

Advising as Teaching

Carol C. Ryan, Metropolitan State University

"Advising as Teaching" was delivered as the President's Address at the 1991 NACADA National Conference in Louisville, Kentucky. In her address Ryan identified characteristics of effective teaching and those of effective advising from the literature and explored their parallels. She argued that faculty should be encouraged to view advising as an extension of their teaching role and made specific suggestions about applying teaching skills in the advising encounter.

The belief that advising is teaching is hardly new. Crookston (1972), for example, has argued that in both teaching and advising the instructor or advisor should function as a facilitator of learning, working with students to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills. Kramer (1983) suggests that advising should be viewed by faculty as a special teaching function, during which the advisee's educational choices are questioned and challenged. And Eble (1988) has written that faculty should consider advising as an extension of their teaching role.

Nevertheless, few writers have fully explored the notion of advising as teaching, and none has outlined the possible parallels between characteristics of effective teaching and exemplary advising practices. Because the majority of academic advising in colleges and universities is provided by faculty (*ACT National Survey on Academic Advising*, 1979, 1983, 1988), an examination of the ways in which faculty and professional advisors can use the teaching skills and techniques they have acquired to enhance their work with advisees is warranted. It may be that these skills outweigh the counseling skills professional advisors have tried to persuade faculty to adopt and that, through a new emphasis on transference of effective teaching skills, faculty may achieve more satisfaction and congruence in their dual roles as advisors and teachers.

Characteristics of Effective Teachers

To determine the characteristics of effective teachers and the possible relationship of good teaching practice to advising, a computer search of the literature (1975-1990) was carried out, using the descriptors *teacher effectiveness, master teachers, teaching models, teacher characteristics,*

teaching styles, teaching skills, teaching strategies, and teacher-student relationship. These were combined with the descriptors *academic advising and postsecondary education.* Three types of reports on effective teaching and 20 of the most commonly listed effective teaching characteristics were identified. Effective teaching has been defined by Walsh (1975) as "that which caused a student to raise his thought process above the fact and data level. He mentally conceptualized, theorized, made generalizations, and drew conclusions" (p. 135).

In four of the reports (Hart, 1989; Knowles, 1980; Roueche, 1982; Weimer, 1990), the authors summed up their views of outstanding teaching characteristics based on their own research and experience. Other writers (Eble, 1988; Menges, McGill, & Shaefer, 1986; Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale, & Reif, 1987; Walsh, 1975) summarized research on effective characteristics carried out by themselves or others. In some cases, **only** teachers were queried and in others both students and teachers responded to questionnaires. Finally, there were three studies in community colleges as to teaching effectiveness. In two of the studies, faculty only were contacted (Guskey & Easton, 1983; Hirst & Bailey, 1983). However, in the final study (Elliot, 1989) faculty, administrators, and students were contacted.

For purposes of this review, the 20 characteristics of effective teaching most often identified in the literature were divided into three categories: teaching, communication, and attitudes toward students. The greatest number (12) are listed under teaching: (a) planning and organizing, or preparation of subject matter; (b) mastery of the subject area; (c) active student participation in the learning process; (d) regular feedback, reinforcement, and encouragement to students; (e) creation of an environment conducive to learning; (f) stimulation of student interest in a subject area; (g) enthusiasm toward the subject; (h) ability to help students learn on their own; (i) working to teach students how to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information and to express ideas clearly; (j) being a co-learner while facilitating the learning process and serving as a resource to the student; (k) relating course content to the student's experi-

ence; (l) giving problem-solving tasks to the student and facilitating personalization of the learning.

Communication skills focused on (a) clarity of the teacher's message to the student; (b) appropriate body language, including eye contact; (c) good questioning skills (for example, using open-ended or probing questions); and (d) development of strong listening skills with which the instructor concentrates on what the student is actually saying. Attitudinal skills included (a) exhibiting positive regard for students as well as concern and respect; (b) being approachable and available to students outside the classroom, which Eble (1988) suggests is still the best way to signal our real concern for students' welfare; (c) open, genuine presentation of oneself to students; and (d) role modeling so that students can better understand the mission or purpose of the institution, the values of the place, and what is expected of them.

Characteristics of Effective Advising

Less research on characteristics of effective advising has been done than on exemplary teaching practices. However, Crockett (1978) reviewed the literature to determine student expectations of academic advising and listed four major factors students identified as most important to them. They are (a) accessibility, (b) specific and accurate information, (c) advice and counsel, and (d) a personal and caring relationship with the advisor.

More recently, in a report from the University of Pennsylvania (*SCUE White Paper on Undergraduate Education*, 1985), the Student Committee on Undergraduate Education suggested that "advising should be an accessible, individual process . . . the advisor should act as a catalyst, initiating discussion, asking questions, and explaining options which cause the student to think carefully about educational goals" (p. 21).

Looking at advising from the other side, NACADA's own goals suggest that the exemplary advisor should:

1. Assist students in self-understanding and self-acceptance (value clarification, understanding abilities, interests, limitations).
2. Assist students in their consideration of life goals by relating interests, skills, abilities, and values to careers, the world of work, and the nature and purpose of higher education.
3. Assist students in developing an educa-

tional plan consistent with life goals and objectives.

4. Assist students in developing decision-making skills.
5. Provide accurate information about institutional policies, procedures, resources, and programs.
6. Make referrals to other institutional or community services.
7. Assist students in evaluation or reevaluation of progress toward established goals and educational plans.
8. Provide information about students to the institution, colleges, **and/or** academic departments. (Crockett, 1988, p. 59)

Some colleges and universities have incorporated statements about effective advising practices into advising or policy statements. For example, Bradley University (Crockett, 1988) states that a good advisor:

1. Is personally and professionally interested in being an advisor.
2. Listens constructively, attempting to hear all aspects of students' expressed problems.
3. Sets aside enough regularly scheduled time to adequately meet the advising needs of students assigned to him.
4. Knows university policy and practice in sufficient detail to provide students accurate usable information.
5. Refers students to other sources of information and assistance when referral seems to be the best student-centered response to be made.
6. Attempts to understand student concerns from a student point of view.
7. Views long range planning as well as immediate problem-solving as an essential part of effective advising. (p. 94)

At Metropolitan State University (1988) advisors are expected to:

1. Model the tenets of the university.
2. Share knowledge about the institution and the curriculum.
3. Link students to community and university resources.
4. Provide accessible advising services to students.
5. Demonstrate sensitivity to differences of gender and culture.
6. Respect students and their personal and educational goals. (p. 1)

Miami Dade Community College (1988) adopted a set of goals for all teaching and non-teaching faculty, including academic advisors.

Some of these goals were to project enthusiasm for their work, demonstrate positive attitudes about each student's ability to learn, set challenging performance goals for themselves and their students, respect all individuals and appreciate diverse talents, be available and responsive to students, provide prompt feedback and fairness in evaluation of student progress, communicate clearly, and create a good learning climate. In addition, instructors and advisors were to be well prepared, respect diverse points of view, and provide students with cooperative and alternative ways of learning.

Clearly, much of the thinking on the part of administrators and advisors about what characteristics an advisor should exhibit is based on a philosophy of student development. This suggests that faculty and professional advisors alike should assist advisees toward intellectual and social growth as they explore life and career goals and choose programs, courses, and cocurricular activities that support their goals (O'Banion, 1972). Part of this task involves joint work or discussion as to the student's decision-making and problem-solving skills; Laff, Schein, and Allen (1987) also suggest that, as part of the developmental advising process, students should be encouraged to become self-directed learners. They, however, are concerned that faculty are not prepared to take on all of these advising tasks. Grites (1981), too, has written that not all faculty are willing to advise in this manner because they view teaching and research as their major responsibilities and have received little training or reward for academic advising.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that many of the skills teachers use in the classroom parallel what goes on in the advisor-advisee meeting and can be adapted to the advising relationship in ways that reinforce student development. By concentrating on the competencies they bring from the classroom to their one-to-one meetings with students and by emphasizing the use of these skills in facilitating student progress, many faculty advisors may begin to discern that advising is teaching and to recognize the value of their counsel in terms of individual student achievement and satisfaction.

Parallels Between Advising and Teaching

Turning to the factors identified in exemplary teaching and effective advising—and reviewing the process of advising itself—it seems

clear that all of the teaching characteristics most commonly identified by students and faculty can be put into practice in advising. Advisors should be as well prepared for the student advisees who have made appointments to see them as they would be for a class. An advising folder with pertinent student information, including notations of previous visits and discussions, should be reviewed before the student appears. Welty (1989) suggests that advisors should set their own goals or objectives for the meeting just as they would for each classroom session. Advisors might prepare further by asking students to come to meetings with a list of questions or concerns. Mastery of the subject area would be broadened in the advising setting to include knowledge of one's discipline, which could be shared with students considering courses or programs of study in the faculty member's own area; specific and accurate information concerning the department or major should be conveyed as well. This teaching competence would also include the ability to make appropriate referrals for more information about other programs or aspects of the university. However the effective advisor should be familiar with university policies and procedures and should be prepared to share that information with students. Finally, advisors should demonstrate the enthusiasm and knowledge about the goals and purposes of the university that they would in their own subject areas, so advisees, especially those new to the university community, gain a better sense of the institution, its purpose, and the ways in which the choices students make can fit together into a coherent, satisfying, and useful educational plan.

Students should be enabled to actively participate in the advising meeting as they would in the classroom, working with their advisors to develop educational and personal objectives and to explore ideas and options. A climate of trust, aided by the physical setting provided by the advisor, must be created so that the student feels free to ask questions, express concerns, revise old ideas, and make new decisions. Tasks to be completed before the next advising meeting can be assigned so that the advisee can use information-gathering, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. And, as the student progresses, the advisor should provide timely feedback, reinforce some of the learning that has taken place, and applaud student successes. In this open and encouraging atmosphere, it is easier

to challenge students to undertake new and perhaps more difficult learning and to consider alternative ideas or different choices.

Similarly, all of the communications skills listed in reports on teacher effectiveness must be used by the skilled advisor. Advisors must be clear in their exchanges with students and, in their out-of-class encounters, should indicate their attentiveness to the message a student is sending. The questioning techniques honed in the classroom are particularly applicable to the advisor's work with students, especially those who are shy or have difficulty expressing themselves. Advisors should ask questions initially that will allow them to learn more about student interests and strengths. Advisors can discuss life and career goals and what students would like to learn to work toward those goals. After a dialogue has been established, it is easier to discuss areas in which students need work.

Students have indicated that they want advisors to be accessible and to demonstrate a personal, caring attitude toward them (Crockett, 1978). Both of these factors are listed in the research as essential attributes of effective teaching as well (Eble, 1988; Elliott, 1989; Guskey & Easton, 1983; Hirst & Bailey, 1983; Knowles, 1980; Menges, McGill, & Shaeffer, 1986; Walsh, 1975). Most teachers and professional advisors come into higher education believing that they would like to work with students. However, they have received little preparation in graduate school for their role as advisors. Advising students one-on-one or in small groups can be a satisfying way to facilitate student development. The students that advisors see are increasingly diverse in age, ethnicity, and academic preparedness. It is important that advisors and teachers respect these students. In addition they should reflect the positive aspects or goals of the college so that advisees, with whom advisors may be the only continuous university contact, will gain a clearer sense of the academic community and its expectations.

Outcomes for Advisors and Students

I have suggested that if more emphasis is placed on the transference of teaching knowledge and skills to the advising setting, faculty may perceive their role as advisors differently. Seminars can help faculty understand the similarities between advising and teaching. Questioning techniques, other communication skills,

and mastery of university-wide, departmental and career information that will be useful to the teacher and advisor could be addressed. Additional work on student development would be important. Experienced faculty advisors could mentor new advisors, and each might practice one or two advising skills she or he wished to try out for the coming year.

However, on too many campuses today advisors are trying to cope with unrealistically large numbers of advisees. How are these advisors to transfer effective teaching skills and provide developmental assistance to 200 or, in some cases, 2,000 students? The answer is that they cannot, and they either do the best they can for a few students or give up altogether. Some advisors, to deal with this issue—but also because it is an effective method—have developed group advising formats that are successful. Another technique, used in schools regardless of the size of the advisee pool, is to teach an introductory class in which all of the students are assigned to the instructor as advisees (Weaver, 1987).

If the institution is committed to effective academic advising as well as to effective teaching, then it has an obligation to see that advising loads are reasonable and to provide adequate resources and training for faculty and professional advisors. Advisors have a right to know what is expected of them and to have the materials and support to do the job. Concurrently, an agreed-upon evaluation system should be put into place so that both advisors and students can assess both the overall advising program and individual advising. Only in that way can advisors evaluate their effectiveness as they can through classroom evaluations and make changes or add to their advising knowledge and skills.

As for students, ultimately the institution's goal should be to provide such an education that students leave the institution armed with the knowledge and skills needed to be active, articulate, and committed citizens who can provide new ideas, create and deal with change, and propose solutions to some of the political, social, and economic challenges we face. Advisors alone cannot empower students to achieve these ends. University-wide, classroom, peer, and personal learning experiences combine to form students' visions of what they are and what they can be. But advisors play an important part. Through their work they have a special teaching opportunity to model and discuss these

possibilities and to challenge students to plan educational programs with an eye to future responsibilities. If advisors can accomplish these aims and assist students in moving toward those critical tasks, their work will have been worthwhile.

References

- ACT national survey on academic advising.* (1979, 1983, 1988). Iowa City: American College Testing Program.
- Crockett, D. S. (Ed.). (1978). *Academic advising: A resource document.* Iowa City: American College Testing Program.
- Crockett, D. S. (Ed.). (1988). *Advising skills, techniques and resources.* Iowa City: American College Testing Program.
- Crookston, B. B. (1972). A developmental view of academic advising as teaching. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 13*, 12-17.
- Eble, K. E. (1988). *The craft of teaching: A guide to mastering the professor's art.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Elliott, D. B. (1989). *Community college faculty behaviors impacting student success: A qualitative study.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 305 952)
- Grites, T. J. (1981). Student self-ratings of teacher-advisors. *NACADA Journal, 1*(1), 29-33.
- Guskey, T. R., & Easton, J. Q. (1983). The characteristics of very effective teachers in urban community colleges. *Community/Junior College Quarterly, 7*, 265-274.
- Hart, F. R. (1989). *Beyond the books: Reflections on learning and teaching.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Hirst, W. A., & Bailey, G. D. (1983). A study to identify effective classroom teaching competencies. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 227 890)
- Knowles, M. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education.* Chicago: Follett.
- Kramer, H. C. (1983). Advising: Implications for faculty development. *NACADA Journal, 3*(2), 25-31.
- Laff, N. S., Schein, H. K., & Allen, D. R. (1987). Teaching, advising, and student development: Finding the common ground. *NACADA Journal, 7*(1), 9-15.
- Menges, R. J., McGill, L. T., & Shaefer, J. M. (1986). Practical ways to build student-faculty rapport. *Liberal Education, 72*(2), 145-155.
- Metropolitan State University academic advising mission statement.* (1988). Copies available from author of this article.
- Miami Dade Community College District. (1988). Faculty excellence at Miami Dade Community College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 313 088)
- O'Banion, T. (1972). An academic advising model. *Junior College Journal, 42*, 62-69.
- Roueche, J. (1982). The need for excellence in college teaching. Speech at the Institute on Staff Development. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 221 250)
- SCUE white paper on undergraduate education.* (1985). Pennsylvania Committee on Undergraduate Education, University of Pennsylvania. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 260 622)
- Sherman, T. M., Armistead, L. P., Fowler, F., Barksdale, M. A., & Reif, G. (1987). The quest for excellence in university teaching. *Journal of Higher Education, 48*(1), 66-84.
- Walsh, G. V. (1975). One in five made us think. In Mohan, Madan, & R. E. Hull (Eds.), *Teaching effectiveness: Its meaning, assessment and improvement.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.
- Weaver, F. S. (1987). Academic advising as teaching. *Innovative Higher Education, 12*(1), 22-25.
- Weimer, M. (1990). *Improving college teaching.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Welty, W. W. (1989, July/August). Discussion method teaching. *Change*, pp. 41-49.

Carol Ryan is Associate Professor in Academic Advising and Arts and Sciences and Coordinator of Academic Advising. She is past president of NACADA and recipient of a 1990 Bush Foundation Minnesota State University faculty development grant to study advising as teaching. Address correspondence concerning this article to her at 121 Metro Square, 7th and Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101.