

Driving Student Success by Supporting Advisors



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With the mounting pressure placed on students today a clear direction is a necessity for success. Students must grapple with life decisions in the form of financial, academic, and career. Luckily for most students they are not alone, most institutions support students by assigning counselors. Today more than ever before advisors must do everything in their power to help students navigate a path towards success.

Advisors are an important part of the student experience. Students who develop a relationship with their advisor are more likely to persist and graduate. Less than 20% of students from the lowest income bracket complete a bachelor's degree in six years. For many of these students, advisors can play a crucial role in bridging the completion gap. According to a recent study from the U.S. Department of Education, the institutions with the highest completion rates for Pell-eligible students are also institutions that have developed strong systems of student support.

The quality of the student-advisor relationship can have a significant impact on future success and better decisions. There are a variety of attributes that make for a positive relationship. The advisor has one of the most difficult roles yet important roles in a student's life.



Simplicity

Advising resources should be easy to find. If students must wade through pages of irrelevant material or a confusing website to get what they need, they are likely to give up and may be less inclined to engage with advising in person. Instead, institutions can leverage their website, student portals, apps, and social media to help students answer basic questions.

Assessments

Assessments are a great way to generate feedback students can use to improve their performance and help with decision making. Often assessment results reveal blind spots and opportunities that the student has not considered. This discovery saves time and uncovers possible options. The goal is for the student to use the information to make more informed decisions. This is great news but often the next step in the process produces one simple yet important question, “now what”? The assessment provides a one-dimensional snapshot that needs to be followed up with an opportunity to dive deeper, build knowledge and establish important skills. The assessment is a hypothesis that needs to be tested and continuously challenge. Often advisors use assessments as the solution when the assessment is the start of exploration.



Creating a Plan of Action

The journey should begin with a plan, at least successful one's do. One primary role for an advisor is to help the student architect a plan for success. The advisor helps the student with the structure and acts like a sounding board in the creation of the plan. The plan should include specific goals (both short and long-term), a clear strategy and a measurable action plan. This allows the advisor to pull from a variety of experiences to help the student create a customize plan that should be updated periodically.



Active Participation

Often the most difficult part of the advisor's role is communicating with students who may be in trouble and guiding them to the best action. Students feel most positive about advising sessions in which they receive clear advice or information from their advisor and play an active role in decision making. Advisors that engage students in dialogue, take the time to build relationships, and celebrate students' achievements can more effectively support students as they navigate difficult decisions.

Resourcefulness

Exceptional advisors do not know everything, they know who to talk to or where to go to help the student. With the unique needs of each student, it is impossible to know everything. It's important for the advisor to acknowledge their limits and create partnerships across the organization. It's okay for the advisor to admit they don't have all the answers, but they should be able to point students in the direction of someone who does.

Build Relationships

While it may seem like a no-brainer, step one is getting to know your advisees, really know them. Ask open-ended questions; Listen -- really listen -- to their narratives about themselves. Listen hard, listen because you care, listen to understand from their point of view. A lot of advisors early on in their careers are very focused on the information they think the student needs, rather than being focused on what the student is communicating -- both verbally and nonverbally. It is critical to know the full student and understand their perspective.

