



The Graduate Advisor Handbook: A Student-Centered Approach

Shore, Bruce M.

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Book Review

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As the director of the Doctor of Ministry degree program at my school, I quickly grabbed *The Handbook for Advising Graduate Students* in hopes that it would serve as a companion for advisors in the program. Perusing the table of contents continued this hope. Many advisors of graduate students follow the axiom of teaching: *we advise as we were advised*. Advisors generally lack the time to reflect on and improve our practices of advising above or beyond what we ourselves received. Additionally, program directors rarely take the necessary time to invest in the pool of graduate advisors for the sake of our students. *The Handbook for Advising Graduate Students* attempts to invite reflective practice toward improving the graduate student experience.

The book is a primer on the intention and attention necessary for the advising relationship. The table of contents alone is instructive for advisors to remember what matters in advising; the order moves from defining the relationship, to student-centered practices, to boundaries and sticky situations, to career support, and finally to developing a culture for student-centered advising.

Part one covers the basics of the student-advisor relationship, namely offering different models for advising. Bruce Shore names three dominant models for how advisors or students select one another: pedigree (specialist relationship), patronage (for research funding), or kindred spirit (interpersonal connection) (10-11). Regardless of which of these models an advisor chooses, Shore argues it must be tied to the student's interest and the advisor's strengths.

Chapter two takes up practices for student-centered advising. Shore makes clear that student-

centered advising is not coddling or enabling; it is empowerment. He writes, “The most valuable thing an advisor can do with a graduate student is to welcome and empower her or him from the first encounter into the shared process of creating knowledge, conceptualizing grant applications, preparing conference presentations, writing for publication, helping with editing and so on” (22). Advising is mentoring for the academic vocation and encouragement toward career fulfillment. Shore emphasizes that time counts, especially time spent in providing feedback and being accessible (37).

Advisors need to develop the skills that increase advisor accessibility and student empowerment. Shore proposes this work as an interrogative skill known as scaffolding. Scaffolding makes the student an active participant in the graduate school process and locates the advisor as the interrogator toward student progress. The advisor’s role is to regularly ask, “Where are you now? What is the next step? What can I do to help you get to that next step?” (41). This last question is an evaluative step that takes time and presence, yet also solidifies the relationship toward its necessary end – degree completion and employability.

The book concludes with a chapter for degree program advisors. Advisor development or enrichment is key in developing a culture of student-centered advising. Just as the scaffolding process works for students, deans and program directors can use the scaffolding questions to assist advisors. Appendix 3 provides a checklist for assessing advisors according to student-centered practices.

The Handbook for Advising Graduate Students is an important idea and assists program directors and advisors in recognizing the content and process of the advising relationship. The book raises important issues in advising graduate students, but is limited in its ability to coach advisors in the work. Shore offers several helpful tricks from his own work in advising, yet because his experiences is the only perspective included, the book lacks the best practices of advising that could come from a broader work engaging multiple types of advisors from multiple kinds of institutions.

Shore’s volume gives reason to write a second book on advising graduate students. Advisors and program directors need a volume that gathers best practices from graduate student advisors and that also includes the voices of students. I would recommend that such a volume adopt a success case methodology that begins with asking recent PhD and professional program graduates about their experiences with advisors. A volume that gathers student stories and advisors’ self-understanding would be helpful in developing advisor training and enrichment exercises for doctoral and professional degree programs.

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