

Envisioning the Future

SUMMARY

Lowenstein expresses a “vision” of what advising might be like at some unspecified time in the not-too-distant future. He does not claim to describe what advising is like now, nor to predict what it will be like in the future. In this way, the essay is very different in its technique from most other writings about advising that are usually found under the heading of “research.” It is not based on a qualitative or a quantitative study, or any kind of survey or interviews. At first glance it appears to be based on nothing more than the author’s imagination. But there is more to it than that.

The essay does primarily four things:

- It proposes a theory or a philosophy of advising, an account of “the essential nature and purpose” of advising. More implicitly than explicitly, it presents a view of what advising ought to be, what its central goals should be, summarized near the end by saying that “advising is a fundamentally academic activity focused on teaching and learning as well as the integration of each student’s curriculum;”
- It argues that (provided advising is viewed in the way the author views it) advising is absolutely central to the academic mission of any college or university;
- It issues a call to action for individual advisors and for the profession as a whole to “think big and aim high” in aspiring to the leadership role that the essay proposes; and finally
- It invites advisors (who may or may not agree with Lowenstein’s ideas) to formulate their own ideas about the philosophy of advising and what they would like advising to be in the future, and to debate these ideas among themselves.

In addition, this essay is meant to suggest that there are types of scholarship about advising other than quantitative or qualitative studies which may be worthy of our attention. This kind of scholarship does not seek to present us with any facts or findings that we did not previously know, but it may benefit us in other ways by inviting us to consider – and debate – ideas about the nature of our profession.

AFTER READING THE CHAPTER: CREATING YOUR OWN VISION

You don’t have to answer all the questions below in order to articulate your vision; you can even ignore them if you want. They are just prompts for what I think are the key components of any vision. When you start reflecting on them, you’ll see they are inter-related. Feel free to start with the third question if you want.

In your ideal future...

- What will advisors do for students that they do not (generally) do now? What will students expect from their advisors?

- How will advisors' roles at their universities be different from what they are now?
- Will advisors be paid more than they currently are? Assuming your answer is "Yes," how will they argue for this? How will universities pay for it?
- How will the *profession* of advising change? Will it be viewed differently by other academics? Will advisors' work lives be different?
- Will advisors prepare for their careers differently than they generally do now?
- How will advising prove its relevance as technology usurps some of its traditional tasks such as registration and monitoring degree progress?
- What steps need to be taken to make your vision a reality (a) by universities? (b) by the advising community? (c) by individual advisors like you?
- Is there a *philosophy of advising* that lies behind your vision for the future – i.e. an idea of the essential nature and purpose of advising? Is there a theory regarding the goals of a college education?

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there features of the advising profession, as Lowenstein describes it, that you find particularly attractive? That you find particularly unattractive?
2. Lowenstein says (p. 257): "Advisors cannot permit themselves to be characterized as handmaidens to the 'real' work of universities, but must insist that they are central to it." At your own institution, with regard to this distinction, how do you think advising is perceived by the leadership? By the faculty? By you and your colleagues?
3. Lowenstein claims (p. 256) that even if his vision cannot be attained in real life, it can still have value as an end to seek, or a standard against which to measure our actual practice. Do you think it is indeed useful in that way? If you don't agree with Lowenstein's vision, do you think a different unachievable vision might be valuable in the way he describes?
4. Do you think it is within the capability of academic advisors individually or collectively to raise the stature of the advising profession within colleges and universities or within academia as a whole? Is this a worthwhile goal?
5. Do you think it would be worthwhile for you and other advisors on your campus to meet on a regular basis to discuss ideas about what advising should become?