Personal Statement on Advising  
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I have always taken the position that advising students is as much a part of a faculty member’s duties and responsibilities as is classroom instruction. In my view, an advisor serves as a mentor, facilitator, guidance counselor, and big brother to students for the duration of their college experience, and beyond. The primary focus of the advising role is to address the student’s goals, and assist in their achieving them in the timeliest and appropriate fashion available.

The first, and really the primary step, of advising is to determine a student’s goals. To me this involves discussing the key points of the student’s major – finding out where they want to go after college and which position or agency they expect to join with their completed degree. This information is very critical initially because most students have a very basic or fragmented idea of what is either possible or required for certain jobs. In the human or behavior sciences, specifically within the criminal justice program where there are both technical and transfer degrees, it is essential for all future advising to first know where the student expects to go after graduation from ABAC, and to ensure they are placed into the proper degree program that best achieves that goal. The advisor can interject other knowledge and experience, help the student sort out their short and long term plans, but it is important always recall that it is their future at stake – wasting four years in the wrong degree program to get a job they really don’t want to be doing is the sort of worst-case scenario that can be avoided by solid and thoughtful advising. The watchword in this effort is always what is best for the student, which degree or discipline helps them get on the right path to take them where they want to go.

The second critical step in advising is to get to know the student, and whatever constraints they may have on progressing through the appropriate degree program. Students may have outside jobs, have certain days of the week or time frames that must be adjusted for, are single parents, or have fixed completion goals for certain reasons. It is important for me, as their advisor, to know their strengths and weaknesses in certain areas – some are good in math and others in English, these skills and weaknesses need to be understood and accounted for in order to suggest the best sequence of courses for a student to take.

A third critical advisor role is basically “support and damage control.” Not every student achieves a passing grade in every class. The advisor should keep the student motivated, keep abreast of their progression through the degree program, and remind them of upcoming requirements (such as registration and applying for graduation). The advisor must be there to come up with the best solution for whatever difficulty arises, without allowing the student to feel they are a failure and need to give up. In this respect the advisor’s role is most like a coach of an athletic team after a tough loss. The advisor needs to bolster the student’s morale, keep them on track, identify the weakness underlying the loss, and help the student develop a plan for coping with the difficulty.

The last critical role is to serve as a sounding board for complaints, a mentor for personal problems and difficulties, a stern “big brother” when the situation requires, and always a professional in the advisor/student relationship. The advisor needs to develop the rapport necessary to give the student confidence that they have someone on campus they can always to and get straight answers, or be directed to the right person to help with any particular problem – be it academic, financial, or personal. In this role the advisor also serves as a future point of contact, even after the student moves on. The advisor should be open to students calling or getting in touch later as they move on to their professional career. This, incidentally, is one of the most important advising roles as these students will recommend the ABAC experience to others and continue the long tradition of close campus-alumni ties.