that distinguish between consequences
sequences to individuals.
much to ask that each advisor put out
help students connect their academic work with their personal passions. But whenever this happens, I think it must be good. By the way, I should add one last point. Although it took a long time for me to really understand my advisor's personal political views, because he tried to keep them out of our discussions, it turns out we disagree on more things than we agree on. But I think in retrospect that only added to the strength of our work together.

Young women and men arriving at college immediately confront a set of decisions. Which courses to choose? What subject to specialize in? What activities to join? How much to study? How to study? Such decisions are intensely personal. Often they are made with little information. Yet their consequences can be enormous. A subject that is bypassed, or study habits that are mismatched for certain classes, can result in limited options, reduced opportunities, or closed doors. Advisors play a critical role. They can ask a broad array of questions, and make a few suggestions, that can affect students in a profound and continuing way.

The Power of Good Advice

During more than ten years of research for this book, I visited more than ninety colleges. Some are highly selective. Some are close to open admissions. Most are in between. They include private and public colleges, large and small, state universities and junior colleges. Of all the challenges

that both faculty and students choose to mention, good academic advising ranks number one.

Agreement is widespread that academic advising is important. There is also agreement that the best advising is tailored to each undergraduate's unique situation—his or her particular background, strengths, areas that need improvement, and hopes and dreams. But different campuses have widely different resources for advising. A small, private liberal arts college with 2,000 students nearly always will design a different advising system from a large, public state university with 20,000, simply because of different resource constraints.

Several findings about good advising have emerged from our student interviews—findings that may be helpful to advisors on many campuses. And the good news about these points is that they are relatively easy for advisors to share with students and for students to implement.

In particular, one remarkably simple suggestion comes up over and over as students reflect on their own college experience. The suggestion builds on the obvious idea that part of a great college education depends upon human relationships. One set of such relationships should, ideally, develop between each student and one or several faculty members. While I say this is an obvious idea, many new students do not mention this point when I ask about their plans and goals for their college experience. So I bring it up when advising new students.

Each year I meet one-on-one with several new students. And each year our conversations follow a similar pattern. We begin with a discussion of the student's goals at college. Then we move on to a short conversation about the student's background. And then we turn to the main event—a discussion of a "study plan." We discuss what courses the

student will take in this first year, and how those may lead to future courses. My special effort is to encourage students to reflect on what courses, taken in that critical first year, will most help them to make wise, informed choices in the following three years. I warn students against simply choosing random classes that sound interesting, with no real idea of how taking certain classes may help them make decisions about future courses, and even about their major or area of concentration.

Then we come to the part of our conversation that I look forward to most. I ask, "So, now that we have had this conversation, what do you see as your job for this term?" Just about all students answer that their job is to work hard and to do well here. I press them. I ask what else might they set as a goal. This time their responses often emphasize participating in campus activities. And again I press them to say more about their goal for the semester.

By now, most students look puzzled. They wonder what I am getting at. And then I share with them the single most important bit of advice I can possibly give to new advisees: "Your job is to get to know one faculty member reasonably well this semester, and also to have that faculty member get to know you reasonably well."

It is clear that most incoming students have not thought about this goal quite so directly. I point out that achieving this goal may require some effort and planning. Yet think of the benefits. Even if you only succeed half the time, I remind each new student, that means in your eight semesters here you will get to know four professors. And they will get to know you. Then I mention a very practical reward for achieving this goal. In senior year, I tell them, when you are looking for a job, or applying to a graduate or professional school, or for some sort of fellowship after college, you will have four

professors who can help you, who can write recommendations, who can serve as references.

I have done this with new students for nearly a decade. As my first-year advisees approach graduation, many tell me that this advice was the single most helpful suggestion they got in freshman year. Many of my colleagues now give their own advisees this advice as well. I understand that on some large campuses it may be far harder for students to implement this idea. Yet I would still urge any student to make the effort. Suppose on certain larger campuses a student only gets to know two professors reasonably well in four years, rather than one per semester. I am convinced that student will be far better off, and will have a far richer experience, than if he or she gets to know no professors at all.

Learning from Successful Students

How can we learn what good advising involves? Since it is not possible to do a controlled experiment, in which one group gets a certain kind of advising and another doesn't, we can try to identify people who clearly succeeded at college. Then we can retrospectively explore what impact a certain type of academic advising might have had on those people. Retrospective analyses can easily be criticized as less than ideal in statistical rigor, especially for making causal inferences from treatment to outcomes. Nonetheless, I had to start somewhere. As it turns out, these conversations with particularly successful students are turning up a fascinating perspective about good advising.

The students I chose to interview were Rhodes and Marshall Scholars. I thought such students, who clearly were highly successful in college, might have some insights and ideas about what constitutes good advising. Clearly some-