

# Rewards for Quality Advisement

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Advising may best be characterized as human capital management. From an administrator's point of view there needs to be a positive climate established by department heads and deans for a reward system to be established for quality advising. Comments made in this paper are the results of observations and practices over some 20 years as an administrator.

Rewards, tangible and intangible, come in all kinds of shapes and forms. Both are important. Two observations of the greatest intangible rewards can be described: First, an advisee returns to campus as an alum and specifically seeks out her former adviser for a visit. Second, a young person not yet enrolled seeks out an adviser because a friend, who is a former student, has enthusiastically recommended that adviser. No dollars can ever be assigned to that kind of reward.

In practice, quality advising occurs when the assignment is desired by the faculty member, and further, when the expectations of the assignment are defined. If a faculty person is forced to be an adviser, that faculty person is seldom in an effective situation. Further, if a faculty member has no idea of what is expected as an advisor, that faculty member will be ineffective.

Additionally, quality advisement is not free. It does have a cost and does have real value. Time spent in preparation and updating to be an adviser must be recognized and counted as necessary. Then, time in the actual advising process must be acknowledged. This is where administration must be an active partner when considering a faculty member's work load. New faculty members can and should be encouraged to be undergraduate advisers, but administration should not overload them because of the pressure of obtaining tenure. However, an advising assignment should not be avoided.

Recognition of the advisement assignments must be included in the position description. As one recruits faculty, there needs to be visible expectations from the administration to consider candidates as to their willingness and desire to advise. Not all positions should carry advising responsibilities, but where it is appropriate, candidates must be evaluated as to their qualifications to be effective advisers.

Advising needs to be defined, and specific measurable objectives should be stated. After all, if we want to reward quality advisement, we must provide the means to evaluate advising. There are some instruments that can be used and each campus and department need to consider if that evaluation is appropriate. It is difficult to reward something that has

not been defined and measured. There is no question that data or evidence can be gathered; we simply have to take responsibility to characterize it.

Administration (department and college) must also provide a training system to help a faculty member develop as an effective adviser. At Nebraska, the introduction of understanding personality preferences, using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), has been invaluable in getting to know students and ourselves better, concerning our behavioral preferences. One needs to consider a range of ways to provide training — special reports, newsletters, seminars and workshops.

Administration must solicit faculty as to their needs as advisers and constantly encourage feedback. Career and employment advising has been enhanced at Nebraska involving a team (five to seven) of faculty each semester with the college's employment seminar. Over 100 of the college's faculty have assisted in this seminar.

Having defined advising expectations and included the assignment of advising as a part of the position description, it is possible to build it into the evaluation for tenure, promotion, and merit pay. These would all clearly be rewards for quality advising. It is critical that this assignment be included as an element that departmental promotion and tenure committees recognize. This would be a key part of the process. In many institutions, the faculty take the lead in building their file for tenure and promotion decisions. As one moves up the administration ladder — department head, dean, and higher — a visible statement and evidence concerning advisement effectiveness must be included. Through this means, it can be possible to have the more tangible and traditional rewards as a part of the system for quality advisement.

Other rewards can and must be included. The most obvious are annual cash awards to faculty deemed to be outstanding advisers. It should be encouraged and developed at the campus level as well as at the college level. Publicity and special award ceremonies need to be planned.

A commitment for quality advising by the administration and the faculty is absolutely essential for a reward system to be developed. In these times of concern for enrollment decline and retention, quality advisement ties to both areas. We, in agriculture, have a history of good advisement; however, we are going to need to make a stronger commitment and provide rewards accordingly. Yes, quality advisement is our goal and it truly becomes a management process for the human capital needed for agriculture.

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