The Academic Advisor Plays an Important Role in the Life of a Student

By Michelle Kechichian, CBP Academic Advisor

Recently, several advisors from the College of Business and Public Management attended NACADA’s National Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. It was heavily attended by advising administrators, faculty advisors, and professional advisors from institutions across the nation and abroad. The institutions represented recognize the significant impact that advising has on student success. As we reflect about the workshops we attended and the stories people shared about their institutions, we felt very proud of our University of La Verne. We realized that some institutions have far less advising support and tools than our institution. Our University’s Office of Academic Advising & Retention provides many advising tools, training, and support to both students and advisors. Examples include resources on the Academic Advising web page, an online degree audit evaluation report, real-time advisee lists for advisors, retention initiatives, workshops, and events. As we look at our advising workloads, we are amazed at what we are able to accomplish. At the heart of NACADA’s members is a sense of camaraderie to share ideas and support their colleagues. It is in this spirit that we share our reflections on what we all accomplish every work day advising students.

Our academic advisors play an important role in the life of a student with:

- Transitioning, learning, goal setting, organizing, time management
- Mentoring and teaching
- Making students understand the importance of GE and how it relates to a major
- Educating students that their program is not just a checklist, but a way to see it as an interconnected network where GE and major courses connect
- Creating interest in co-curricular activities and showing students how it helps them to develop for success in their careers
- Encouraging students to work with the Career Services Office beginning as a freshman to develop skills about how to conduct informational meetings, resume writing, job searches, and interviews
- Helping students to identify their strengths and opportunities. We encourage students to write down their goals. We take the time to get to know our students. By getting to know our students, we are able to direct them to connect with resources or faculty that may be helpful as the student explores, learns, or makes decisions.

We become experts of degree requirements, curriculum, and student resources. Examples include: attending the Faculty Advising Nuts & Bolts Workshop offered each semester; keeping current on student services and resources including our catalog and website; talking with faculty and administrators across colleges to learn about courses and programs; and staying current on research and best practices in advising such as by reading the Academic Advising Today, which is NACADA’s quarterly newsletter. By joining NACADA, we are able to access this newsletter, other helpful advising resources, and to connect with colleagues with similar student advising populations.

We maintain regular contact with students throughout the year as part of our on-going commitment to student success initiatives. It begins by participating in the new student advising and registration (SOAR) program which is our first opportunity to meet and connect with new students. After the start of students’ first semester at La Verne, we reach out to students to schedule a follow up appointment with us to ask about their progress in courses as well as other aspects of transitioning to La Verne. During the meeting, we also share the Academic Advising syllabus. As a result of these conversations, often we refer students to reach out to faculty across our institution about various programs, majors, or minors. Other topics we discuss with our students throughout the year include: GE checklist, transfer work, scholarships, semester-by-semester plan, degree evaluation, university values, academic concerns, studying abroad, co-curricular activities, and graduation. We also track students about the many helpful online resources such as those found on the Academic Advising web page under “Downloads.” Because our institution requires students to schedule an advising and registration meeting with their advisor each semester, students benefit by having the opportunity to review their course schedule plan with their advisor. In addition to meeting with their advisor, students are strongly encouraged to attend the Advising & Registration Workshops as well as to view the online videos on “How to Register” and on “How to Select a Course by Attribute Code.”

To assist us with managing student progress, we utilize a variety of tools. Examples of these tools include: WebCAPP which is our online degree audit program; MyLaVerne’s Faculty Services advisor menu and advisee list; an Excel spreadsheet of advisee information; Microsoft Outlook for emails and appointments; an online appointment calendar tool, and utilizing volunteer peer mentoring programs.

We hear from so many students that have said what a difference we have made in their lives and how much easier the transition has been because of their advisors. This short essay is to applaud all advisors for everything you do every day to help students connect with our university and be successful.

Questions, Comments, or Want to Contribute? ccervantes@laverne.edu or (909) 593-3511, ext. 4843