

Advisers Are Strategic Planners: Response to Steele and White

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In their article, “Leadership in Higher Education: Insights from Academic Advisers,” Steele and White (2019) argue that higher education is facing challenges that advisers could help to address if administrators would listen. The authors articulate that academic advisers have a broad reach on campus that is often ignored by higher education leadership.

There are numerous ways to define the role of the academic adviser on any campus. The lack of professionalization and distinct definitions of the advising position are troublesome for leadership. The advising role’s transition on many campuses from a primary faculty responsibility to a professional position may initially have led higher education leadership to think of the position as fulfilling a service.

While Steele and White may have a negative attitude towards the corporate approach that higher education leaders have taken (and that criticism is not without merit), unless there is a massive change to the funding structure of higher education, this will not change. Using corporate language will assist lawmakers in understanding the public good higher education serves. Positioning academic advising using corporate language will help administrators understand the role we play on campus.

In broad terms, advisers see the desired future of the institution and its students, assist in defining goals of that future, and then develop and enact steps to achieve those goals. Advisers are strategic planners for the students (micro-strategic planning) and the institution (macro-strategic planning) seeking continuous improvement (“Strategic Planning,” 2019). To better illustrate this for both advisers and administrators, advisers should create a model demonstrating the processes with which they are involved within the student lifecycle for administrators to visualize. This process, typically used within software design, can be helpful for demonstrating the touchpoints of advising across campus.

Institutional leadership has taken advantage of the strategic capabilities advisers have provided their campuses. Understanding the academic advising role as a strategic planning one invites both leadership and advisers to give and take more ownership within the institution. It establishes a level of professionalism currently missing in the role on some levels. Institutional leadership understands the terms of

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strategic planning, and framing advising in this way increases the likelihood that administrators will invite advisers to the table to address challenges in higher education.

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