

RUNNING HEAD: Personalization in Academic Advising:

Personalization in Academic Advising: A Case Study of Components and Structure

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Abstract

(Purpose) The primary purpose of this study was to provide a blueprint and framework for how academic advisors and other educational professionals can create personalized relationships with student clients. Past research has shown that students' desire personalized relationships with academic personnel, however, little research exists on exactly how advisors and student affairs counselors can go about building a personal relationship with students within the confines of an academic relationship. (Methodology) Data obtained from participant-observation case study research is used to highlight the components and structure involved in one advisor's relationships with 11 students. Themes were extracted from observations and interviews. (Results) Nine components of "personalization" in student affairs advising are presented which encourage academic advisors and other relevant personnel to make personal connections with students beyond simple technical competencies. These components include prepping, attending, bonding, disclosing, laughing, counseling, normalizing, coaching, and continuing. A secondary aspect of this study included a focus on student attitudes regarding personalization. The student data contained herein provide, it is asserted, evidence that a personalized relationship does impact students in a positive manner. (Conclusions). Results provide a framework for academic advisors and educational personnel to use to enhance relationships with students that may ultimately help promote successful academic and educational outcomes. (Recommendations) Academic advisors and other student affairs professionals need to connect with students on a personal level in order for optimal outcomes. Educational personnel who work with students need to realize the power contained in forming "personalized" relationships and strive to attain such to benefit their student clients.

Personalization in Academic Advising: A Case Study of Components and Structure

According to Gordon (1992), creating sound developmental academic advising programs necessitates a strong focus on and consideration of the personal needs of students as well as the fostering of a caring relationship between advisor and advisee. Numerous studies have supported this proposition and have concluded that the personal relationship between advisor and advisee is a foundation for successful advising outcomes (Nadler & Nadler, 1993; Kramer, Arrington, & Chynoweth, 1985). However, just as Fiddler (1996) reported that a descriptive set of behaviors and competencies was lacking for developmental and technical advising, curiously little research currently exists on just how a caring advising relationship is to be established and sustained. Given the constraints and realities of academic advising (e.g. seeing clients only once or twice a year), it is perhaps understandable why research efforts into advising relationships have not been a major focus. There is some, although not a great amount, of research regarding this focus of study.

Daller, Creamer, and Creamer (1997) recently elaborated on the concept of personalization, which is evidenced by expressing concern for students' well being, making reference to past appointments, and otherwise asking personal and tailored questions. While their study highlighted a few aspects of personalization, it was not the primary focus of study, and a more thorough descriptive portrait of this concept is currently lacking. Despite the lack of a blueprint for accomplishing such, the development a personal relationship with advisors has consistently shown to be important and desired by students.

Clearly, the task of an academic advisor is not to solve life problems or otherwise provide personal therapy. Getting help with personal problems ranked eleventh of 15 advising functions in Eddy's (1989) study of both faculty and students - seemingly unimportant. Furthermore, Creeden (1990), found that only 7% of students viewed help with personal problems as an important aspect of advising. However, a personal relationship is consistently revealed to be a

salient and important factor in the academic advising research. According to Fielstein (1987,1989), students do want a personal relationship, but they want it constructed around academic matters. Fielstein (1987) surveyed 90 undergraduate students, and asked two relevant questions: "How important do you think it is for your advisor to be personally acquainted with you?" and "Do you think your present advisor is interested in you as a person, and is this what you want from an advisor?" (p. 36). Results were revealing. A personal relationship with advisors was either a priority or a high priority for 83.3% of the students, yet over 37% of respondents stated that they did not believe their current advisor was interested in them as a person. Wadden and Herzog (1982) surveyed 101 faculty advisors and found some support for students' perceptions. Thirty percent of respondents reported that personal involvement with advisees was not a significant part of their advising duties.

This subject continues to be underdeveloped in the literature. Especially troubling is the fact that almost all of the research into the "personal" aspects of advising are undertaken from a quantitative perspective. Padilla and Pavel's (1994) study is one of the few studies using qualitative methods, although their subject of study was only tangentially related to the concept of personalization. What they did find of note was that effective advisors utilize open-mindedness (non-judgmental attitude), sensitivity (listening to needs), and responsiveness (helping deal with red tape).

With this in mind, an answer was sought to the question: what is personalization? Based on the literature, it was and is assumed that a personalized relationship is desirable and enhances the advising encounter, but what specifically does personalization entail? Case study research is used here to highlight the components and structure of such relationships and give academic personnel a blueprint for fostering personalized relationships with students. A secondary aspect of this study included a focus on student attitudes regarding personalization. The student data contained herein provide, it is asserted, evidence that a personalized relationship does impact students in a positive manner.

Method

Design

The current study sought to complement, supplement, and further develop the existing literature by utilizing open-ended interviews and other qualitative methods to gain a more thorough picture of the advising relationship. This study utilized a participant-observational case study design, which Bogdan and Biklen (1998) described as a detailed examination of one particular setting, subject, or event, utilizing observed behaviors and interviews as the primary data sources. Bromley (1986) has called such methods, which have sometimes been unfairly maligned for not being "scientific" enough, "the bedrock of scientific investigation" (p.ix).

Theoretical Framework and Researcher's Stance

A hermeneutical perspective was chosen to view, code, and analyze the data. In the hermeneutical tradition, the researcher becomes personally involved in the process of data collection and observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Interpretation of data is driven by a preliminary understanding, and throughout the course of inquiry, interpretative corrections will be made, perceptions altered, and biases will be deconstructed. The final product is considered the best thought at the moment (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). For this researcher, the appeal of the hermeneutical process is the candid acknowledgement it makes about how the researcher is involved with the results.

Context of Study

The study was undertaken in the Student Advisement Center of the College of Education at a mid-sized university in the western United States. The center provides individual academic advising services to primarily undergraduate students who are interested in becoming teachers. Prospective college students also utilize the center for informational purposes.

Participants

Participants included one academic advisor, who was the primary focus of study, and 11 of her student clients. The advisor, Marilyn (not her real name), was a 27-year-old Caucasian

pursuing a master's degree in College Student Development, and had been working at the center as a graduate assistant for approximately 13 months prior to the commencement of the study. The students were either first or second-year education students, and were mostly female (eight females, three males).

Data Collection

Initially, the study was planned to assess how the advising center was utilized. As my investigation continued, I became less interested in the mechanics of the center and began to see the personal advising relationship as the most exciting topic of study. Preliminary observations were undertaken with two other advisors at the center. It soon became clear that focusing on all three advisors would have been excessively ambitious and the rigors of the methodology precluded such a focus. Thus, the decision was made to focus exclusively on Marilyn because she worked the most hours and saw the most clients.

Observation. For purposes of clarity, data have been collapsed and are reported in an integrated fashion. Data were collected approximately twice weekly during September and October, 1999. During these times, a total of ten 30-minute advising appointments were observed with Marilyn, including a dual session with a male and female couple who were both prospective students. Of the nine individual sessions, seven were with female clients and two were with male clients.

Before each appointment began, in the lobby, Marilyn asked permission for observation of the session. All students granted permission. I then followed Marilyn and the student to Marilyn's office and took a seat on a chair sitting behind and out of the view of Marilyn and the advisee. On each set of fieldnotes, recorded in a loose-leaf notebook, the date and time was listed, as well as a description of the student (e.g., sex, year in school, etc). As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the right hand column was used for the reflective part of fieldnotes. Observer's comments were made to help flag for themes or personal reactions to prompt further thought. The use of a hand-held tape recorder was initially considered, but it was decided that

using a recording device, especially with new advisees, might cause damage to the natural process of advising. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated that the researcher must make efforts to be "unobtrusive and non-interfering with what people normally do" (p.77). It was decided that the use of a tape recorder would jeopardize that basic assumption.

At the end of several observed sessions, I engaged Marilyn in informal conversation which made up the interview portion of the data (described below). After the completion of each individual observation and interview, the fieldnotes were separated from the interview data and set aside into separate file folders. Each observation yielded approximately four to five pages of handwritten notes, and each interview generated about three pages of handwritten notes. After each advising session and interview, I typed reflective notes to myself on a computer word processing program. These notes were later printed upon the data analysis stage.

Interviews. There were a total of five formal interviews held with Marilyn. Four of these were scheduled immediately following the advising session, and one was done informally. Each interview lasted a total of 20-30 minutes and was loosely structured, similar to the concept of a "guided conversation" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 95). Initially, the interview began with a question regarding Marilyn's general feelings of the how effective the session was, and then gentle probing questions were asked based on the responses. <<I found that Marilyn was a willing and cooperative interviewee, and offered a wealth of data>>>.

Interviews were also held with select students to assess student perceptions of advising. Most of the time, either the student voluntarily offered feedback or Marilyn specifically asked the student for feedback. If a student did not offer any kind of feedback, I asked if I could speak with him or her for approximately three to four minutes for the purposes of assessing the quality of the advising received. Using the same unstructured process that I used with Marilyn, I let the students give me their perceptions of the process, asking only two to three general questions.

Written Materials. Another component of measuring student perceptions came about in the form of thank-you notes received by Marilyn (see Figure 1). Permission was granted from

Marilyn to include examples of these personal documents, which offered a relevant picture of how students felt about her efforts.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, which has been described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) as data that comes from a multitude of different sources and is constantly being analyzed during the course of the study. In this study, data were utilized from several sources (advising sessions, personal documents, photos, etc.), and each piece of data sparked new thoughts. Data were initially read once without any prejudice or attempt to influence the organization of the results. Then, an attempt at developing themes began. The primary method for extracting themes was through data scanning and circling data that stood out as representing personalization of advising. Next to those circles, emerging themes were tentatively titled. The data was read thoroughly two more times, adjustments made, and proposed categories were listed separately. These formed the basis for the categories contained in the Results section.

Results

Below are the themes extracted from the fieldnote data. These themes are not meant to be comprehensive regarding everything done in the advising session. Rather, they are meant to paint a picture of the way in which a personalized relationship is constructed through a case study of one academic advisor.

Components and Structure of Personalization and How a Personalized Relationship is Developed

Choosing courses or going through rote requirements may seem trivial, but Marilyn explained that the power of advising transcends those functions. While Marilyn expressed that sometimes the act of advising is "all the same," forming a personal "connection" to each student helps avoid that staleness. She explained that it is rapport which allows her to be effective. I asked Marilyn if she ever advises using email, and she did not hide her disdain for it:

I don't like email. The problem is they don't come see me. There's no person to person contact. I have a student who tried to email me....he didn't keep his appointment....and I told him to get himself in here. I've got that brother-sister connection with him, where I can say 'you need to keep your appointments' and he listens to me.

One-on-one rapport is the crucial element without which, for Marilyn, effective advising cannot occur. How that personal rapport is developed will be described in the following subsections.

Prepping. For Marilyn, the personalization began before students set foot in the center. "I update their charts and look back at old notes so I don't act like I just met them," she said. "I guess it's to try to make that connection...so they'll go 'oh, she remembers.'" According to Marilyn, the fact that she only sees most students a handful of times each year necessitates good record keeping. "Most of the time, it will come back to me as I am talking to them, but since we don't see them very often it's hard to keep it all in our heads." Marilyn's preparations included accessing a student's university record on the university's centralized computer database, viewing the student's individual education file (which includes a summary of each past advising appointment), and familiarizing herself with the requirements for that student's indicated teaching major.

Attending. I observed that Marilyn's non-verbal behaviors showed care and concern. For example, an excerpt from my fieldnotes: "Relaxed...looking directly in eyes... legs folded calmly...forward leaning posture...using body as a tool...facilitates openness." Later, Marilyn elaborated on her body postures: "I think non-verbal communication makes up 80 percent of what we convey," she said. "I just use skills that come natural to me...open body...eye contact in the context of culture, that type of thing." Marilyn was observed on many occasions to get quite close to her students, sometimes as close as a few inches. The fieldnotes indicated that she did not have an aversion to working in close proximity with her clients. Physical closeness

between advisor and advisee was also promoted by a working space that utilized tables that were circular in nature.

Bonding. Results supported Frost's (1993) conclusion that advisors often engage in conversations unrelated to advising. At the beginning and end of the advising session Marilyn was often observed to ask students about things going on in their lives. "It's just natural," she said. "I just love people. I try to find out about other matters of their life." For example, consider the following exchange:

Marilyn: Oh I like your hair by the way.

Student: Oh, my boyfriend likes it like this.

Marilyn: The things you do for men. What are you thinking girl? (joking).

At the end of another advising session, Marilyn commented on a relatively large stack of notes containing documents from a previous advising session that the student was holding. Marilyn laughed and made positive reference to the personal traits of this student. "Right on!," she stated. "A fellow packrat! I save everything too!"

A discussion about the weather in Oregon with two prospective transfer students led to a discussion about the differences between the university and their current community college. One student had asked about parking on campus, which led into a discussion about living in the dormitories. "I really want to live in the dorms because my uncle made so many lifelong friends and I want that," the student said, to which Marilyn responded: "I made so many friends when I lived in the dorms."

Disclosing. Examples such as the previous sentence were commonplace in my observations. Marilyn's personal self-disclosure often resulted in self-disclosure from students, allowing the relationship to deepen. Marilyn stated that self-disclosure statements also play a role in the way she views herself professionally. "I think I like to be real," she said in an interview. "Most of the time, that allows them to be real too. There's too much distance between professional and

student." During one session, she offhandedly revealed she was from Montana. This led to an interaction highlighted below:

Student: I have relatives in Bozeman and I am thinking about working in agriculture in Montana. How'd you end up (here)?

Marilyn: Kind of like how I wound up in Bozeman. It just happened. Actually, I am in the counseling program.

This exchange led to the student asking about counseling as a career option, to which Marilyn responded by revealing her own experiences. "I really had to explore what I wanted to do with it," she said. "I interviewed a lot of people and had to get a grasp on what I wanted to do." She tied this into a discussion of the importance of informational interviewing. In revealing her own experiences, Marilyn was able to identify with the student's concerns and served as a role model.

Another time, she was talking to a young woman from her home state, and the student became animated discussing her experiences as a new resident. The student and Marilyn leaned closer in to each other, and in my fieldnotes, I made a comment that the student's face seemed to show excitement about being able to connect with someone. Students may have begun their advising encounters simply expecting help with classes, but they appeared to leave with a satisfaction that someone in the university bureaucracy was willing relate to them as a person. Additionally, self-disclosure was encompassed through other personally revealing acts, though not strictly verbal in nature. At the end of the session with the two transfer students mentioned above, Marilyn presented a rose to each. "Today it's 'community day,'" she said, "and I got a bunch of roses, so I just thought I'd give you one." The two students appeared to stare in disbelief. With perfect timing, the center's director, who was standing nearby, didn't miss a beat and said, "Just to let you know, we're not always like this!" The participants broke out into laughter, which was another example of an important observed aspect of personalized advising.

Laughing. Marilyn used humor and laughter frequently during the advising format. With a student who was worried about getting a job after graduation, she explained the job market, and then added the humorous comment, "oh, I forgot to tell you that you may want to get a job when you graduate!" Later, she became distracted by the classical music that the secretary (a close friend of Marilyn's) had playing in the background. "Turn off that elevator music or I am going to die of boredom!" she shouted, at which the advisee broke into laughter. When the student said "I had one other question," Marilyn responded "No, sorry, we're done," and again broke out into her characteristic laughter. "But for you....I guess I can help," she said.

With another student, her thinking power was not quite all there. "Now, you have to take the computer test at Barnes & Noble," she mistakenly said. Upon realizing her mistake, with a look of surrender and laughing profusely, she stated that "this is what happens when you don't get enough sleep!" It should be noted that this exchange took place immediately following root canal surgery, and Marilyn, by her self-report, was not feeling well. That her attempts at humor were still undertaken underscored the importance she placed on this component of advising.

Counseling. Using all of the methods described above, Marilyn related to her students on a personal level, and this allowed, at times, for an ever deeper connection – one in which she actually helped students through their own personal challenges. One day, in the midst of an interview, Marilyn took a phone call, and I was present to hear this call. From the tone of Marilyn's voice and the things she was saying, the student was obviously emotional about a traumatic event. "I just can't imagine the load you have on your right now," Marilyn spoke. "Gosh, it breaks my heart to see you like this. I am glad you trust me enough to share this all with me." I later asked Marilyn about this phone call but she expressed a reluctance to talk about what had happened for fear of breaking confidentiality.

In another interview, Marilyn related a story about a former college football player who had been mis-advised at his former school and pushed into only easy classes. "They gave him no

direction, it's like all they cared about was football." As a result, even though he had 96 credits at his previous school, he was still 72 credits shy of graduating. Marilyn explained:

He was very upset. His Grandma is very ill and he needs to take care of her. He's dropping his classes here, so he's going to take F's in them. By the way he walked out of here, I think he's going to quit school. He has this rage, I basically listened and validated that. I told him I understood his frustration. He was in tears. This big football guy. He left because he was about to bawl.

I asked Marilyn if this was the first student who cried in front of her. She chuckled.

No, no, no. People cry with me all the time. They come in and they tell me their serious personal stuff. It's like I have to let them vent, and if I didn't let them get that out of the way, they may never have that chance again. This may be their only opportunity to get help, to make that connection.

I pointed out to her that she uses the word "connect" an awful lot. She smiled with a knowing acknowledgement. It should be noted that two days later this football player came back to Marilyn and told her that he was going to stay in school, due in part to her help.

Normalizing. Another observed component of the personalized relationship is letting the student know that what he or she is feeling is okay. For example, consider the following exchange:

Marilyn: I am not going to ask you to make a decision in five minutes. It's totally okay for you to be undecided. It's important that you realize that.

Student: I am so stressing.

Marilyn: It's weird not knowing, I know, but it's something most of us go through in order to grow.

Student: Do I have to? Can't I just stay here in your office?

That last statement appears to show the student was being impacted by what Marilyn was attempting to do - namely, make the student feel normal when her indecision was making her feel anything but. Later, in an interview, Marilyn expressed a core belief that not only is indecision acceptable, but it is to be supported and normalized as a common experience for most students. "What worries me is the freshmen that already know what they want to do," she said.

With a secondary education sophomore who was ambivalent about which direction to take in her studies and life, Marilyn reframed her indecision as normal, and explored the student's strengths. Marilyn had the student explore areas in which she was interested, mainly math and English, and promoted the fact that she was strong in both areas as a positive (whereas the student saw indecision as a negative). Marilyn encouraged the student to view it as a future employer would. "They'd go 'wow, she's right brained and left brained,' Marilyn said. The student kept repeating the statement that "I want to be challenged." Marilyn used this statement as a way to promote the woman's exploration of both math and English: "Maybe by doing both you can get the challenge you need," she stated.

Coaching. For the purposes of this study, Marilyn's attempts to maximize students' self-understanding and growth have been defined as "coaching." Marilyn appeared aware of individual differences between students and strived to highlight these. For example, questions such as "How many credits would you like to take?," "would you like to take an introductory elementary education class?," and "how comfortable are you with math?," not only helped her assessment, but also let students know that their preferences were important. Marilyn asked questions tentatively, and used her voice as a tool, manipulating the inflection and tone when asking questions. Questions such as those presented above also appeared to serve the purpose of promoting a student focus on their own personal needs.

Marilyn was observed to "coach" about learning styles. When a student asked for Marilyn to put something down on paper so she would not forget, Marilyn immediately seized upon this as a learning opportunity. "That's how I am too," she said. "I am very visual. I have to see it. It's really helpful to know how you learn best. It's so interesting how people are so individually different." This topic was also discussed outside the context of the advising relationship. One afternoon, during a quiet time when she had no appointments, Marilyn and a student sat in the lobby, informally discussing the subject of learning styles. This subject obviously held her attention. Coaching was also observed to involve more direct and action-oriented advocacy. During one session, Marilyn was observed to empower a student into action. This particular student was concerned about the rising cost of tuition. Marilyn intervened and encouraged the student to make her voice heard.

Student: Are they gonna raise tuition?

Marilyn: Yeah, I think four dollars per credit. If you don't raise a stink, then they will implement it. If you don't want it raised, you've got to speak your mind.

Continuing. To promote a smooth continuation of the relationship, Marilyn explicitly asked her students for a return visit. "If you have any problems, come back and see me, okay?," she told one student, and she used a variation of that line with each observed session. "I tell students they can and should come back," Marilyn stated. "I don't even care if they switch to another department. I have that connection and I am going to use it."

Impact on Students: How Students Respond to Personalized Advising

When asked how Marilyn knows if she has been effective, she responded matter of factly, "I ask." She was indeed observed to do this at the end of most of the sessions. All observed students responded affirmatively and indicated that her efforts were appreciated. At the end of one session came the following spontaneous feedback from a student: "You answered more than

I expected. I mean, the advisors at (another college), they don't want to help you. They're like 'do this. See ya.'"

I took a few students aside who did not offer feedback and asked questions about what they had experienced. One young woman was undecided and had expressed anxiety over that fact. "She did a great job," she said of Marilyn. "I needed an outside source to tell me what I am feeling is okay, and she did that. She comforted me and calmed me down." When asked about Marilyn's strengths, a male student responded without hesitation. "It's fun!," he stated. "She's herself. She's not fake like some other people around this place (the university)." Interestingly, with this particular male student, Marilyn had stated that she was not in the best frame of mind. "I am like mush right now," she said. "I don't have anything left in my head."

Marilyn also offered me access to some of the notes she has received from students, which portrayed the degree to which the students appreciated her personal efforts (see Figure 1). She also showed me a candle that she had received as a gift from one of her students. "It makes it even more special because she made it," Marilyn said. "I had come in after a totally bad day and this was laying on my desk and I couldn't believe it. I had no idea how much you actually affect students."

I asked Marilyn why she thought students were so receptive to her. "There's a lot of people out there (at the university) who treat them poorly. If you hit the wrong person on the wrong day, you have a negative outlook. What's sad is that a lot of faculty don't realize what they could be getting out of it. I get something out of it, or I wouldn't be doing it."

Discussion

This study was unique for several reasons. First and foremost was the fact that it focused specifically on how a personalized relationship is constructed, and secondly, following Nadler and Nadler's (1993) recommendation, it focused on actual advising behaviors through the use of qualitative observation of live interaction.

It was found that the relationship espoused by Marilyn is developmental in nature and has elements of a personal relationship, although it is centered around academic matters. Marilyn personalized the relationship by preparing, using helpful non-verbal communication, allowing personal talk and even counseling when appropriate, helping the student feel normal, aiding the student in self-understanding, using personal self disclosure to prompt the same, utilizing humor, and making efforts to continue the relationship. Kramer, Arrington, and Chynoweth (1985) have shown that students desire advisors who are interested in them and recommend that advisors build personal relationships with students. All of the methods mentioned in the present investigation served the purpose of doing just that.

These components support Padilla and Pavel's (1994) findings. Marilyn performed her job with a friendly, non-judgmental attitude and held a strong sensitivity to individual needs. She exemplified elements found by Gordon (1992) through empowering students, being aware of developmental needs, and by exemplifying counseling skills in action (listening). Marilyn was also found to support all of the advising functions desired by students, including helping students clarify life goals, attain decision-making skills, and achieve self-understanding (Creeden, 1990; Fielstein, 1989).

Interestingly, despite the seemingly discrete categories described above, it is asserted that how a relationship is constructed can never be entirely clear. The process was often not linear. In fact, the data in partial supported a postmodern theory of advising (Stowe, 1996). Stowe (1996) related that a modernist advisor pushes for linearity, order, and prediction. A postmodern advisor accepts chaos, knowing that order will eventually rise from it. The data in the present investigation are consistent with this contention. Marilyn supported undecided students in their undecidedness. A more traditional advisor may have pushed for a decision.

Hermeneutical Deconstruction

Interestingly, this non-linearity is one of the reasons why did I choose the relationship as the object of study. Why was this so? In assessing my motives, I found that it was a reaction

against the dryness of quantitative studies that described advising competencies in technical, autocratic ways. I saw this research as a way to breathe life into what some may consider a stale subject. In qualitative research, of course, this bias is allowed, as long as one is candid about it. The manner in which this study was presented and the way in which the categories were conceptualized was also the result of this researcher's influence and preferences. Why did I organize this paper the way that I did? My initial assumption was that the data could be coded into neat, tight categories. Only after grappling with the wealth of data, and with the methodology, did I come to understand the challenge and limitations of presenting this subject in the manner I did. Separating otherwise continuous streams of conversation into dichotomous categories and distilling a personal relationship was difficult indeed. Despite the challenge of presenting the essence of a personal relationship in a research paper, I have organized this paper into categories. I realize that the postmodern view of advising as non-linear is somewhat belied by the fact it was presented in a linear fashion, but for the sake of clarity, at this point in time, there may perhaps be no way other way to the data. Perhaps future research may present the data in another, more continuous fashion.

In the hermeneutical tradition, this researcher must be candid about another potential limitation of the research. Over the course of this study, Marilyn and I developed a relationship that was friendly and personal. The ease with which she spoke in interviews may have been due to a self-presentation bias on her part. Furthermore, although I believe I was precise in reporting exactly what I saw, the results may have been colored by an unconscious attempt on my part to portray Marilyn favorably. For that, I defer judgement to the reader.

While it was outside of the scope of this study, future case study research should consider a focus on the role of advisor gender within the advisory dyad and its possible influence on personalization style. Future research may also concentrate on the impact an advising relationship may have on the self-concepts of both advisor and advisee, how the relationship comes to a conclusion, and as Daller, Creamer, and Creamer (1997) suggest, how an advising

relationship changes through time. Data here showed that mood of the advisor was perceived by the advisor to influence the quality of the relationship, and future research may focus on that domain as well.

Conclusion and Implications

The components and structure of personalized advising presented herein are offered to supplement the quantitatively dominated field of academic advising, which also has often relied exclusively on self-report methods (Nadler & Nadler, 1993). This work has illustrated important aspects, through behavioral observation, of how to build and maintain a relationship with advisees, and may allow academic advisors to pursue a personalized relationship with advisees through the use of the identified components. As Nadler and Nadler (1993) suggest, building personal relationships will ultimately help promote retention, and timely graduation, and overall student success.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Thank you note received by Marilyn.

Figure 1

