

**Giving Easy Advice:  
What Responsibility Do Grad Students Have to Promote the  
University's Broader Educational Goals<sup>1</sup>**

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Barb is a third-year graduate teaching assistant for the Chemistry Department at Liberal Arts University. One day Tony Bologna, a Chemistry major interested in pre-medicine, shows up at Barb's office hours to talk about the recent midterm exam. After going over the exam, they start chatting about Tony's plans for the following semester. Tony proceeds to complain that he has to take a heavy course load, including Organic Chemistry and Physics.

"I'm still trying to figure out the rest of my schedule," Tony explained, "but I really don't want another difficult class. You don't by any chance know of any super easy course I could take, do you? You know ... something that wouldn't bog me down and take up too much of my study time?"

"How are you doing on your Gen. Ed. requirements?" Barb asked.

"I haven't satisfied the Civics requirement yet. I just think it's kind of stupid that they even make us take that stuff," Tony complained. "I want to be a doctor, and most of these Gen. Ed. requirements are just completely irrelevant and a complete waste of time."

"In that case, I know of just the class for you," she replied. "I did my undergrad work here too, and I hated taking that stuff. I got really lucky, though. My old advisor clued me in to a really easy section of *American Government* taught by Professor D.C. Washington. He's a complete pushover—I didn't get much out of it, but at least I was able to satisfy the requirement without taking up too much of my time. I even managed to get an A with hardly any effort at all. Come to think of it, I don't even think that anyone in the class got less than a B+."

"Great! That sounds perfect!" Tony beamed as he packed up his belongings. "I'm going to register for that right away. I'll have to tell my friends about it too!"

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<sup>1</sup> This case is adapted from a case previously presented by the authors at the 2010 National Academic Advisor's Association (NACADA), North Central Region 6 Conference, and soon to be presented at the 2010 NACADA Annual Conference. That case—entitled "Spirit v Letter"—is available online at:  
[http://ethics.unl.edu/ethics\\_resources/online/promoting\\_ethics\\_in\\_academic\\_advising.pdf](http://ethics.unl.edu/ethics_resources/online/promoting_ethics_in_academic_advising.pdf)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you think that Barb's advice to Tony was appropriate? Why or why not? Would you react differently if this advice was coming from a research assistant, rather than a teaching assistant? A faculty member? An undergraduate advisor? Why or why not?
2. What would we think about this situation if Tony was a first-year grad student asking Barb about the easiest way to satisfy the department's requirements (rather than the University's General Education requirements)? What if Tony was trying to figure out the best strategy for getting funding in the future?
3. Graduate student assistants are frequently good cheerleaders for their discipline. What is the grad student's role in promoting the overarching educational goals of the university at large? Do we need to be cheerleaders for these goals as well?
4. Do you think that you, or the other graduate students in your department, have an adequate understanding of what UNL's overall educational goals are? Of you're your department's overall educational goals? Who has a responsibility to make sure that we actually understand those goals? Who in the original case seems to have failed in their responsibilities?