Stealth Advising: How Advisors Introduce Academic Substance into Routine Conversations

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How do academic advisors encourage students to consider the meaning, value, and logic of their educational journeys during appointments despite pressures from students and others to discuss rote information, such as curricular rules and requirements? The concept of stealth advising describes how advisors manage such pressures by weaving novel content into conversations without disrupting conversational flow or sacrificing rapport. Drawing on observations of appointments and interviews with students and their advisors, I discuss three stealth advising strategies: checking in on students' experiences, supplementing rote information with related content, and challenging or questioning students' decisions. I outline the challenges and limitations of using stealth advising to achieve quality advising.

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Academic advisors play a prominent role in helping students understand and navigate institutional rules and policies. According to NACADA (2017), a mastery of "curriculum, degree programs, and other academic requirements" as well as "institution specific policies, procedures, rules, and regulations" (para. 4) are among the foundational core competencies advisors must master to guide students effectively. Moreover, research suggests that advisors are effective at conveying such information. Through an online survey of 22,305 students from two community colleges and seven universities, Smith and Allen (2014) found that students in closer contact with advisors better understand degree requirements and university timelines, policies, procedures, and resources. Studies have suggested that some primary-role (Menke et al., 2018) and faculty advisors (Allen & Smith, 2008a; Hart-Baldridge, 2020; Waters, 2002) believe that conveying knowledge of policies and procedures is an advisor's most important role. According to Fielstein (1994), "[S]tudents have the right to want and expect precise information regarding curriculum choices, major requirements, and graduation requirements" (p. 78).

On the other hand, established and influential lines of scholarship have defined an advisor's most important role as supporting students' personal or intellectual growth. Developmental advising focuses on supporting the whole student, understanding students as individuals with a sense of agency, and acknowledging how they change over time (Crookston, 2009; O'Banion, 2009). Approaches focusing on advising's academic role have defined quality advising in terms of helping students understand the meaning and value of education, the logic of the curriculum, and their intellectual identities (Hemwall & Trachte, 2009; Lowenstein, 2009).

These scholars contrast their approaches to quality advising with what they refer to as "prescriptive advising," which focuses on the administrative role of communicating rules, requirements, policies, and procedures to students. Grites (2013) noted that prescriptive and developmental advising are commonly understood as occupying a continuum with "simple course scheduling" on the prescriptive end and "long-range life and career planning" at the developmental end (p. 6). Lowenstein (2009) compared prescriptive advising to "book-keeping" with a meager learning outcome of the student succeeding in "memorizing some of the rules and requirements" (p.124).

While advising scholars have paid significant attention to defining what kind of content constitutes quality advising, less attention has been paid to how advisors actually deliver such content in practice. In particular, even if advisors define quality advising in terms of learning or development, others may think of advising differently (McGill, 2021). Researchers have found that administrators understand advising's value in terms of improving retention and completion via mechanical or prescriptive tasks, such as checking degree requirements or conveying institutional information (Bridgen, 2017; Duslak, 2021; Menke et al., 2020). Similarly, surveys have revealed that students highly value and want advisors to provide clarification and accurate information about degree requirements, timelines, policies, and procedures (Allen et al., 2013; Allen & Smith, 2008b; Cheung et al., 2017; Creeden, 1990; Smith & Allen, 2006; Winston & Sandor, 1984). How do advisors have meaningful and substantive conversations with students—such as those concerning the value of education or constructing an intellectual identity—given demands around delivering rote information, such as curricular rules and requirements?

Stealth Advising as a Practical Strategy

I refer to the practical steps people take to navigate the competing pressures that shape the content and quality of advising as the *pragmatics of advising*. These pressures may include material or resource constraints, relational expectations, and organizational routines and norms. It is important not only to develop normative theories and conduct empirical research describing what people believe advising is or ought to be, but also to examine the practices and strategies that people use to shape the content of advising. An analysis of the pragmatics of advising involves highlighting people's active efforts in managing multiple expectations around or barriers to achieving quality advising. These active steps may include: (1) action at the organizational and institutional levels to re-enforce or create changes in structures, policies, and practices; and (2) the interactional and rhetorical strategies advisors and students use to construct meaning during advising appointments and in other everyday settings, such as classrooms, staff meetings, and conferences.

This article focuses on strategies in the second category, those operating at the micro-interactional level.[1] While they may occur increasingly over Zoom, face-to-face meetings are the primary means through which students interact with their advisors, and such close contact with individual students is a defining characteristic of advising (Gaines, 2014). Thus, it is important to understand how academic advising is practiced within the context of face-to-face interaction with students. Philosophical and theoretical analyses have argued for the importance of advisors attuning to the nature of their conversations and dynamics of their encounters with students (Barnett et al., 2006; Colgan, 2017a, 2017b; Hughey, 2011; Marshall, 2012; Powell et al., 2013). However, little empirical research systematically analyzes how advising meetings unfold (Duller et al., 1997).

I define the set of interactional strategies advisors use to seamlessly weave novel content into conversations with students in ways that do not disrupt conversational flow or sacrifice rapport as *stealth advising*. When using these strategies, advisors momentarily insert alternative topics into conversations without completely derailing discussions around content they feel pressured to make the primary focus. These are practical strategies that advisors use when pressures and expectations around delivering some content leaves little time to cover other content. For instance, stealth advising limits tension with students when the content students want to cover differs from what advisors hope to discuss. Drawing on observational and interview data, this article describes how advisors do stealth advising in order to discuss academically substantive topics (e.g., intellectual identity, the value of education, the logic of the curriculum) when faced with pressures to focus on institutional rules, requirements, policies, and procedures.

Method

Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study given the focus on describing the meaning and process of academic advising appointments (Taylor et al., 2016). I observed one-on-one academic advising appointments and conducted interviews with students and their advisors. Observations provided data on participant communication and conduct, meeting content, conversation flow, and how topics arose and expired. Interviews provided a secondary data source for understanding students' and advisors' motivations and the meanings they gave to advising interactions.

Observations occurred at, and all participants were recruited from, one academic advising unit at a large, research-intensive university. The advising unit primarily served first- and second-year students who had not declared a major. Given the size and complexity of the university, many institutional rules and policies impacted students. Moreover, first- and second-year students are less familiar with such information and thus may need more guidance from their advisors. In short, delivering institutional information was particularly salient in the research setting, making the site an extreme case (Eisenhardt, 1989). Extreme cases are ideal for building theory in new topic areas because the dynamics under study are highly salient and visible. Thus, this was an ideal research setting for

[1] See Collins (1994) for a thorough history and definition of the micro-interactionist perspective in sociology.

exploring how advisors introduce novel topics when pressured to deliver institutional information.

I employed two recruitment methods. First, I approached students in the advising center lobby as they arrived for appointments. Observation occurred immediately upon gaining student consent. Effort was made to vary observation days and times. I approached a total of 28 students in this manner; 21 consented to observation. After the appointment concluded, I asked students to participate in an interview; all but one agreed. Second, an email was sent to all students in the advising unit, soliciting their participation in an in-depth interview about their "experiences in college so far." This process garnered 17 participants. At the end of each interview, I asked students for permission to observe their academic advising appointments that semester. Six students agreed, and all were observed upon advisor consent.

The observed advising appointments lasted 10 minutes to 40 minutes; most were about 30 minutes. With consent from both parties, audio recordings were taken and later transcribed. I wrote extensive field notes documenting observations in narrative form within 24 hours of the appointment. A potential methodological limitation is that the presence of an observer may have altered interactions. However, during appointments, I sat quietly to the side like a "fly on the wall." Students and advisors did not interact with or include me in their discussions.

Interviews with students ranged from 10 minutes to 80 minutes; all but three exceeded 25 minutes. Interviews with advisors lasted between 10 minutes and 20 minutes, with most taking approximately 15 minutes. Interviews were loosely structured and covered reasons for scheduling appointments, impressions of appointments attended, and less germane topics.

Ultimately, 38 students and 15 academic advisors participated in the study, and 27 students were observed with their advisors during academic advising appointments. Participants varied demographically (see Table 1). The aim was to illuminate broad patterns and identify the range of behaviors present across groups. How patterns differ by demographic group was beyond the scope of this paper.

I began fieldwork with a broad interest in examining face-to-face interactional dynamics but did not impose existing theories or concepts on the data. Insofar as concepts were allowed to emerge from the data itself, the analytical method used is consistent with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1973). After writing each set of field notes and transcribing recordings, I wrote short analytic memos outlining emerging themes. At this stage, I noticed that the bulk of advising conversations discussed institutional information. After data collection concluded, I systematically coded field notes and meeting transcripts line by line in Atlas TI, identifying 33 topics of conversation and how those topics arose. Within these topics, I grouped together those related to the meaning, value, or logic of the student's academics or education. I examined each strip of data in this grouping, which led to additional codes labeling who raised the topic and the conversational context in which it was raised. The stealth advising strategies described below reflect the themes that emerged from this analysis. Atlas TI was only used to analyze observational data, because the content and process of advising meetings is the primary focus of this study. However, interview data provided background context, and reading it confirmed meanings and motivations inferred from observation.

Pressures Shaping Conversational Content

Institutional and organizational pressures shape the content of advising conversations, including an emphasis on discussing rules, requirements, policies, and procedures. At the university studied, rules and requirements were numerous, complex, important, and consequential for students' progress towards graduation. For example, major requirements varied by program and changed annually. The university portrayed advisors as authorities on and a primary contact from whom to learn about these topics. Advisors had to limit advising appointments to 30 minutes to accommodate all students, so they had little time to discuss other topics.

At the micro-interactional level, advisors faced pressures to establish and maintain rapport with students. They wanted students to feel comfortable asking them for help and to return routinely for guidance. Advisors fostered such rapport by being attuned to students' stated needs. Thus, advisors typically began conversations by asking students what they wanted to discuss and made sure to address students' immediate concerns. In response to this question, 20 out of the 27 students observed primarily wanted to get information or gain clarity on rules and requirements. Among the remaining students, five sought help with academic difficulty, such as academic-warning status or decisions around dropping a class. Only two came in

Table 1. Participant Demographics

	Students	Advisors
Gender		
Male	16	3
Female	22	12
Race		
White	26	13
Black	9	2
Asian	3	0
First Gen College		
Yes	17	-
No	21	-
Seniority		
First Year	23	-
Second Year	15	-

Note. n = 38 for students and n = 15 for advisors.

primarily wanting to discuss substantive concerns around the meaning of their academic journeys. Thus, communicating and clarifying curricular or institutional rules and requirements dominated or at least constituted the central framework that organized the course of advising conversations.

Among the 20 students seeking clarity on rules and requirements, students brought up concerns such as how to get off a waiting list, how to submit transfer credits, how to enroll at another university, how to gain credits through an internship, and clarifying curricular requirements for entrance to particular majors. Eleven students wanted to discuss course scheduling. Their focus in discussing schedules was not on the meaning or value of selecting particular courses, but rather on how to fulfill curricular requirements so that they could stay "on track" for graduation. Subsequently, the content of those conversations primarily focused on addressing such concerns.

While the primary thrust and focus of most meetings centered around communicating curricular and institutional rules and requirements, certainly other topics did emerge. In 20 out of the 28 appointments observed, there were at least some moments devoted to discussing the meaning and value of academics or the logic of curriculum. Specifically, advisors explained why classes and programs were relevant and useful, the purpose of curricular requirements, and how different classes or facets of students' educational plans were meaningfully connected. Advisors also cultivated students' intellectual identities by encouraging students to think critically about their personal interests, strengths, and goals, and how these fit with particular classes and programs. In order to help them evaluate fit, advisors provided students with ideas on how to research and learn more about classes and curriculum. They also described the educational goals of classes and the distinguishing characteristics of different disciplines or fields of knowledge.

Advisors, in theory, could be bold, assertive, and persistent when introducing such alternative topics and perspectives into conversations. Such was the case in one advising meeting. Second-year student Dennis[2] met his advisor Jesse to discuss if the classes he selected fulfilled accounting major requirements. He had recently shifted to a business major from a technology-related major. Jesse began by asking Dennis what he wanted to discuss but then pushed Dennis to think more deeply about his academic interests, analyzing his experiences in prior classes, questioning the logic behind his turn toward accounting, and emphasizing the need to explore other business-related majors.

As the meeting progressed, Dennis grew visibly less comfortable, fidgeting in his seat and tugging at the zipper on his hoodie. Despite the meeting running 34 minutes, 4 minutes over the designated half hour time slot, they did not discuss his schedule until the final 6 minutes of the meeting. And rather than directly telling him what requirements would be appropriate for next semester, Jesse briefly explained how to run a degree audit and turned again toward discussing major exploration. By that time, Dennis looked anxious and impatient, slightly slumped to one side, leaning on his elbow, fingers cupping the right side of his head, which was entirely hidden in the hood of his sweatshirt. Jesse clearly picked up on Dennis' anxieties. When we spoke after the meeting, Jesse looked enervated and became reflective, saying "I wish I had more than 30 minutes for appointments like this. . .. It's not possible to fit in my agenda and his agenda." Although frustrated that Dennis was not more amenable toward efforts to develop his critical thinking skills, ultimately what Jesse took away from the interaction was that another approach may be necessary.

> Jesse: I don't know if he's gonna come back. But, if he's not gonna come back, he's not gonna come back. So, if I were to redo something like this, you know, I often do this

[2] All names of advisors and students are pseudonyms. I also changed course numbers and titles to help maintain anonymity.

> when something doesn't go particularly in the direction that I thought it was, then I ask, "Well, what did I miss here?"

In questioning whether Dennis would return, Jesse clearly believed that the tension between what student and advisor wanted to discuss threatened rapport and their relationship.

This case was an outlier. In all other situations observed, advisors focused on responding to students' concerns, including their questions about curricular requirements, and interjected lessons around the meaning of academics or logic of the curriculum in ways that did not significantly detract from those concerns. Rather than aggressively sidelining the issues students raised, advisors weaved topics they wanted to introduce into conversations in a more seamless and stealthy manner.

Rhetorical Strategies in Stealth Advising

Below, I describe three strategies advisors used to weave substantive conversation about the meaning, value, and logic of the student's education into meetings focusing on explaining rules, requirements, policies, and procedures: checking in on students' progress and experiences, supplementing rote information with related content, and challenging or questioning students' decisions. These are rhetorical "strategies" because they represent practical means through which advisors shape the content of advising conversations, particularly with the goal of introducing novel content. However, they are not necessarily conscious, studied, or preplanned. Moreover, advisors could potentially use these strategies, particularly the last one, to aggressively overtake a conversation. But, in the cases described below, they are stealth advising strategies insofar as advisors seamlessly transitioned away from students' stated conversational goals only briefly and temporarily so that rapport was never threatened. Unlike the encounter between Jesse and Dennis, in these situations no evident frustration, awkwardness, or tension was observed.

Checking In

Advisors routinely asked students how their classes or semesters were going. *Checking in* with students in this manner may be considered a stealth strategy because it was typically used in interstitial moments, as an aside before getting into or back to the primary conversation. Advisors asked these questions to check in on whether students were encountering any academic difficulties. However, checking in on classes also allowed advisors to stealthily weave in conversations about academic interests and preferences. Unearthing students' interests and preferences, in turn, provided students and advisors opportunities to discuss the value of courses or programs and encouraged decision-making focused on learning rather than fulfilling rules and requirements.

By the middle of their advising meeting, first-year student Sam had discussed an issue around receiving AP credit for calculus and reviewed majors of interest with his advisor Alex. Sam wanted to discuss requirements related to course scheduling: "I don't understand the gen-eds completely, so I took another philosophy because I know I need two humanities or six credits in humanities. I have three. I don't know if I actually have six or what." However, Alex put this question on pause to briefly check in on Sam's progress in classes.

> Alex: So, let's go back to your courses and see what you signed up for, and let's check your general education. [Pause]. So, let's not even talk about this yet. How is everything else going at this point? Do you feel pretty good about your classes?
>
> Sam: Yeah. I feel great about them.
>
> Alex: Grades are OK?
>
> Sam: Yup. I had one opportunity to go do some extra credit to bring my communication cinema class up to what I think would be a 4.0 weighting. . .
>
> Alex: So, what was your most interesting class you would say? What's –?
>
> Sam: Cinema.
>
> Alex: So, that goes back to your interest in film. . .

The conversation soon returns to what credits Sam needs to fulfill general education requirements. However, here Alex is able to comment briefly on Sam's intellectual identity, linking his experience in class back to a point when he expressed an interest in pursuing film.

Most frequently though, checking in occurred at the beginning of advising meetings. Advisors almost always initiated small talk during the walk from the lobby to their office. In the office, advisors would often check in on the student's progress in classes with the same casual and conversational tone, almost as if continuing their small talk. For example, Drew asked first-year student Lisa about her classes immediately after the two sat down.

> Drew: How has your semester been so far?
>
> Lisa: Good.
>
> Drew: Have you taken a first round of exams?
>
> Lisa: Yeah, I was really stressed. I had my first exam for anatomy. You had to know all the bones, so it was really stressful, but I got a 95 so I was really happy.

Although the conversation began with a focus on grades and class performance, Drew shifted focus to Lisa's opinions and impressions about what she was learning.

> Drew: OK, and you have—how are the rest of your classes, psych, soc, stat, and bio?
>
> Lisa: They're good.
>
> Drew: Any pros or cons?
>
> Lisa: Um, there's no exams in BIO 101.... You do a journal, which can kind of get annoying cause you have to do like—It's like a weird class.
>
> Drew: I've heard that from other students.
>
> Lisa: Yeah. It's like you had to do a two-page reflection on "what is dirt" and you're like *what*? It's just a little complicated to get done.

At this point, Lisa seemed unenthusiastic about the class. But Drew introduced a new perspective.

> Drew: I've heard a lot of things from students about that class, that they say in the end they learn a lot about themselves.
>
> Lisa: Yeah.
>
> Drew: So, that's good—
>
> Lisa: And the other people in my lab.

Lisa evidently agrees that the class is worthwhile as an opportunity to learn about herself and others. Thus, Drew reminds Lisa that her class has educational value. Immediately after this exchange, Drew changes the subject asking, "So, what do you want to talk about today and cover?" Lisa reveals that she wants clarity on rules and procedures around declaring her major, which Drew provides. Rather than derailing what Lisa came in to discuss, Drew had stealthily created an opportunity to reflect on academic preferences and the educational value of classes.

Supplementing Information

Another stealth advising strategy that advisors used was *supplementing* explanations of curricular rules and requirements with additional information or comments regarding the meaning, value, or logic of those requirements. Here, the flow from providing rote information to discussing the educational substance of the curriculum feels natural and unforced because both relate to the same broad topic of course selection and planning. However, this shift in discussion cannot be regarded as the inevitable outcome of the conversation. Rather, it requires an effort on the advisor's part, given students' questions or concerns may easily drive conversation elsewhere.

Leslie supplemented a review of curricular requirements with an explanation of the logic behind taking those requirements during a conversation with Edward, a first-year student considering majors in hospitality and recreation management.

> Leslie: You're gonna take accounting and things like that no matter what.
>
> Edward: No matter what? I heard accounting is hard.
>
> Leslie: It is.
>
> Edward: Alright.

Given that Edward's concern focused on ways around the requirement, his question had been answered and this discussion could have ended here. However, Leslie instead pivoted toward discussing the educational value of such classes:

> Leslie: But you need to know it, right?
>
> Edward: Yeah.
>
> Leslie: Like you gotta know how much money you're making and how much money you are paying people, stuff like that. So, when the time comes you will be taking

> accounting and marketing, stuff like that for either of these things.

Rather than saying, “But you need to *do* it,” focusing on completing requirements, Leslie emphasizes that Edward needs to “know” and understand business principles to manage hotels or recreation centers effectively. This rhetorical move was particularly stealthy insofar as Leslie seamlessly pivoted back to requirements (i.e. “you will be taking accounting. . .”).

Another example occurred after Patricia, a first-year student considering a major in sociology and minor in human development, asked her advisor Mickey a question concerning curricular requirements: “What is the difference between a major and a minor in the course load?” Mickey responded with information concerning credit requirements.

> Mickey: OK, well, your major is going to be many more credits. Typically, four-ish years, roughly 15 credits per semester, roughly will bring you to a major, so 120 roughly-ish at the end, for a bachelor’s degree. You don’t have to have a minor. You can use your electives to work towards—that’s another thing to consider too, if you want a minor the electives you can use towards your minor. Your minor is fewer credits. . .

Then midsentence Mickey pivots toward the purpose of undertaking a minor.

> Mickey: . . . and is a way to help you specialize then.
>
> Patricia: OK.
>
> Mickey: Um, make yourself a little more unique and marketable even, and to explore other interests related to what you are working on. And I’m sure [human development] relates to sociology and it works hand in hand.

Even though Patricia specifically asked about course loads, Mickey slipped in a little supplementary information, explaining that a minor could help a student seem attractive to employers and explore interests. Mickey also suggested that there can be a meaningful relationship between majors and minors, connecting different elements of Patricia’s curriculum.

Questioning and Challenging Students’ Decisions

Another stealth strategy advisors used when explaining curricular requirements was weaving in questions about the logic or reasoning behind students’ academic decisions. Students must specify their majors or minors of interest when discussing curricular requirements, because requirements vary significantly. Rather than simply accepting students’ decisions, advisors asked them to reflect on *why* they were interested in a particular academic program. This challenged students to link the curriculum with their personal goals or identities, yet flowed naturally from students’ requests to discuss curricular rules and requirements.

For example, when advisor Kelly was calculating first-year student Nate’s GPA to see if he was meeting qualifications to declare a major in the College of Business, she stealthily slipped in a conversation about making careful curricular decisions. Each business major had different GPA requirements. As she was pulling up an online GPA calculator, she asked him which major he was considering.

> Kelly: And if we had to pick a major, what major would you be thinking about?
>
> Nate: I’m just going to say accounting, because two of my cousins did accounting.

At this point, Kelly had obtained the information she needed to discuss GPA requirements. However, she continued to probe.

> Kelly: What do you like about accounting though?
>
> Nate: I haven’t taken the class yet, so I don’t really know.
>
> Kelly: Well, there are resources that you can use to explore these majors. I’m gonna highly recommend that you do that.

Kelly then navigated to a university website with information about various majors and explained how Nate could learn more there. In this exchange, Kelly suggests that Nate should not simply follow others when selecting a major, but rather he should also consider his own preferences. Moreover, she tells him that he can discover what he likes not only by taking classes—a strategy he evidently assumed would be sufficient—but also by reading more about major options online.

In addition to probing into or questioning the logic of students' decisions, advisors also directly challenged students and offered alternative perspectives. Despite confronting students, such comments and conversations were stealthy because their integration into conversations did not disrupt from students' goals or create tension. For instance, Wendy came in to discuss course scheduling with her advisor Jesse. The topic of selecting minors emerged as Jesse told Wendy that general education classes could be used to explore minors. Although Wendy told Jesse that she was considering business minors, perhaps in management, Jesse reminded her that she had previously wanted to take additional philosophy classes.

> Jesse: So, could a philosophy minor be possible?
>
> Wendy: No, I don't think so [decisive, but light chuckle at end]. No. I just don't know that—when I think of a minor, I think of something extra that you could use to help you in the future. But what would I do with philosophy?

Wendy's question is rhetorical; her tone indicated the answer was obvious—there is not much one could "do" with a minor in philosophy. However, Jesse challenged this assumption.

> Jesse: You would learn how to think.
>
> Wendy: Yeah, that too [agrees].
>
> Jesse: You would be able to really be very good at asking questions—most of us are not good.... This is what philosophy does. It teaches you to how to think, and you can put this to good use in a presentation, as somebody's manager, as somebody who is looking at the organization, wherever you are, what is it that we do well, what is it that we say we do but that we don't do well, and find good ways of framing this in a way that—so, who's to say what's the use of philosophy.
>
> Wendy: Yeah [chuckles in understanding of Jesse's point]. I never thought about it in that way, to be honest.

Here, Jesse explained the logic behind taking a philosophy class and its relevance to Wendy's goals. This conversation fell seamlessly into the larger discussion around course scheduling and helped steer it away from a simple focus on curricular rules and requirements.

Challenges of Stealth Advising

Stealth advising can introduce students to new perspectives and alter the course of advising conversations. However, advisors must have the knowledge, wisdom, and interactional skill as well as the desire to seize on moments and introduce appropriate and deeper content. Advisors using the rhetorical strategies described above might convey very limited educational content. For instance, while responding to her questions regarding general education requirements, Reese checked in on how first-year student Beth felt about an English class that fulfilled a humanities requirement.

> Beth: So, I'll fulfill my humanities requirements then?
>
> Reese: Mm hm [yes], with English 122. What can you tell me about English 122?
>
> Beth: Um, Australian and New Zealand cultural perspectives, basically just talks about Australia and New Zealand and the history behind the countries. So, it's pretty interesting.
>
> Reese: Yeah, learn something new [every day].
>
> Beth: Yeah!
>
> Reese: OK, ECON 150. So social and behavioral science, one is prescribed...

Beth expresses interest in the class and describes what she is learning, but rather than expanding on this, Reese quickly returns to discussing general education requirements. The short exchange allowed Reese to understand content Beth is learning and potential topics that interest her, information that could potentially be used in future conversations. Moreover, simply raising the question let the student know that the advisor would like such topics to be part of their conversations. However, in this particular meeting, neither she nor Reese push the conversation further. Indeed, through the 20-minute meeting, this was the only discussion vaguely related to the logic of the curriculum, value of education, or intellectual identity development. The remainder, aside from small talk, focused on curricular rules and requirements.

It can be challenging for advisors to have the conviction and confidence to introduce new perspectives, given pressures to respect students' desires and maintain rapport. In one observed situation, such pressures led the advisor to apologize for introducing topics beyond curricular requirements. After asking a first-year student how his current classes were going, what he was learning from his classes, and his involvement and adjustment to college, the advisor apologized for derailing the conversation, saying, "OK, good. And, everything with classes sounds good. We'll talk about scheduling then," before adding ironically with a slightly self-deprecating smile, "what you came here to do."

Conclusion

Although institutional rules and requirements often dominate advising meetings, advisors slip other topics into conversations in a stealth manner, allowing them to exert some control over the content of conversations. But stealth advising is ultimately a practical compromise rather than an ideal strategy for discussing the meaning and value of education or any other complex or nuanced topic. Given that stealth advising introduces new topics fleetingly, it typically allows advisors to pursue those topics in limited depth. Furthermore, stealth advising keeps the conversation primarily focused on meeting student and institutional demands. This allows advisors to avoid tension with students and may help ensure that students return to advisors for assistance. However, sometimes students may benefit more from conversations that do not focus on answering the questions they came in with or do not align with how they envisioned their advisor's role, even if those interactions are uncomfortable or awkward.

Institutional and organizational changes may help advisors gain more time and resources for discussing topics beyond rules and requirements, for example by simplifying those rules or lowering roster sizes. It is important for institutions to appreciate the primacy of advisors' roles in discussing the meaning and value of education, the logic of the curriculum, the substance of what students are learning, and related topics. Institutions may provide students with the expectation that they will discuss such issues with advisors and promote the value of doing so. They may also prepare students to have challenging conversations with advisors, rather than viewing students as customers to be satisfied with advising as a service (Steele & White, 2019).

However, without institutional changes to assist them, advisors may be limited to stealth advising to discuss issues that they find important beyond rules and requirements. In this case, advisors need to be ready for opportunities to utilize the kinds of rhetorical strategies discussed. Advisors must be nimble and quick in order to effectively insert topics stealthily into advising meetings. This requires not only developing interactional and conversational skills, but also a deep and nuanced understanding of the meaning and value of academic disciplines, general education, and a college degree. Certainly, this has implications for advisor training and hiring.

More broadly, it is vital for advising scholars to examine the pragmatics of advising. In addition to developing normative theories that define what an advisor's role should be, scholars should examine how advising is practically accomplished in the face of social or material factors that shape whether or not those ideals can be realized. I have presented a general conceptual toolkit for discussing how advisors navigate competing pressures and attempt to exert control over the content of advising conversations at the micro-interactional level. The strategies discussed could be used to introduce various topics related to and beyond the meaning and value of academics. Advisors may use stealth advising to discuss mental health and well-being (Allen & Trimble, 1993), students' dreams and life goals (Bloom et al., 2008; Bloom & Martin, 2002), social justice (Puroway, 2016), academic difficulty, or other topics. Examining how and when these strategies manifest in various situations and contexts or how they impact student learning and other outcomes are potential projects for future empirical research.

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