



In the spring 2006 *Liberal Education* article “Teachable Moments: Advising as Liberal Education,” Ned Scott Laff wrote that “advising can help students realize how their contextual and critical thinking continually helps them examine and be sensitive to new contexts that challenge their ways of understanding.” Further, he states, “in order to help students better understand the nature of liberal learning and how it informs their overall undergraduate experiences, advising must be reconceived as a liberal learning experience in itself.”

While editing this issue of *Peer Review*, I found it enlightening to read about the range of practices on today’s campuses that exemplify Laff’s description of effective advising. As an undergraduate student in the seventies, I attended two very different institutions; as such, my advising in each setting couldn’t have been more dissimilar. I liken my advising experience while enrolled in a large university to academic triage—my only contact with my adviser came in times of emergencies, such as having to obtain a signature to allow me to register or add/drop a class. At the other school I attended, a small college, my academic advisers throughout the years were more like primary care doctors—almost everything I did, curricular and cocurricular, I discussed with them.

To gain a sense of others’ academic advising experiences, I conducted a small informal poll of some my colleagues in which I asked them to recall and rate—from one (no impact) to five (a true academic mentor)—how important their academic advisers had been to their undergraduate academic successes. It was disheartening to hear that most of the group, which spanned from Boomers who graduated in the sixties to more recent Generation Y graduates, rated their advising experience as three or lower. The following comments represent the general sentiment of what I heard:

“I don’t remember if I even had an adviser,”

“I basically picked my courses myself,”

“There was no shaping in my advising experience, just compliance,” and

“After seeing that I was fairly competent in choosing courses, my adviser told me ‘You’re very well advised by yourself.’”

However, sprinkled among the negative comments were a few positive remembrances:

“[My academic adviser] really understood how I learned, what my strengths/weaknesses were, and where I wanted to go in my education.”

“The academic adviser took the time to get to know me and I got to know him. Most importantly, he asked me pivotal questions about my interests and my future plans. I would definitely attribute much of my undergraduate success to this adviser.”

AAC&U senior fellow Jerry Gaff clearly recalls his adviser’s influence on his undergraduate career as a member of the class of 1958 at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. “The guy who was my major adviser was very thoughtful and helpful. We talked about courses in my field and he helped me determine my future plans. Since I was interested in religion at that time, he even arranged for me to get some ‘real world’ experience by setting me up to preach my one and only sermon at a local church.”

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Ideally, as in Gaff’s experience, academic advisers can have a memorable impact on student satisfaction and success. The 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that “the quality of academic advising is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment for students at four-year schools.” The NSSE data further showed that “students who rate their advising as good or excellent are more likely to interact with faculty in various ways, perceive the institution’s environment to be more supportive overall, are more satisfied with their overall college experience, and gain more from college in most areas.”

Academic advising, as illustrated by this edition’s cover, should give students a compass to navigate the maze of choices they will encounter throughout their undergraduate education. By giving students the tools to make smart educational choices, advising can provide them with the outcomes they need to successfully define, pursue, and accomplish their academic goals.

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