



Coaching and advising

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Background

Advising can be defined as an activity where students work with professionals to identify academic and career goals and to develop plans to meet those goals. Coaching is a form of college mentoring that aims to help students connect their daily activities to long-term goals and build essential skills. While advising tends to focus on information provision and academic planning and goal identification, coaching focuses on skill development, overcoming barriers, and fostering a sense of belonging. Both coaching and advising play a significant role in improving student outcomes in community colleges, particularly concerning persistence, completion, and academic success. While college attendance has increased, completion rates have not kept pace. Many students struggle to succeed in college and coaching and advising are seen as strategies to facilitate student persistence and completion. Coaching and advising help to develop essential skills, fostering a sense of belonging, and address the diverse needs of student populations, often through a blend of personalized, proactive, and technology-supported interventions.

Key takeaways from the literature

1) Coaching and advising can address retention and completion gaps

- Student coaching has been shown to **increase retention rates**. For example, in one study, students who received coaching were 5.2 percentage points more likely to remain enrolled after six months, with this effect persisting even after the coaching ended (3.4 percentage points after 24 months) (Bettinger and Baker 2011).
- Coached students also had **graduation rates four percentage points higher** than uncoached students after four years at the campuses for which data was available (Bettinger and Baker 2011; Rogers et al. 2014).

2) Coaching and advising can bridging information gaps and assist with essential skill development

- A key reason students may not succeed is a lack of crucial information on how to be successful in college, or a failure to act on information they possess1.... Personalized support and advising can bridge these informational gaps (Bettinger and Baker 2011).
- Coaches guide students in connecting daily activities to long-term goals and help them build essential skills like time management, self-advocacy, and study



techniques. Mentors can also assist students in acquiring better study skills and identifying academic resources within their institutions (Bettinger and Baker 2011).

- Advising is ideally a developmental process that extends beyond merely imparting information; it should facilitate student learning about themselves, their goals, and how to achieve them. This includes teaching students how to weigh information, set goals, and make realistic plans (Karp 2013).

3) Coaching and advising can foster a sense of belonging and connection

- Feelings of separation can contribute to students dropping out. Student coaching can help universities reach out to students who might otherwise feel disconnected from their institutions (Bettinger and Baker 2011).
- Interventions that foster a stronger sense of social belonging among underrepresented groups have been shown to improve academic outcomes (Castleman et al. 2015).
- Community college students, especially first-generation and ethnic minority students, benefit from personal connections with faculty or staff, which can bolster their sense of belonging and academic confidence (Booth et al. 2013).

4) Coaching and advising can address the needs of diverse students

- Historically underserved students, including African-American, Latino, and first-generation college students, particularly benefit from comprehensive support that addresses their academic, financial, social, and personal needs. They value explicit insight on how experiences contribute to their achievement, opportunities to connect with peers and educators, and academic assistance outside of class (Booth et al. 2013).

Possible associated interventions/activities

To implement effective coaching and advising, community colleges should adopt a multifaceted, integrated approach that is student-centered, leverages technology, and engages the entire institutional community. A significant challenge in community colleges is the **high student-to-counselor ratio**, often ranging from 1:1500 to 1:3500, making intensive, one-on-one advising rarely feasible. In light of this, there are several actions that colleges can take in developing an effective advising and coaching infrastructure:

1. Foster a holistic and integrated support system:

- **Integrate services:** Move beyond fragmented support services (e.g., academic, career, financial aid, personal support) to an integrated model where these

functions are coordinated and work together. This can involve using "student support case managers" to eliminate silos among support functions (Arnold 2018)

- **Prioritize career counseling:** Position career counseling as a driving force for an integrated advising approach, ensuring students connect academic plans with labor market realities and long-term career goals from the outset. Many students do not understand how to relate their academic goals to the labor market (Karp 2013).
- **Provide comprehensive support for underserved students:** Offer comprehensive support that addresses academic, financial, social, and personal needs, especially for historically underserved student groups (e.g., African American, Latino, first-generation). This is crucial to prevent the equity gap from growing (Booth et al. 2013).

2. Implement proactive and developmental engagement:

- **Embrace proactive/intrusive advising and coaching:** Actively reach out to students, particularly those identified as at-risk, rather than waiting for them to seek help. Many students, especially those with less "social know-how," may not know they need assistance or how to find it (Bettinger and Baker 2011)
- **Cultivate sustained relationships:** Establish mechanisms for consistent, personalized support with a single advisor or coach over multiple semesters or years, enabling a deeper, more trusting relationship. This contrasts with traditional models where students may meet different advisors each time (Arnold 2018; Karp 2013).
- **Focus on development, not just information:** Shift from merely providing "information dumps" to a developmental approach that teaches students how to be self-aware, weigh information, set goals, and make realistic plans. Advisors and coaches should act as "teachers" in this process (Karp 2013).
- **Ensure Continued Support:** Recognize that initial support effects can "fade out" over time. Provide ongoing guidance for continuing students, as their needs (e.g., changing programs, new barriers) may evolve (Karp 2013).

3. Develop student skills and foster a culture of success:

- **Teach "how to succeed":** Explicitly teach students how to navigate the postsecondary environment, build essential skills (e.g., time management, self-advocacy, study skills), and connect their daily activities to long-term academic and career goals. This can involve requiring a high-quality student success course (Jaggers and Fletcher 2014).
- **Empower Faculty as Primary Supporters:** Recognize that faculty have the greatest potential impact on student success. Work with instructors to incorporate elements of success factors into course content and delivery, and connect



students to campus resources. Provide professional development and incentives for faculty to take on this expanded role (Booth et al. 2013).

4. Optimize resources through strategic use of technology:

- **Leverage Early Alert Systems:** Implement early alert systems to timely identify at-risk students based on indicators like frequent absences or failing grades. These systems, while widespread, are only moderately effective on their own and must be paired with robust intervention strategies (Hanover Research 2014).
- **Utilize E-advising and digital tools:** Employ technology, such as online portals, course management systems, and communication platforms (e.g., email, text, social media), to provide information efficiently, track student progress and identify those veering off track; streamline basic tasks like registration and financial aid applications; enhance learning experiences and communication in support programs like Supplemental Instruction (Karp 2013; Jagers and Fletcher 2014; Rabbitoy et al. 2015)
- **Implement triage for advising:** Design a multifaceted approach that identifies students' level of need to allocate intensive, one-on-one advising to those who need it most (e.g., undecided students, those with complex challenges) (Karp 2013).
- **Simplify Structures:** Reduce student confusion and the need for constant advising by simplifying program and transfer structures. This might involve creating default course sequences or advocating for clearer statewide articulation frameworks (Jagers and Fletcher 2014).
- **Integrate personal touch points in digital systems:** Ensure that even with increased technology use, there are integrated personal “touch points” (e.g., chat with an advisor, easy appointment scheduling, proactive outreach triggered by early alerts) to provide human support when needed (Jagers and Fletcher 2014)

5) Practice Continuous Improvement and Listen to Student Voices:

- **Listen to students:** Actively solicit and incorporate student input when redesigning support services. Their candid perspectives can reveal where assistance is needed and appreciated (Arnold 2018).
- **Use Evidence-Based Decisions:** Gather, review, and analyze retention and graduation data to identify specific problems and **develop customized advising plans** based on evidence (Jagers and Fletcher 2014).

Related metrics and indicators:

1) Student progression and completion

- **Persistence and retention rates:** A primary metric is the likelihood of students persisting or retaining enrollment during the coaching/advising period and for a

sustained period thereafter. This can be tracked at six, twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four months, with effects persisting even after direct intervention ends

- **Degree/credential attainment and graduation rates:** Programs aim to increase the proportion of students who successfully complete their degrees or credentials.
- **Time to degree:** Improving the efficiency of student progress towards a degree is a key outcome.
- **Transfer success:** The rate at which students successfully transfer to a four-year institution is another important measure.

2) Academic Performance

- **Grade Point Average (GPA):** Improved GPA indicates academic success, with studies showing a significant effect on grades for mentored students.
- **Course completion and passing rates:** The likelihood of students completing and passing their courses.
- **Credit earning:** Students earning more credits indicates progress and academic success.
- **Remedial Course Progress:** For students in remedial courses, moving through these more quickly is a positive indicator.

3) Student Skill Development and Understanding

- **Self-Reported learning gains:** Assessing students' perceptions of their gains in practical competence, general education, and personal and social development due to engaged learning experiences.
- **Development of key skills:** Observing improvements in “soft skills” such as teamwork, communication (written and oral), self-awareness, self-management, and problem-solving.
- **Goal setting and planning:** Programs aim to help students develop a clear vision of their goals, connect daily activities to long-term goals, and make realistic academic and career plans.
- **Navigation and self-advocacy skills:** Evaluating students' ability to navigate the postsecondary environment, including identifying and utilizing resources, time management, and self-advocacy. This includes understanding course selection, programs of study, and transfer requirements.
- **Career Decision-Making:** Metrics related to increased career decidedness and career maturity.

4) Student experience and satisfaction

- **Student satisfaction:** Overall satisfaction with the educational experience and specifically with advising services.



- **Sense of belonging and feeling valued:** Students' perceptions of feeling valued and connected to the institution, peers, and faculty are crucial to success.
- **Student engagement:** Increased engagement in campus life and academic activities.
- **Student feedback:** Gathering candid perspectives from students regarding the assistance they received and appreciated.

5) Program efficiency and reach

- **Cost-effectiveness:** Assessing whether the benefits achieved (e.g., retention gains) outweigh the costs of implementing the advising or coaching program, potentially comparing it to other interventions like financial aid.
- **Program take-up and response rates:** Monitoring how many students engage with the coaching or advising services when offered, especially in proactive outreach models.
- **Impact on specific student populations:** Evaluating the differential effects on historically underserved student groups (e.g., African American, Latino/a, first-generation, transfer students, males), as advising and coaching can help close equity gaps.

Supporting literature

[NOTE: Many of these sources are on file at RPIE as PDFs and can be shared on request]

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