Doing It All: Adding Advising into Faculty Workloads

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The majority of universities in the United States depend upon faculty members to serve as advisors. Although I must be honest and admit that some faculty members resent their advising duties and others should never be allowed near a student's degree audit, many enjoy the one-on-one time with students that advising affords. Finding the time to achieve excellence in advising can be difficult, however, especially when the rewards for doing so are small. Being a great advisor normally cannot help a faculty member get promoted or tenured, but there are ways for faculty members to maximize their advising effectiveness while fulfilling the other responsibilities associated with being a full-time academic.

Faculty members typically need to demonstrate effectiveness in Teaching, Scholarship, and Service to receive promotion and tenure. The importance of each leg of this "three-legged stool" varies from institution to institution. For example, while an undergraduate-only institution might place its greatest importance upon teaching, a research institution is likely to emphasize publication of original research in quality journals. The placement of advising responsibilities varies, as well. Some institutions consider advising as a service-related responsibility, while others think of it as a dimension of teaching. This article will focus upon these traditional dimensions considered for promotion and tenure, demonstrating some ways that can help faculty advisors find time to "do it all."

Linking Advising and Service

If faculty members need to show specific evidence of advising effectiveness within the service category, there are more ways to do so than simply listing the number of advisees seen in a given semester.

- Advise a student organization. Being a faculty advisor for a student organization normally is a manageable activity. It might require a few hours per week or month. Honorary societies, in particular, can be very helpful for advising. Members of an academic honor society can be called upon to offer informal peer advising in classes or to serve as mentors for new students.

- Join a campus advising group. If a faculty member's contract requires participation in university committees, why not seek out membership in an advising group? Many universities and colleges have a campus-wide organization designed to centralize concerns related to advising issues. This type of group also can be excellent for keeping abreast of curriculum changes, policy changes, and new initiatives across campus.

- Help design advising training materials. Most faculty advisors discover shortcuts and hints during their careers. Pulling those hints into one centralized location—a handbook or a Web site—could be a valuable contribution to a department or unit. If a load reassignment can be arranged in exchange for the production of training materials, an entire unit can benefit for the cost of one three-hour course.

- Consider group advising. While one-on-one sessions are best for developmental and career-related advising, basic information can be provided easily in a group setting. Arranging groups according to class year or status in the major will help ensure that students who need help with advanced requirements (internships, capstone courses) will not be overlooked in favor of students needing basic assistance.

Linking Advising and Scholarship

Integrating advising into scholarship and research requirements is perhaps the most difficult of the proposed links, as it is almost entirely dependent upon the will of a faculty member's unit, college, or university. However, if work in publications other than major journals in a discipline is acceptable, many different methods might be found for combining scholarship and advising. Taking advantage of load-reassignment opportunities is essential for achieving this goal.

- Conduct Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) projects. Many disciplines respect SoTL projects as legitimate research. Finding outlets for research exploring the learning outcomes of
advising activities in a discipline can help a faculty member combine these essential activities. Articles (e.g., Stolpa Flatt, 2005) and books (e.g., Richlin, 2005) can be found to assist in the development of course materials that are appropriate for this form of research.

- Research advising or advisors in a discipline. Even an annotated bibliography might be a helpful start to exploring characteristics of advising within a specific educational setting. As a general rule, any characteristic impacting student-professor relationships is likely to impact student-advisor relationships.
- Connect disciplinary theories to advising issues. The NACADA Journal recently published a special issue about discipline-specific theories and their application to advising (Hagen, 2005). If a discipline does not publish a journal related to education, the NACADA Journal can be an excellent outlet for publication.

Linking Advising and Teaching

If advising truly is teaching, this connection should be the easiest to make. The goal of any of these activities is to minimize the necessity for prescriptive advising and maximize opportunities to provide developmental and career advising.

- Advise during classes. Any faculty member can take five minutes during class to address an advising-related issue. This time can be used to address curriculum changes, policy adjustments, or internship possibilities. It also can be used to highlight university services students can use to assist them with personal or academic issues.
- Design an advising course. A course designed to orient students to a given major can be extremely valuable. Done well, this type of course will almost teach itself. Guest speakers can provide basics about coursework in the major, services available on campus, student organizations, and other major opportunities. Older students can be used for informal peer advising; alumni can be brought in to discuss their jobs and job searching. Advising exercises can help students learn how to plan for future semesters and assemble portfolio materials.

The number of methods for integrating advising into more traditional responsibilities is limited only by the imagination of faculty members and the willingness of a department and/or university to accept these activities. Faculty members who find creative methods of advising while doing teaching, scholarship, or service activities will find it considerably easier to “do it all.”

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References

