



INTRODUCTION

Addressing Changes in Advising First-Year Students

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The importance of excellence in advising first-year students has been recognized for many years (Gardner, 1986) and remains central to student academic success (Complete College America, 2016). During their first college year, most students are inundated with challenges that require them to learn and develop the skills needed to negotiate their new environment and discover a major that fits their talents and needs. Advisors of first-year students guide their transition, helping students develop the competencies necessary to negotiate their complex environment (King, 2007) and generate academic plans for timely graduation and appropriate career choices. Advisors help students learn to make the most of their college years, not merely by completing requirements toward a degree but also by growing intellectually and developing all aspects of their identity (Kincanon, 2009). As discussed throughout this volume, the increasing diversity of incoming students combined with heightened emphasis on timely college graduation makes quality first-year advising a crucial component for higher education.

In 1995, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (then the National Academic Advising Association) and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (National Resource Center) collaborated to publish a book for academic advisors of first-year students, *First-Year Academic Advising: Patterns in the Present, Pathways to the Future* (Upcraft & Kramer, 1995). In 2007, these two organizations published a new text to reflect the changed environment and theoretical landscape of advising students in their first college year, *Academic Advising: New Insights for Teaching and Learning in the First Year* (Hunter, McCalla-Wriggins, & White, 2007). Because of continued and rapid changes in higher education over the last 10 years, we present *Academic Advising and the First College Year* with academic advisors as the principal audience.

More than ever, first-year students need excellent advising. Since 2007, dramatic changes to the postsecondary environment as well as rapidly evolving profiles and needs of first-year students (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007) require reexamination of practice. For example, first-year students arrive on campus with wider differences in financial circumstances and academic preparation than their predecessors (Camera, 2016). In addition, a substantial number of first-year students deal with the transition to college while managing mental health challenges (American Psychological Association, 2013) or learning disabilities (Council for Learning Disabilities, 2010). Adult learners, military veterans, first in the family to attend, individuals from historically underrepresented groups, international students, and others with unique or nonmajority characteristics now make up a large percentage of current student groups.

Although not shown in the typical demographic profile, and therefore less evident to some, students today experience pressure to attend college and to finish with a credential in short order. Since 2009, U.S. policy makers have focused on increasing the number of college graduates (Obama, 2009), which has spurred organizations such as Complete College America (2015) to “work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees” (para. 1). Research into the factors that increase persistence was mandated by Congress (Ross et al., 2012) at the same time that Klepfer and Hull (2012) published their findings that “the strength of academic advising [is] a factor in persistence. College students who reported visiting with advisors frequently had a much greater likelihood of persisting than their peers who never did” (para. 17).

The need to persist and finish college within restricted time limits has raised the stakes for many students. As explained in chapter 1, state funding of educational institutions has dropped while costs have risen for various reasons (Woodhouse, 2015). As a result, students shoulder a greater burden than those in the past while their ability to secure federal student loans increasingly depends on swift progress toward a degree. In addition, the institutional definition of success, often measured by persistence within particular majors and graduation rates, and the student’s definition of success, in terms of career and learning goals, may conflict. Wallace and Wallace (2016) explained, “When institutional circumstances interfere with students’ success, advisors act as advocates, serving as mediators and facilitators who leverage their specialized knowledge and experience to help students remove obstacles in the path to success” (p. 98).

Advisors not only need to understand the precarious funding situation but also must recognize the specialized knowledge and experience necessary to advance students through their program of study. They must develop theory and practice based on recent research in academic advising, educational psychology, and other areas of higher education. For example, although referrals to tutoring and counseling remain essential, advisors must gain familiarity with ways to construct advising partnerships across institutional units and help students mitigate stereotype threat, strengthen a sense of belonging, and develop a growth mindset. Only with their own continued self-development can advisors guide students through stressors and setbacks that might otherwise derail their academic careers.

A number of excellent recent publications focus on assisting students and their families during the first year of college, such as *Navigating the First College Year: A Guide for Parents and Families* (Mullendore & Banahan, 2014) and *Academic Advising in the First Year of College: A Guide for Families* (Gordon, Levinson, & Kirkner, 2014). Furthermore, recent studies on theory and best practices for orientation programs, first-year seminars, and engagement practices have been published since 2007, but an updated publication on diverse first-year students, written specifically for academic advisors, that addresses the evolving issues in higher education, emerging theory, and recognized practice has been lacking. Both primary-role and faculty advisors must adjust to the many changes in higher education in the new millennium. The contributors to *Academic Advising and the First College Year* provide advisors some of the current information on demographics, theories, and best practices needed to support first-year students. They also direct advisors to updated resources for staying current with developments in the lives of first-year college students.

This book is organized into four interconnecting sections. The first focuses on the current state of first-year advising, including the emerging concerns of increasingly diverse students and the role of the advisor in this evolving high-stakes academic environment. The authors of the second section identify the challenges and situations of first-year transitions and present information on ways to advise students through them. The third section details means of encouraging students to engage in their educations via academic planning and advising, and the final section is directed toward those tools and support structures, including assessment, proven most important in delivering quality advising to first-year students. In each section the authors have kept both primary-role, faculty, and other advisors in mind and have highlighted new developments in

first-year advising. In each chapter, Aiming for Excellence discussion questions and activities give advisors concrete ideas and strategies for expanding their knowledge and applying the readings to their advising practice.

Section I explains the rising importance of advising for first-year students and ways advisors support them through the application of appropriate theory. The first chapter examines the developing enrollment trends and constraints that modern circumstances put on students. It also focuses on the advising challenges associated with changes in the matriculating populations, stakeholder expectations for higher education, and mechanisms of financial support.

The second chapter follows up on the theme of change by offering summaries of the theories that explain the universal experiences of first-year college students. It focuses on advising theory applicable to the changing student body and accounts for recent research in advising, educational psychology, and higher education. The theories and practices proven most useful in supporting first-year students, especially the merits of proactive, developmental, and learning-centered advising, are articulated in depth.

The contributors of section II are concerned with transitions at the heart of the first-year student's experience and of critical importance for advisors to understand. Chapter 3 focuses on the adjustment to college life and describes the new theories and best practices advisors use to assist first-year students with transitioning and attendant challenges. By focusing on the experiences of students in two-year colleges, the authors of chapter 4 expound on the shared needs of most first-year students while featuring the unique demands associated with advising in two-year institutions.

To satisfy stakeholders, including parents and students, who have placed great importance on earning a college degree, proactive advising may prove most effective, especially for keeping underprepared first-year students on track for academic success. Proactive advising offers directed assistance with transition difficulties for both those who struggled in high school and those surprised that they are underprepared for their present academic situation in college. Chapter 5 offers details on proactive advising and other means of support that help advisors of at-risk and underprepared students assess and address student weaknesses.

In the absence of proactive advising, or even when it is employed, some students will not succeed in their first year of college. Chapter 6 explains the ways advisors can assist first-year students recovering from academic difficulty. It addresses the causes of struggles, including academic underpreparedness, by discussing a rich vein of new research and best practices coming out of educational psychology.

Chapter 7 goes into depth on advising the diverse populations of first-year students that have emerged in the last few decades. Advisors must recognize the specific challenges of students and the demographic profiles of their own institutions as well as those colleges that send or receive students. Advisors with skills to identify and address the multiple dimensions of student identity (e.g., disability, sexual orientation, first-generation status, social class) create the environment that welcomes and encourages diversity. Although impossible to address every type of circumstance advisors will encounter, chapter 7 provides resources and suggestions that help advisors develop the critical consciousness and cultural competency necessary to communicate and guide individuals at risk of feeling marginalized or unsupported.

Section III concentrates on heightening engagement of first-year students. A natural follow-up to the introduction on belonging broached in chapter 7, the discussion in chapter 8 presents both longstanding and emerging techniques for helping first-year students understand and engage in the advising process and in academic planning. Specifically, chapter 8 explains the theory behind and best practices for the learning-centered advising that encourages students to take ownership of their plans and create solid goals for their education. Advisors need to assist diverse first-year students in choosing majors that may lead to satisfying careers; however, because of current economic and political forces, students may feel compelled to choose a major early and stick with it despite growing disinterest in, or minimal talent for, the chosen discipline. This unfortunate situation calls for advisors to employ understanding and honed skills in motivating students to explore all options amid financial, parental, or societal pressures. Chapter 9 explains the signs of and remedies for ameliorating premature foreclosure on a major or career choice while advancing the student toward graduation.

Like those in the preceding sections, the authors of the two chapters in section IV wrote with the primary-role or faculty advisor in mind, but these closing discussions may also pique the interest of advising administrators, deans, and provosts. The section addresses the advising structures and assessment methods that support advisors of first-year students. Chapter 10 focuses primarily on proven and emerging tools and frameworks that advisors use to promote student learning, such as early-warning systems and partnerships. Ongoing evaluation of these tools and support systems keeps the changing needs of first-year students in the forefront of practice. Assessment practices have become more sophisticated and provide information useful to both advisors and supervisors in improving student support. Chapter 11 discusses the ways in which assessment of advising provides relevant information for meeting student needs.

Today's first-year students do not resemble those of the past. In addition, the academic environments, challenges, and pressures have also changed the milieu for students and advisors. Although advising theory and best practices have evolved to meet emerging challenges, advisors must continuously seek to support all first-year students in ways they need and deserve.

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