

Advising Is Teaching and Service: Response to Steele and White

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Steele and White (2019) are right to be critical of portrayals of student advising as a service—an approach which diminishes advisers by feeding into a dangerous mischaracterization of higher education as a business and students as customers. Equating academic advisers with those in a customer service position, i.e., strictly focused on the pursuit of a happy customer, misses the primary goal of educating students and engaging them in the educational process. The authors hit the mark when they suggest that front-line academic advisers, due to their awareness of student and institutional issues, are best suited to make significant contributions to conversations with institutional leaders in pursuit of real solutions.

As a remedy to the business-forward model prevalent in many higher education institutions, I propose that we expand the NACADA mantra that *advising is teaching* and embrace the concept of advising as *teaching and service*. “Service” here does not refer to customer service but rather to the act of lending one’s time and expertise towards the betterment of others. That is, most faculty positions carry service expectations in addition to teaching and research, and these expectations often include service to the university or to the broader community. Just as faculty sit on committees that influence policy as part of their service, many professional advisers do so as well and should be equally valued and recognized for it.

As we academic advisers consider how to best influence educational policy and practices, let us not perpetuate approaches that undervalue our contributions and make us invisible by relegating us to customer service roles. Instead, with a servant-leadership model in mind, we should assess our advising work in terms of impact on students and their communities. This approach will help us promote and value service insofar as it supports and engages students. Academic advisers provide a direct connection to the student voice and can bring campus issues and solutions to light. Use that connection and your *teaching and service* roles to advocate for students and your departments and to make your work visible and your voice heard.

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