

Academic Advising: Making the Connections

Academic advisors play one of the most important roles in the lives of our students. They are the one person on-campus each student meets with. Naturally, as this relationship develops, advisors come to know their advisees better. If an advisee is having difficulty, the academic advisor serves as a link in making appropriate referrals.

Nationally, a growing concern on college campuses is addressing the mental health needs of students. A 2003 study completed by Kansas State University Counseling Center conducted an analysis of client problems over the past 13 years. Researchers found a significant increase in students' psychological issues in 14 out of 19 areas (e.g. depression, suicidal thoughts, sexual assaults, personality). Another study by Kitzrow from 1996-2001, found 85% of college counseling center directors saw more students with severe psychological issues. This data supports what we already experience in our classes and our offices.

As is across the country, the two main reasons students seek out counseling at BCC are depression and anxiety. At times, the stress is related to their academic studies, but usually, students are overwhelmed by other things going on in their lives. Statistically, traditional-age college students are more at risk for suicide than non-traditional students; however, both groups present with depression. In a 2004 study by the American College Health Association, 45% of students "felt so depressed that it was difficult to function." One out of 11 traditional-age students have seriously considered suicide. Recognizing the symptoms can help your advisees get connected to the right resources on-campus. Changes in each student's behavior will differ. However, some of the more common ones are: academic problems, significant change in mood, substance-abuse, personality changes, lack of concentration, irritability and suicidal feelings.

If you notice these changes, it's important to find a way to talk with your advisee. An example is: "I've noticed you have been missing a lot of classes, aren't doing your work and do not seem like yourself. I'm concerned about you." This provides an opening for your advisee to let you know what's been impacting him/her. Being empathic and specifically addressing the changes you notice may help your student become more aware. If a student is presenting with issues which go beyond your area of expertise, a referral may be the next step. Personal counseling may help in providing a confidential setting for your student to address some of these issues. Many times students are letting someone know because they truly want the help, and may feel unsure as to how to access it know it takes.

Letting your advisees know that many students seek out help for similar issues may also help normalize the process, as well as presenting this as being a sign of strength not weakness.

In my experience, students are more apt to follow through with an appointment if they call from an advisor's office or if the advisor is able to walk with his/her student to the Student Development Center. Other students may hear from more than one faculty about counseling before they make an appointment. Ultimately, it is the student's choice. The only exception is if a student poses a risk to him/herself or others. If this occurs, you should call security first, especially if you are concerned about a student's immediate safety. Never try to handle these situations on your own; access the help available to you on-campus. Although personal counseling is only one resource, we have found that this helps students access other services.

We each play an important part in helping students to achieve their goals and being successful. Your connection may be the link to your student success!

References Cited:

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<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/advisingissues/mental-health.htm>

