

O'Banion Revisited: Now More Than Ever

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First I would like to commend Howard Schein and Virginia Gordon for developing the idea of devoting a significant portion of the journal to a discussion of developmental academic advising. As common as this concept is to those who have been active in the field, I suspect there are still many who are not familiar with it. A person new to the field will be able to turn to this issue, read two of the cornerstones, and then gain valuable insights by reading the differing perspectives offered by the invited respondents. This is sure to be an issue that will be used and cited frequently.

I am going to speak in favor of the O'Banion model as a framework for working with students. First I will address two commonly held misconceptions concerning the applicability of the model for advisors across institutional lines. Next I will attempt to explain why the O'Banion model holds promise as a method of enhancing a student's educational experience. And finally I will discuss the role this model plays within the larger context of working with students with their developmental needs in mind.

Misconception #1: O'Banion's model is appropriate for counselors but not for faculty who serve in a dual capacity (i.e., advising and classroom teaching).

Reading O'Banion's article, one discovers his discussion of the pros and cons of having counselors or having faculty advise. However, O'Banion's major purpose was to emphasize a process that all students should be entitled to work through, with a lesser emphasis on who helps them do so: "Who does advising is probably not as important as the philosophy of the institution . . . and the commitment and understanding with which the counselor or instructor approaches the process." My sense is that language such as "exploration of life goals" and "exploration of vocational goals" causes faculty to resist the notion that they have the time or ability to engage students in this process given faculty workloads. To a certain extent, faculty may be correct. However, I think a more important point may be that advisors (counselors or faculty) recognize their responsibility to work with the developmental needs of students and to

assure that students are guided to appropriate campus resources for assistance. If I as a counselor, for instance, want to work with students through the entire five-step process, then so be it. Or if I as a faculty advisor feel more comfortable referring students to career counselors, then that is appropriate. I stress that students need assistance in addressing developmental issues. An advisor, because of his or her position, can have a positive impact on a student's growth and development throughout that student's academic career by engaging the student in assessing educational and career goals.

Misconception #2: O'Banion's model is applicable only at two-year colleges.

True, O'Banion was writing in a community college journal to a community college audience. However, I see no reason why the model and underlying philosophy are not applicable at the four-year level. It is absurd to think that community college students are the only students who need to answer such basic questions as, "How do I want to live my life?"

Why O'Banion's Model Holds Promise Today

Why would I state that the O'Banion model is more relevant now than when it was originally written? The answer is framed within the context higher education finds itself in today. Consider the impact on higher education of such factors as:

- Economic recessions
- Shrinking resources
- Retrenchment
- Higher student costs--consumerism
- More underprepared, at-risk students
- Declining or flattening enrollments
- Increased minority access
- More undecided students
- Increased accountability

Certainly there were difficult challenges in the early 1970s, but for the most part, higher education was still benefiting from growing enrollment and increased resources from the Higher Education Act of 1965 and other federal assistance programs. Community colleges, espe-

cially, were in a honeymoon period as they attempted to define what exactly their mission was to be.

That period has given way to a growing sense of pessimism. Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president of George Washington University, states, "Higher education sowed the wind of cheerful inefficiency and today is reaping the whirlwind of growing public distrust and disgust" (Morse, 1992, p. 101). "The academy is under fire," Robert Atwell from the American Council on Education states; "Things will not get better until sometime after the year 2010" (Morse, p. 100). Finally, United States Representative Patricia Schroeder offers, "Despite the higher price tag, our kids are getting fewer class selections, shorter library hours, and overenrolled required classes taught by more teaching assistants and fewer professors" (Gaines, 1992, p. A1). Had Representative Schroeder been familiar with any of ACT's national surveys of academic advising—1979, 1983, 1987, 1991—which show a basic dissatisfaction with several aspects of advising in colleges and universities, she could have made an even more condemning statement.

A fair question might be, "Why mention these depressing topics?" My point is there is no room for error in working with students. "Doing more with less" has been the adage most often used in the 90s. Because it deals with students who, for a variety of reasons, come to college with fewer academic skills, pay higher tuition and fees, and receive fewer services, higher education must proactively address these pressing concerns. My premise that O'Banion's model is needed now more than ever involves such a proactive stance. This is especially true if O'Banion's five-step approach is applied from a strong base of student development theory and embraces the notion of shared responsibility between advisor and student (Frost, 1991; Habley, 1981).

A major strength of the O'Banion model is its clear, concise description of the five-step process. This approach breaks advising into its most basic terms and illustrates where fundamental problems historically and currently reside. For example, advisors and advising programs typically focus their efforts on steps four and five (i.e., course choice and scheduling). Consequently advising typically occurs once a semester with the goal of selecting classes to build a schedule. Therefore advising is viewed not as a process but rather as an event necessary to register for classes. The difficulty with this system is

that students need to address the fundamental questions raised in the first three steps, which seemingly go unattended to. The outcome is that students are typically adrift, going with neither consultation nor direction from any representative of the institution.

This phenomenon is unfortunate because advisors present one of the few structured, ongoing interventions students have throughout their entire educational program. Advisors, as I mentioned, can have a positive impact. Institutions and advisors should seize this opportunity to assure that students and institutions meet their goals, for the benefits of a strong advising program in terms of student satisfaction and involvement, retention, and persistence are well documented (Astin, 1975, 1985; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Tinto, 1975, 1987).

The Larger Context of Students' Developmental Needs

I conclude by stating that the O'Banion model must be viewed within the larger context of student growth in several domains. If advisors focus on the educational and career needs of students and exclude the important concepts of advising as teaching and student growth (Frost, 1991), each party is shortchanged. Gordon's description of three vectors for delivering academic advising should enhance my point:

- *Developing competence*, or increasing the intellectual, physical, and social skills that lead to the knowledge that one is capable of handling and mastering a range of tasks.
- *Developing autonomy*, or confronting a series of issues leading ultimately to the recognition of one's independence.

Developing purpose, or assessing and clarifying interests, educational and career options, and lifestyle preferences and using these factors to set a coherent direction for life. (Gordon, 1988, p. 109)

When advisors work with students in the above context, advising is much more than course scheduling. The challenges and responsibilities of academic advisors in today's colleges and universities are enormous . . . so much so that if one ponders this situation, one can at times be overwhelmed.

In closing, let me offer an analogy that may make our jobs more manageable. Think of academic advising as a course offered to your advisees. You are the instructor or facilitator; the

student is a learner; your office **is** the classroom; facilitating student **growth** along several **dimensions is the** curriculum; and **the O'Banion** model **is** the lesson plan.

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