
- Refer to pre-professional advisors, groups and clubs early.
- Emphasize need to maintain high academic standards in order to compete for entrance into selective admission programs.

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- Assist in recognizing abilities toward goals.
- Assist with formation of alternative career plans.

### **Students with Disabilities**

The first step when interacting with people with disabilities seems obvious: Treat them as you would treat anyone else. Students with disabilities come to college for the same reasons other students do. They bring with them the same range of backgrounds, intelligence and academic skills.

#### *Characteristics*

- One or more major life activities are limited.
- May perceive self as able rather than disabled.
- May need support from peers and others.
- May express need for removal of barriers to full participation.

#### *Advising techniques*

- Understand student abilities and barriers.
- Consider scheduling issues such as physical distance and time between classes.
- Display positive attitudes about integration of students into college.
- Encourage full participation in college.
- Recommend support services when needed.
- Act as an advocate (Hemphill, 2002).

#### *Universal Design*

Sheryl Burgstahler from Washington University describes ways to provide equal access in advising services through Universal Design: An increasing number of students with disabilities are pursuing educational opportunities at the college level. Accessibility to student services including advising is becoming increasingly important. The goal of universal design is equal access for everyone. People with a variety of ages, reading abilities, learning styles, native languages, cultures, learning disabilities, visual, speech hearing and mobility impairments will be seeking higher education. As an advisor, prepare to be accessible to everyone. Make sure the student:

- Feels welcome.
- Can get into your office and maneuver within it.
- Is able to access printed materials and electronic resources you recommend.
- Can participate in events and activities you sponsor.

#### *Helpful Communication Hints*

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. There are no strict rules when it comes to relating to people with disabilities. However, here are some helpful hints.

#### *General Guidelines*

- Ask a person with a disability if he/she needs help before providing.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through the person's companion or interpreter.
- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation. If so, refer to the person first and then the disability. "A man who is blind" is better than "a blind man" because it emphasizes the person first."

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- Avoid negative descriptions of a person's disability. For example, "a person who uses a wheelchair" is more appropriate than "a person confined to a wheelchair." A wheelchair is not confining- it's liberating!
- Ask for permission before you interact with a person's guide dog or service dog.

### *Visual Impairments*

- Be descriptive for people with visual impairments. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than "The computer is over there."
- When guiding people with visual impairments, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.

### *Learning Disabilities*

- Offer directions/instruction both orally and in writing. If asked, read instructions to individuals who have specific learning disabilities.

### *Mobility Impairments*

- Sit or otherwise position yourself at the approximate height of people sitting in wheelchairs when you interact.

### *Speech Impairments*

- Listen carefully. Repeat what you think you understand and then ask the person with speech impairment to clarify and/or repeat the portion that you did not understand.

### *Deaf or Hard of Hearing*

- Face people with hearing impairments so they can see your lips.
- Speak clearly at a normal volume. Speak more loudly only if requested. Use paper and pencil if the deaf person does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- In groups raise hands to be recognized, so the person who is deaf knows who is speaking.
- When using an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is deaf; when an interpreter voices what a deaf person signs, look at the deaf person, not the interpreter.

### *Psychiatric Impairments*

- Provide information in clear, calm, respectful tones.
- Allow opportunities for addressing specific questions (Burgstahler, 2006).

## **Transfer Students**

According to Brooke Lockhart, Associate Director of Admissions at Southeast, transfer students are a growing population of diverse students varying in age, college preparedness, goals, and expectations. We enroll 1,000 new transfer students annually at Southeast. It has been said that "transfer students are oftentimes first-semester students with some experience in higher education." (Grites, 2004) When meeting with transfer students, it is important to recognize the varying degrees of college experiences and preparation.

### *Characteristics*

- Community college experience with or without advisor assistance.
- May have attended more than one higher education institution (referred to as "swirling" students).
- May feel frustrated if all questions cannot be answered by one person.
- Vary greatly in academic talent and expectations.

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- May or may not have defined academic goals.
- May or may not want to get involved with campus activities.
- May have more additional family or work commitments than traditional freshmen students.
- May have elective or non-transferable credit.
- May have credit not yet on file (current or previous semester transcript may be missing).

*As a result of these complex characteristics, it can be challenging to advise a transfer student.*

### *Advising techniques*

- Welcome the student to Southeast Missouri State University and inquire about why he/she chose this institution.
- Review all transfer credit and explain any electives or non-transferable coursework.
- Ask the student if he or she will be bringing in any degree.
- Refer a student to the online course evaluation system when the student wishes to request either exact course or general education equivalency.
- Explain all necessary Southeast Missouri State University policies and procedures and inform the student that each college/university is different.
- Review all requirements, including general education, admission (if any, including GPA), and major courses.
- Work together with the student to determine an appropriate first semester of coursework
- Assist the student with registration.
- Review the “Checklist for Transfer Students” in the Appendix.
- Give student ideas on how to become engaged and connected to campus.

### **Exploratory/Undecided Students**

Undecided or exploratory students come from various age groups, backgrounds, and educational experience. As a result, there is no one proven advisement panacea that works best with every exploratory student (Steele & McDonald, 2002).

Students enter higher education at various levels of undecidedness. In fact, these students may be in a cyclical process; they will make a decision and then return to undecidedness due to doubt, lack of information, peer influence, fear, parental pressure, etc. All students in the exploring phase must be assessed as individuals (Slowinski & Hammock, 2003).

#### *Characteristics*

- Unwilling, unable or unready to make educational or vocational decisions.
- May generally have difficulty making decisions.
- May be wavering between two or more options.
- May not be knowledgeable regarding career/major options and/or requirements.
- May or may not be academically under prepared.

#### *Advising Techniques*

- Be aware of an individual student's values and seek to incorporate these values into the exploration process.
- Help student operate in a planned organized manner as they approach their exploration.
- Remind the student that choosing a career/major is a process which takes time and effort.
- Help identify sources to gain information on prospective fields of study.
- Encourage student to use all available resources to help with their decision such as Career Services, faculty interviews, career shadowing, etc. (Slowinski & Hammock, 2003).

### **Academically At-Risk Students**

Academically at-risk students are those who, for any number or reasons, are not adequately prepared for college.

#### *Characteristics*

- May be first-generation college students.
- May be financially disadvantaged.
- May have a physical, mental or emotional disability.
- May generally have low self-esteem.
- May have low academic self-concept.
- May have unrealistic grade and career expectations.
- May be unfocused in their career objectives.
- May have external locus of control.
- May lack adequate study skills for college success.
- May believe learning is memorizing.
- May have a history of passive learning.
- May have low level skills in writing, reading or mathematics. (Ender and Wilkie, 2000).

#### *Advising techniques*

- Explain importance of developmental courses as foundation/review.
- Recommend regular advising appointments (monthly, semi-monthly).
- Establish a trusting relationship.
- Employ intrusive advising.
- Strive to help them experience academic success.
- Help students gain a sense of belonging and significance on campus.
- Strongly encourage use of academic support systems (Jones & Becker, 2002).

## **RELATIONAL SKILLS FOR ADVISORS**

Delmas (2001) in an article, *NACADA The "Quality" in Advising*, writes:

I try to give students what I think they need from me. A tissue, a letter of recommendation, words of encouragement or congratulations, a smile of recognition in the hall that says, 'You are important to me.' Since I represent the institution, it means that the student is important to the institution, too. Of course not all advising is complicated and involved. What most of our students need is for us to answer 'just one quick question,' and don't we love that? But sometimes our advisees and their life situations require us to stand up and be brave, kind, caring and resourceful. That is quality advising. It's the whole package, not just our responsibilities as narrowly defined in a job description moldering away in a file somewhere. Come to think of it, that thing could use an overhaul!

- Demonstrate strong listening and communication skills.
- Know student's name.
- Give undivided attention.
- Be friendly.
- Make appropriate eye contact.
- Probe and clarify.
- Remove seating barriers.

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- Assist in the exploration of vocational and life goals.
- Recognize and value individual differences.
- Understand and assist in the decision-making process.
- View all occupations as valuable and significant.
- Exhibit knowledge of academic programs and university policies.
- Know degree programs offered and their unique requirements.
- Understand policies governing degree-seeking students.
- Be informed about courses offered, content, prerequisites, availability, transferability, and sequencing.
- Encourage appropriate balance of courses and workload.
- Know about remedial courses.
- Understand learning styles.
- Place students based on test scores.
- Make appropriate referrals (Kerr, 1996, p. 178).

Assistance can encompass educational, personal, spiritual, social and professional areas. Effective referrals can help ensure academic success. Tips on making REFERRALS in Academic Advising:

- Be informed of web, campus and community resources. Pay attention to office contacts and the chain of command in various offices.
- Keep listing of names, offices, numbers and websites for quick reference.
- Pay attention to student's expressed and implied needs (e.g. financial aid or student employment).
- Find the right referral and help student avoid unnecessary legwork (e.g. instructor or registrar).
- Make students feel comfortable, highlighting the referral's friendliness, accessibility or willingness to help.
- Facilitate referrals by creating a referral in SupportNET or telephoning the parties to whom you are sending student while he/she is with you. Phoning should guarantee the appropriate office gives an appointment to the student. Student may be given the phone to make the appointment. On rare occasions, advisors working with students in crisis may take a student directly to the appropriate source for help such as the Behavioral Health and Accessibility, Testing Services or Learning Assistance Programs.

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR ADVISORS

At the NACADA Summer institute in June, 2010, Nancy King shared insights about communicating effectively with advisees. The following are her thoughts.

There are three basic types of conversations advisors have with students:

- Conversations which are informational:
  - University policies and procedures;
  - Requirements;
  - Important dates and deadlines;
  - Programs of study.

*All too often advising conversations stop here and do not progress to the next two types.*

- Conversations about the individual student:
  - Values;
  - Interests;
  - Strengths;
  - Areas for improvement (e.g. student skills, time management);
  - Engagement at the institution.
- Conversations about the future:
  - Goal setting;
  - Relating education to future career and personal life;
  - Steps needed to make future goals real;
  - Understanding individual changes as result of education.

## BASIC TOPICS FOR ADVISING SESSIONS

Crockett (1995), in a pre-conference workshop at a National Conference on Student Retention, discussed "Modes and Models for Designing and Implementing a Successful Advising Program. Some thoughts are as follows:

An effective advisor individualizes each advising session and goes beyond suggesting classes and building schedules. The ultimate purpose is to assist students as they develop meaningful educational plans to help them achieve their life goals. The following are suggestions for generating meaningful discussions with advisees.

### **Classes:**

- How are your classes going?
- Are you having any problems?
- What seems to be your most challenging class this semester? What is your favorite one?
- Do you know others in your classes?

### **Rapport with Professors:**

- How are you getting along with your professors?
- Have you visited any instructors or professors during their posted office hours?

### **Study Skills:**

- Do you have any problems with your note taking?
- Are your test results accurately reflecting the time invested?

### **Career Exploration:**

- What academic areas are you currently considering? What do you like best about these areas?
- What occupations are you considering? What about these occupations attract you?
- How do your abilities and skills fit the tasks necessary to succeed in these areas?
- Will these occupations provide the rewards and satisfaction you want for your life? How?
- What are the differences among the majors you are tentatively considering? The similarities?
- Who (or what) has influenced your ideas about these alternatives?

## LIMITATIONS ON ADVISING RESPONSIBILITIES

Limitations to advising exist, and the advisor must be aware of these limitations. As a result, the integrity of advising as a profession is strengthened and sustained. Crockett (1995) again discusses some of the limitations of the advising relationship:

- An advisor cannot make decisions for an advisee, but the advisor can be a sympathetic listener and offer various alternatives for the student to consider;
- An advisor cannot increase the native ability of the advisee, but the advisor can encourage the maximum use of that ability;
- An advisor cannot reduce the academic or employment load of a floundering student, but the advisor can make recommendations to the appropriate office or dean if the student has been suspended (suggesting stipulations concerning reinstatement);
- An advisor should not in any way criticize a fellow faculty member to a student, but the advisor can make a friendly approach to any instructor who is involved in the student's problem;
- An advisor should not generally share matters of a confidential nature with others, but the exchange of helpful information between advisor and instructor or administrators can be beneficial to students. This exchange should be conducted in a professional and discreet manner;
- An advisor should not attempt to handle cases of emotional disturbances that fall outside the behavioral pattern of students judged reasonably normal. When complex problems arise advisors should refer students to professional personnel through the Dean of Students' Office or the Center for Behavioral Health and Accessibility.

## RELATING WITH PARENTS

A cultural shift has taken place in recent years, reflected in a stronger involvement by parents in their children's education. Sue Shellenbarger, in her 2005 Wall Street Journal article, "Colleges Ward off Over-Involved Parents", outlines some reasons for this trend:

- Media coverage of campus crimes;
- Increasing mental health problems among college students;
- Rising drug and alcohol arrests on college campuses;
- A strong consumer mentality, i.e. "I am paying for college and I want to be sure my money is spent wisely."

Mark D. Menezes, in an article, "Advisors and Parents: Together Building Stronger Advising Relationships", expounds on the trend and how advisors should respond:

Academic advisors today are not just meeting with young students eager to start their college career and plan their lives for the future; they are also meeting with the parents and other family members of this new college generation. Parents now expect to be an integral part of their children's college experience. This significantly changes the practice of academic advising and advisors need to outline the expectations of students and parents. Because more and more parents want to be included in the advising relationship, advisors must adopt a new approach to advising that will still create an environment for students to realize their autonomy and develop an educational plan consistent with their personal goals. Good communication is the key (2005).

Advisors must learn to accept and incorporate involved parents in a healthy manner that will enhance the student's advising experience, yet foster personal growth and responsibility. More

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parental involvement in their student's academic life is a strong trend that is not likely to change anytime soon.

Employ these Tools when Parents Accompany Students:

- Permission to Release Confidential Information (Office of Registrar website - See Forms).
- Utilize the Degree Map for the student's program to discuss sequence, admission to program criteria, pre-reqs, etc.
- Speak in generalities if consent is not granted: Do not discuss specific grades, but indicate a certain grade is required for a particular course.
- Urge parents to talk to their student. The dialogue needs to start there.

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