# The Role of the Advisor In Undergraduate Education

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Prepared for the Workshop on the Improvement of Undergraduate Instruction of Agricultural Economics, sponsored by the American Farm Economics Association. Bemidji State College, Bemidji, Minnesota. August 21-24, 1963

Two experiences encountered in the preparation of this paper moved me to the point of minor shock, and I would share them with you. In searching recent literature bearing upon the general question at hand, I came last to the document to which I should have turned first, namely, the report of your workshop on "Agribusiness Management, Curriculum Development, and Teaching Programs", held at Harvard University, August 8-15, 1962. The paper presented at that time by Dean Whitla, (1), of Harvard University under the title "Advising Systems for Undergraduates" might well have served as the introductory paper for this segment of your conference. His excellent discussion of the importance of assisting the student to understand better his own and the institution's goals, the value of the role model, faculty attitude toward advising, in-service training, the psycho-social effects of a new environment upon students—these concepts and others comprise a fine basis for appreciation of the importance of this work. A re-reading of this paper at regular intervals would help us all. You may appreciate my feelings, however, in finding the assignment I was undertaking so nicely completed one year earlier, and presented in a document that has, undoubtedly, reached each of you for study.

Secondly, as I sat in the library of the installation where I was completing a Reserve tour and began to draw my notes together, one of our medical officers, an Assistant Professor of Medicine at a major university, stopped to inquire as to my activity. After a chat about student advising, his summary comment, roughly paraphrased, was about as follows: "One can agree that students have problems and often need help. However, I feel that the work of the faculty in the advising of undergraduate students should be confined to academic advising. The average faculty member is not competent to move into the areas external to matters relating to the academic objectives of the student. Many faculty members badly mishandle questions in areas beyond their competence, to the detriment of the students. Moreover, the modern faculty member has other things on his mind; he has research to forward, papers to get out, teaching to present. And unless he does these things well, he has little promise professionally. Time spent with undergraduate advisees outside the classroom is not time well used in the modern university setting." Suddenly my thesis—that the faculty advisor makes a vital contribution to undergraduate education because major aspects of the productive learning situation can best be engendered by the faculty member in his role as advisor—is under frontal attack, and I am left to ponder whether my own observations and participation have been so superficial as to leave me promoting an idealistic, but unrealistic, program.

A glance into the past restores my confidence. Some years ago a worried house counselor called concerning a student's unusual behavior. This junior in Agriculture, formerly pleasant and communicative, had taken to isolating himself in his room at all times when in the dormitory, to writing snatches of verse (for an ag. student, most unusual, indeed), and to movie-going several nights each week, where previously he had been the hardest working student in the dorm. What was the problem? Here was a student of rather marginal academic promise who was completely enthralled by the work in the area of soil science, and whose objective was to undertake graduate study in this field. By dint of extreme effort he earned a B+ grade point average in his first quarter in college, but each quarter brought him closer to the college mean, until it was evident that admission to the Graduate School was no longer a possibility. For this student, a grade point average above the minimum level acceptable for graduation was not enough; anything below that which would find favor with the Graduate School represented failure. And finally, overwhelmed by his sense of defeat, his composure shattered, he became completely ineffective, and he withdrew. We failed with him, because by the time he was identified as one in need of assistance, it was too late to help him to recognize and accept the inappropriateness of his objective But might this not have been accomplished at an earlier stage by an alert and informed advisor

Who else was in a better position to assist this student to a realistic appraisal of his own promise and to see the many opportunities available to him in soil science other than those stemming from the graduate program?

Another student sat in my office, and we sought explanations for his continued poor performance in the face of high measured potential, suddenly his shoulders heaved with tremendous sobs, and as the barriers came down he poured out a tale of his complete social isolation, his inability to "make friends with anyone", his sitting in his rooming house night after night, shut away, until he was no longer a student faced with normal pressures, but one unbearably lonely, with, in his view, no place to turn for the comforts and support that comes from companionship. How could this happen, on a campus that takes pride in its "friendliness", that has Student Activities Advisors in the Dean of Student's Office, Student Program Consultants in the Student Center, and other agencies almost too numerous to mention dedicated to student service? The key is identification and communication, and in spite of generalized invitations, the student had never been moved to seek the professional assistance needed. Who might best have served the student in those early quarters when record of college performance compared to high school suggested something was awry? As I see it, a sensitive faculty advisor might well have succeeded in establishing a rapport with the student that would have permitted an earlier catharsis, with some help to follow. The identification of the problem by the College Office in the latter stages of probation was not the answer.

The professor in Rhetoric 51, Advanced Composition called. "My student", she said, "is a splendid student, though her work is inconsistent in its quality and her writing leads me to believe that she is unhappy or discontented. Are there other evidences of difficulty?" And follow-up revealed a young woman of musical promise and interest, with nine years of intensive training in piano and organ, a soloist in organ and voice, who was in Home Economics Education because her mother insisted that this was the place for her. The mother, unskilled and without college background, had lost her husband when her brood of youngsters were but small children, and had faced a struggle in providing for the family. The mother felt that the home economics teacher was one who could find job placement under almost all circumstances. She was determined that her daughter would not run the vocational risk that she herself had encountered; hence the girl had been directed into Home Economics Education, even though sadly lacking in interest. Some time later, with family contact and re-orientation, the girl was a happy transfer to the School of Music, where she later graduated with honors, and moved to a graduate degree and professional employment. A useful solution, yes, but one dependent upon the alert eye of an experienced teacher for identification, and perilously late in the game. Was there not one in better position to sense this discomfiture, at an earlier stage?

The boy came to the campus from a large high school in a non-metropolitan area. He ranked in the top ten per cent of his class, and had a fine record of local leadership. He received a freshman scholarship. Yet after five quarters he was dropped from the college for low scholarship. Lack of personal discipline appeared to be a major factor in his difficulty. As a "big man" in his living group, and with a history of earlier academic success, earned with but minimum investment of effort, he did not sense correctly the demands of the college program. Off to a bad start, he could not quickly recover. His collegiate program is interrupted, if not terminated. Again, who is in the best position to establish contact of the type that will permit an earlier alerting of the student to the requirements of the campus, always assuming that the student may accept, or reject the interpretations given?

Finally, almost half of the freshman entrants in United States four-year colleges of any recent year will not be in residence beyond the second year. The greatest drop-out occurs in the first year, with approximately one-third of the freshmen terminating at the close of or before the end of their first college year. The weight of numbers suggest that administrative officers will not know many of these students in the early days of their tenure, and the class instructor will, by and large, be limited in his appraisal to his speciality. The house counselor will not get the full impact of the nature of performance until a good deal later. Of all who serve the student, the faculty adviser is in the best position to make some general and preliminary appraisals, to note deficiencies in technique and performnce or marked changes in attitude, and to stimulate some action based upon the needs observed.

In the June 21, 1963 issue of Life, John Keats (2), ascribed the major source of difficulty leading to the huge dropout population not as one of lack of ability, but as one rooted in the emotions of college students, with many variations. If his analysis is sound, and much evidence supports this view, one is drawn to an increased awareness of the highly individualized nature of the educative process. In the context of the professional program, the faculty adviser occupies a position of central focus.

## The Learning Situation

What are the characteristics of a productive learning situation, against which we can better appraise the role of the faculty adviser?

Heller, (3), has used the term "climate of learning" in which he describes climate as that "intangible but real quality that results from a totality of customs, habits, values, status symbols. The climate is known by the nature of the distribution; when the majority have intellectual interests and good work habits the climate is different from that which obtains when only a minority have such interests . . . "In his recent summary paper, Morris Keeton, (4), stresses the necessity for edu-

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Drama Club and Pi Kappa Delta. He was named to Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities, was chosen as Bachelor of Ugliness (Senior honor in the class of 1947) and graduated with High Distinction (magna cum laude).

Dean Barker did graduate work in Dairy Husbandry at Iowa State University where he held an appointment as Research Fellow. He was granted the M.S. degree in 1949.

The terminal degree was earned by Dr. Barker at Auburn University in 1959. During the time of his graduate work there, he held a research fellowship and was granted the Ph.D. degree in Animal Husbandry and Nutrition.

Dr. Barker has authored the following research publications:

Diurnal Variation in Concentration of Fat in Blood Plasma of Calves Fed Various Types of Oils. J. Dairy Sci. 1949. 32:709.

Filled Milks for Dairy Calves. III Comparative Value of Various Soybean Oils and Butter Oil in a Practical Dietary Regime. J. Dairy Sci. 1952. 35:507-514.

Coffee Pulp as a Substitute for Corn as a Concentrate in the Ration of Dairy Cows. Iowa Journal Sci. 1951.

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Factors Influencing the Initiation and Duration of the Breeding Season of the Ewe. A Review. 1962 J. National Assn. Colleges and Teachers Agri. 6:8-16.

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Causes of Variations in Estural Activity in Ewes. In press. J. Animal Sci.

Dean Barker is a member of the American Society Animal Science, the American Dairy Science Association, the Louisiana Dairy Science Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Louisiana Teachers Association, the Louisiana Farm Bureau, the Lincoln Parish and Louisiana Cattlemen's Association, the Northwest Louisiana Swine Growers Association and the National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture.

Membership in the following honor societies has been bestowed on Dr. Barker: Gamma Sigma Delta, Sigma Xi, Pi Kappa Delta and Phi Kappa Phi.

Dr. Barker has served as Vice-President of the Louisiana Dairy Science Association, Southern regional director of NACTA, 1960-62, and Secretary-Treasurer of NACTA 1962-64. He has served on the board of directors for the North Louisiana State Fair Association for 14 years and has served as Treasurer for this organization for the past 9 years.

Dean Barker is currently serving as President of the Louisiana Dairy Science Association, Vice-President of NACTA and on the Board of Directors for the Northwest Louisiana Sheep Breeders Association.

Dr. Barker is a member of the Methodist church and is presently serving his 5th year as charge lay leader. He is a certified lay speaker in the Ruston District of the Methodist church.

Dean Barker is a member of the Ruston Lions Club.

Dr. Barker is married to the former Ruby Causey. Mrs. Barker was graduated from Louisiana Tech with a B.A. degree in Music Education in 1954 and received a Master of Music Education from Auburn University in 1958.

Dr. and Mrs. Barker are the parents to two children: James Hal and Linda Lou.

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cators to be sensitive to the impact of the climate of learning in college upon student performance, attitude, and growth, noting the impact of the student culture, off-campus environments, and the faculty culture upon student learning. He cites LaVine's analysis of the common features of six diverse institutions which did enable their students to change values and attitudes along lines desired by the institution, these changes being attained when :

a. there was high drive to complete the course, to conform to institutional expectations, or to achieve success in school,
b. there was isolation from sources of influence outside the school.
c. intrainstitutional goal consistency was present. The goals of students were consistent with, though not necessarily identical with, the goals of the instructors,
d. explicitness of values and role models were present. Each institution presents a distinctive environment to its students, with little ambiguity about what kind of behavior is deemed desirable,
e. there exists a practice of positively valued responses. The students are not passive agents, but are making responses and actively imitating their role models,
f. students are rewarded for performing positively valued responses and punished for performing incompatable responses. (5).

If these factors contribute to appropriate changes in behavior, or learning, they tell us

something about what should be sought for in the way of climate, whether student, faculty, or off campus.

Newton Edward's comment on the nature of education is cited by Dugan, (6), in his discussion of the work of the school counselor. Edwards says, "Education is not some discrete activity carried on outside the community of ideas and values of an age; it is never an autonomous process divorced from the community it serves; it always operates within a given social framework and finds its central purpose, its guiding principles and ultimate goals in the particular social order within which it develops and functions." (7). And this quote brings to mind a graduate class of years ago, in the Psychology of the Adolescent, when C. Gibert Wrenn drew from us an enumeration of basic needs of the developing personality, including our becoming emancipated from the home, being accepted by our peers, finding security in the attitudes of others towards us, developing a healthy relationship with the opposite sex, and making a realistic vocational choice. Each of us has at one time or another suffered the tortures of the damned as we wrestled with one or another of these factors. Did they bear upon our ability to be productive in the learning situation?

Once, in an informal setting, a student complained about Professor X, who, the student said, was unorganized in presentation and rambling in discourse. I knew this distinguished professor to be filled with a love of the biological world, excited with every new manifestation, anxious to take his students beyond the confines of a course outline, to leave them with the sense of mystery that gripped him—all the more compellingly because study held the key to so much of it! Where was the dislocation between student and teacher? Possibly in the definition of role, with the student having need for a fuller understanding of the many and varing responsibilities of the instructor and the realization that instructors vary in their attention to different aspects of their work. The student's concept of the purpose of the classroom experience will largely determine his appraisal of this experience. The dislocation is not always in the same direction, but the essential is mutual understanding and respect for purpose.

The high school graduating classes from which our students come range from 15 to 500+. Some students have experienced carefully developed experimental programs in biology (the BSCS understandings); others have had the most limited exposure to up-to-date equipment and content. Some have gone far beyond their fathers' experience in mathematics, in accelerated programs of high intensity; others have worked through the traditional program with limited enthusiasm. Some come from homes where books are legion, the apt phrase commonplace; some from homes where reading plays no part in the family pattern. There is need for classification, placement, and careful initial programming, all seemingly simple but tremendously complex services basic to productive scholarship.

And it would appear that the student must possess some comprehensive basis for appraising his progress and growth—personal and social, as well as intellectual and professional. These devices are not automatic, nor built-in. Crucial among the many bench marks or agencies useful to the student in measuring his progress is the "outside observer", one who has natural entree to the student, who has the balance, tact, and wisdom to permit valid expression, and who possesses a commitment to contribute to the student's self-appraisal.

For our purpose, then, learning is best accomplished in an appropriate climate, with recognition that it takes place in a social setting, where both student and staff recognize their respective roles, where individual and trait differences influence programming, and where realistic evaluation can take place.

## One View of Student *Advising*

If these conditions, among others, bear upon the growth of the student while on the campus, what is the function of student advising relative to them? In the context used by Carpenter, the faculty advisor is one who works in the direction of "aiding each student to know himself—his abilities and interests, and the ways in which he defeats himself—increasing the ability of the student to make his own decisions and to take steps which he himself comes to see are important for his growth". (8). Student advising is a student centered process, where the student is helped to see himself more clearly, in the interests of more effective activity.

Granting that the degree to which one can contribute to the advising process varies with training and experience, and that the "counselor" as professionally defined differs from the "adviser" in his insight and skill as a result of special preparation, still Wrenn's discussion of counseling will assist us in our review of the place of the faculty adviser.

> "Counseling has become a way of assisting at different choice points in the life of the growing child and youth, assisting him in the art and science of making informed decisions. The movement is from self-perceptions and awareness or concern. The counselor's task is to assist the student in the decisions to be made regarding educational, vocational, and social environments which he will find most satisfying and in which he can become most productive.. The counselor is a person whose richness of understanding of the changing world should match his depth of understanding of the individual with whom he is working." (9).

To hark back to my medical friend, it is clear that many members of the faculty in good conscience feel that undergraduate advising should be limited in amount, and that the advising function as herein defined is one they would wish not

to accept. This attitude may be a result of circumstance or of philosophy. That instructor carrying a heavy load, involved in a demanding research program, and not entirely free from committee responsibilities, often dispairs at the additional load that advising brings. And if he should feel that his department and college administrators have limited appreciation of the time and energy consumed in this function, enthusiastic entry into the area is going to be difficult. But this is a problem better discussed at another time.

Stroup, (10), has noted the changing social function of the college teacher. With the rise of popular education, with increasing differentiation of economic functions, and with the growing impact of other related technological and ideological innovations, the intellectual became not a person of general knowledge, but of a specialized knowledge. He describes the college teacher as having become *the technician in* a knowledge area so ramified and so changeable that it took most of his time and his best effort to survive as an academician. As a member of a well defined class, he regularly held no special responsibility in society. This assists in understanding why, so often, the instructor immersed in his scholarship divorced from social responsibility does not understand (or accept?) fully his role as a counselor of students in groups and of individuals. Strong words, these. Yet descriptive of a point of view.

Hilton comments, "It is partly because counseling has been labeled as a special and seperate activity—which it rightly is as soon as the level which requires special knowledge and skill is reached—that teachers feel they can reject it wholly. One of the engaging problems of the human being is the ease with which he sheds responsibilities which are not his primary interest. And to the college teacher the guidance specialist looks like a fine person to free his time for study and research," (11).

Some risks are run in the process of faculty advising. The staff member may misconstrue his role and responsibilities in advising. Studies of advising programs suggest that major assistance to students often falls in the areas of educational advisement (programming?) and vocational information-giving, with but limited attention given to other aspects of student activity and behavior. It is clear that students often do not use advisers to good advantage. This, I assume, is a function of orientation and of student perception of the faculty member's appraisal of his own role as an adviser. The danger is always present that the adviser will impose his standards and values upon the student, without sensing where the student is in his own development or in his readiness to be guided by the faculty adviser's reference group standards. The temptation to foster dependency, to derive ego-fulfillment from student contact, is beguiling. And some members of staff operate from somewhat limited understanding of "what makes Sammy run".

But our object is not to discredit the faculty advising program, but rather to relate it to the learning situation; indeed, to suggest that the faculty adviser is a necessary part of the productive academic environment.

## Outcome of the Advising Process

A frequent or at least regular contact between studest and adviser would appear basic to the reaping of real benefits from the advising system. As I view our own campus in operation, with the possible exception of two or three very well handled undergraduate professional clubs, operated on a departmental basis, and excepting those instances where students are employed in the departments, undergraduate students have limited opportunity to learn to know members of the faculty as individuals outside the classroom, or to engage in the interchange of the kind suggested as necessary in the discussion of the productive learning situation.

Both Whitla and LaVine, as noted earlier, mentioned the concept of the "role model". These students have entered an environment strange to them. Where have they learned what it is that students do on campus? To what end shall they work? Who shall they imitate? If the pattern is before them, in the form of a faculty member who is interested as a person, helpful, clearly professional, and finding reward in his own work, one guide line is established. As the student's interests become crystallized, and the direction of his professional study becomes evident, other models may be presented to him. But in the critical early quarters, when a myriad of conflicting influences bear on the student, one well defined pattern may prove to be most useful.

Berdie, (12), notes the counseling relationship as affording the student an opportunity to establish a responsible relationship with a respected adult. Most student's contacts are restricted to their own families or to their own age groups, but with only casual contacts with mature persons. The counselor who can react to a student as an appreciative adult, and who is willing to discuss the student's questions in a non-emotional and objective manner, performs a service that may not be easily found elsewhere. The adviser would seem to perform a similar service. This theme was repeatedly emphasized in the dialogue of the "Meet the Professor" program of March 17, 1963, where "Priorities in College Teaching" were under discussion. (13).

Who will best define institutional goals? The orientation course may open the door, and individual course instructors will add to the picture. Informal student discussion will contribute—the "student culture" in action—but the integrating agent may well be the faculty adviser who takes time to discuss with his students, singly or in groups, the campus, the collective interests of the

faculty, the non-classroom aspects of academic life, the accomplishments of members of earlier student generations..

There is evidence that students' goals often need clarification. Berdie sums an approach nicely. "The counseling situation offers the student an opportunity to recognize his goals and to verbalize the processes which resulted in their selection. Most students are working toward goals they have previously chosen. Frequently they have not defined realistically these goals: often they have not understood the means by which they selected these goals, and usually they know little of the motivations underlying these selections." (14). And the experienced adviser sees all too often the distress that stems from late recognition of inappropriate objectives and the insecurity stemming from unanticipated forced changes. A relationship that will permit the adviser and student to move even part way in the direction Berdie suggests as appropriate for the counselor rests on mutual respect, confidence, and good rapport.

The grade slip is not an adequate record of growth. It measures but one aspect of total student performance. One experienced placement officer recently stressed the significance of the level of socialization skills possessed by the student. This is, for the majority of students with acceptable scholastic records, of great importance in inital placement and in early employment progress. The alert faculty adviser will sense the student's needs in this area, and, more importantly, is in a position to assist the student to become aware of these needs, later perhaps suggesting some useful possibilities for the securing of helpful experiences. This is a function that the Dean's office cannot perform, nor do the "boys at the House" do as much of it as we are want to assume. In **loco parentis,** the adviser may reinforce positive aspects of growth, and raise gentle question about those activities that appear inconsistent with institutional and, one may hope, individual goals.

The experienced adviser will not be reluctant to initiate referrals when specialized assistance is merited. Institutional resources are many, but in the present setting the services are available largely only to those students who call for them. The arrangement or encouragement that brings the student to a specialized agency may comprise the extent of adviser action. Every adviser and administrator will recall instances where an earlier recognition of difficulty, and an earlier grappling with a problem situation, might have given a troubled student more chance for success in the institutional environment.

And finally, the awareness that individual and trait differences are always with us makes it inappropriate for the adviser to use too often the stock remark, "If he would just bear down a little harder, he could handle the program". Educational advising, influenced by all of the factors previously discussed, brings students and adviser together in initial contact and, well done, contributes to a rapport that permits the other outcomes to be achieved.

This discussion, suggesting that the faculty adviser contributes to the establishment of a productive learning situation and assists the student to work well in the situation, assumes that the faculty and the administration are agreed that the campus program is more than a smorgasbord, or more appropriately, an automat, to which unidentified entities come, to pick and to choose, to consume, then to go. **There must be agreement that the student on the campus is a highly individual being, and that the institution bears a responsibility, once having admitted him, to assist him, within all reasonable bounds, to accomplish the purpose that brought him to the campus. This help may take many forms. No single pattern of service is appropriate to all students. The basis for intelligent guidance is understanding, warmth, and objective acceptance of the student.**

The faculty adviser represents the academic community, he personifies the professional person, he demonstrates a professional concern. He is an educator. In the classroom he deals with content, but he is always teaching students. And in his office contacts with advisees, he is working not just with "one of the student group", but with a personality for which he has assumed a grave responsibility. He becomes proficient through experience and through in-service training. He may or may not feel that the efforts he expends in this direction are wholly appreciated. But a campus has an atmosphere, or climate, and that one on which a successful faculty advising program is in operation is easily identified.

In the critical days ahead, when pressures of student numbers, stress on facilities, and demands on staff time and energies will grow, the extent to which individualized advising services can be rendered will in large part answer the question of the appropriateness of continuing to identify the large university as an undergraduate teaching institution.

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# Why the Dollar . . .

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The answers, in part, are implied in the earlier portions of this article. They may be summarized as follows.

(1) We must get over the idea that we can get something for nothing. Most of us are common, ordinary folks: wage earners, professional people, farmers and small business men. Individually we are little people: yet as a group we pay about 90% of all taxes collected by the various governmental agencies. From us comes the money which keeps the government and our economy rolling.

(2) Governmental policies and actions are set forth by human beings like ourselves. These individuals are not much smarter than we are, if as smart, so they make plenty of mistakes and bad guesses.

(3) Government is big business and is owned by all the people, not the office holders. It should be conducted economically and efficiently for the welfare of the majority, not for the benefit of small cliques, political allies and pressure groups.

(4) Deficit financing on what now seems to be a perpetual basis is most unhealthy economically. It passes the resonsibility to oncoming generations and lowers the respect other nations have for our country and its dollar.

(5) Governmental officials are the employees of the people. As such they are responsible to our citizenry. These officials must work for the taxpayers, not themselves. If they don't, let us find someone else who will work for our interest and be faithful to his trust. Integrity should be expected at the top as well as at the bottom.

(6) There is a limit to helping people. As the old saying goes, "The Lord helps those who help themselves."

(7) If the dollar continues to shrink it will not be very long before the United States government will be compelled to re-value our currency. This situation will cause untold financial losses to most Americans and bring about an economic catastrophy such as occurred in Germany and France after World War I, and in more ancient nations who followed the same false pattern which we are following today.