

The Faculty Advisor Components of Quality Academic Advising

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We have identified elements that constitute quality academic advising by identifying three essential categories of knowledge and skills:

- Conceptual—the advisors' understanding about the nature of advising, the institutional advising environment, advisees, and the nature of the advising relationship;
- Informational—the information that advisors need to know and provide in accurate detail to students;
- Relational—the skills and attitudes advisors must establish and maintain in the advisor–advisee relationship.

Without understanding (conceptual elements), there is no context for the delivery of services. Without information, there is no substance to advising. And, without interpersonal skills (relational), the quality of the advisee/advisor interaction is left to chance. While we have clearly identified each component as essential to quality advising, we would also like to make clear that information comprises the substance of quality advising and provides the framework for the conceptual and relational dimensions.

Because faculty advisors face an enormous challenge in attaining or knowing the access points for the information students need to achieve their educational goals, we will develop framework, using this toolkit, that outlines the substantive information that advisors need to know in four basic categories: the internal (institutional) environment, the external environment, student needs, and advisor self-knowledge.

In this section of the toolkit, we will focus on the internal and external information that faculty advisors must attain and touch on for student-centered advising.

The Internal Environment

Faculty advisors function within diverse environments and face intense challenges to deliver quality advising responsive to the specific contexts at McNeese and the changing needs of students. To comfortably execute their roles as advisors, faculty members must quickly grasp a basic understanding of McNeese and its culture, which is cultivated through the university's mission and goals, the campus culture, and available resources. McNeese's culture - Excellence with a personal touch - is reflected in the definition and mission of academic advising, the model for advising delivery, and faculty roles and responsibilities.

Specifically, faculty advisors must learn the systems and structures that direct campus operations. They must know the technological systems used in advising and registration; academic programs; curricular requirements; policies and procedures; special populations and support services; and institutional rules, regulations, and organizational structures that affect student learning experiences.

Student-Centered Advising

Advisors assist students in designing and achieving appropriate personal, academic, and career goals. To achieve these objectives, they must assist students in identifying options and exploring alternatives to make appropriate decisions, evaluate personal and academic strengths and weaknesses, and develop skills needed for successful completion of the degree. To be effective in this endeavor, advisors must assess and address students' individual needs. Before advisors can identify students' needs, they must first know the students.

Valuable information about advisees can be extracted from the institution's student information system (Banner), so advisors need to learn to navigate and access information from it. However, more important than getting up to speed with institutional technology, the faculty advisor needs to take the time to listen to advisee narratives, which will often reveal insights into the student's areas of excitement and concern.

The types of information new faculty advisors should learn will vary according to the personal and academic developmental levels of their students. In general, first-year students present different needs than do upper-level students. For example, first-year students likely need to focus on entry-level major requirements, the general education program, basic university procedures (e.g., declare a major or drop a course), and important dates and deadlines. Second, third- or fourth-year students may initially look to major and graduation requirements, then turn their attention to specific data on certification requirements, internships, or graduate school or professional program application processes. Likewise, students with declared majors need different information than do undeclared students. McNeese has freshman advisors in Student Central to advise and assist students. All other students are advised by faculty advisors in departments across campus.

Smaller cohorts also challenge advisors with unique issues. For example, adult students and returning student veterans, who bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and depth of character to campus, present issues unlike those of many traditional aged students. First-generation college students, without the advantage of parental or personal knowledge of the college experience, may struggle with the general goals and vocabulary of higher education, as well as navigation of the specific institutional system. In addition to identifying the general needs associated with the student's cohort, the faculty advisor must recognize the student's individual characteristics and respond to his or her specific needs.

The External Environment

The external environment of McNeese has evolved from local and regional concerns to statewide and national connections. As a result, education extends beyond the classroom to prepare students for spheres outside their immediate community. Faculty advisors can link students to external arenas through their established professional and disciplinary networks and other referral sources and services. In practice, they often use their connections and knowledge to combine academic pursuits with real world applications and settings, such as service learning opportunities, cooperative education programs, and internship experiences.

Through their personal knowledge and experiences with various aspects of the external environment, faculty advisors also assist students in identifying options for major fields of study and prepare them for new, emerging career fields. They can pair students' personal and academic interests to specialized concentrations within a career field, such as business, social services, law or medicine, as well as help them identify and prepare for acceptance into appropriate graduate programs. The external information advisors need corresponds to their unique institutions and positions. For example, faculty advisors in teacher education programs must know state and regional certification requirements, as well as the school systems and associated administrators where the students may apply for placement. Effective faculty advisors of graduate students know available research and grant opportunities and can suggest appropriate professional associations. Even those advising freshmen or second year students need enough awareness to help them engage with the local community or find resources outside McNeese.

All advisors need to be knowledgeable about external resources to enrich students' academic experiences and make appropriate referrals for community engagement, as well as for continuing educational or career exploration and development. In addition to assisting students in achieving their academic and professional goals, advisors frequently assist students with broader concerns not adequately addressed through campus resources; for example, advisors may need to refer students for assessment of personal abilities, access to mental health services, connection with religious interests, or help with family, legal, or financial matters.

After hearing the broad realms and complex details learned and embraced by faculty advisors who best advise students, new faculty advisors may be inclined to panic. Therefore, we remind the new advisor that gaining knowledge in context takes time and requires engagement in this developmental process. The first step involves the realization that although they must strive for excellence, first-year advisors are not expected to know all and be all. Achieving excellence in advising compares to gaining fluency in a foreign language or mastering the steps to a rhythmic dance: It takes time, and it takes practice. As when undertaking any incremental goal, the advisor must determine the basics to mark realistic milestones for acquiring knowledge in the first year.

Next Steps? > Continue by reading the next article in this toolkit - [Thriving as a Faculty Advisor Mastering the Basics](#). Or go back the review the previous article [Faculty Academic Advising: A Dynamic, Multidimensional Process](#).
