



# Clarifying student support roles helps staff and students thrive

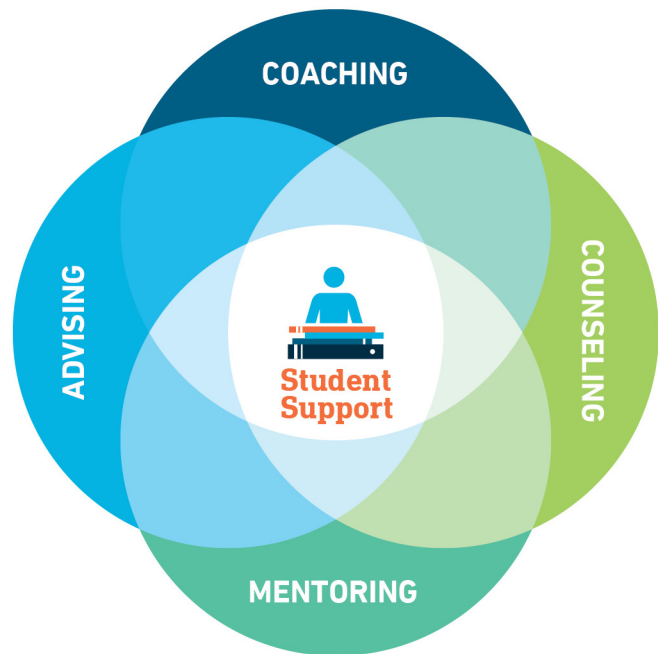
## Coaching, advising, counseling and mentoring all differ — yet can effectively work together to drive student persistence.

Student support roles at colleges and universities take on many forms: admissions staff, mental health counselors and advisors, to name a few. Each is important on its own but can be even more effective when paired with one-on-one, direct student coaching from InsideTrack. Our research-proven coaching methodology adds an important layer to any student support intervention, creating a roadmap for improved student success.

### Understanding student support roles

What's the difference between advising and coaching? How can counseling and coaching complement one another in order to best help students? And what role does a mentor play in conjunction with a rigorously trained student success coach?

As a way to provide a better understanding of what coaching is and how it works, we compare and contrast three common student support services to the role of student success coaches. Providing role clarity — and showing how the different roles can work together — can help institutions increase retention, persistence and completion for all students.





# Advising and Coaching:

Both positively impact student experiences and boost persistence and completion rates

## What is advising?

Advisors are the go-to experts in policy, procedure, campus resources and degree requirements. Their focus is often on a specific academic need and ensuring the student has a plan for meeting that need (such as assistance with registration, a degree plan, resources for academic support, etc.). Sometimes that plan is co-created with the student using a developmental advising approach, while other times the advisor will point the student toward resources or recommend specific next steps using a more directive advising approach. Academic advisors are adept at working with students to select programs that lead to a chosen career path, and they typically work only within the academic sphere.

## What is coaching?

Coaching moves beyond the realm of academics, creating a collaborative, individually tailored approach to address each student's needs. Coaching typically takes a proactive approach to both short- and long-term success and can be implemented separately from or, ideally, alongside advising services. InsideTrack Coaching is further distinguished by our [research-proven methodology](#), designed to include holistic assessment of potential risk factors and development of specific cognitive and noncognitive skills to help students overcome barriers. Coaching carefully balances meeting the immediate needs of students and nurturing long-term personal growth and development. This process helps students build skills that will serve them well each day, overcome bumps in the road and successfully achieve their goals.



## ONE SCENARIO, TWO APPROACHES

Let's say an upset student reaches out because they received a bill they weren't expecting. How might an advisor and coach differ in communicating with the student?

**The advisor** may explain information about fees and ask about the student's funding sources. The advisor also helps identify which departments might be involved, then refers the student to the financial aid office, veteran's benefit office and/or the bursar's office, as applicable.

**The coach** may help the student articulate their concern by asking a series of open-ended questions. The coach will help the student create questions for each department to help them get the answers they're looking for, while building confidence. The coach will also ensure the student commits to a plan for connecting with the appropriate department and schedules a follow-up coaching session to check in on their progress.

## Co-existing and collaborating for the win

Advisors and coaches both play a critical role in higher education, and the work they do with students should be seen as symbiotic. In fact, the best scenario for student success is when coaching and advising complement one another. When this happens, students get the wraparound support that helps them feel seen and empowers them to overcome barriers so they can continue along their educational pathway.



# Counseling and Coaching:

Both address student wellbeing, support development and help learners work toward their goals

## What is counseling?

For this higher ed comparison, we are focusing on an institution's licensed mental health counselors. Campus counseling centers typically offer services such as risk assessments and diagnosis of mental health disorders, treatment for anxiety and depression, therapy sessions, counseling groups, and other support and prevention programs. As a growing number of students struggle with anxiety, depression, uncertainty and any number of life stressors, they have been increasingly seeking out mental health counseling for assistance.

By creating a safe and confidential environment, counselors empower learners to understand the "why" behind their emotions, offering professional interventions that are essential for positive mental health.

## What is coaching?

Student success coaching refers to a proactive, collaborative relationship in which a coach works one-on-one to help students address any challenges they're facing on the way to short- and long-term success. Coaches support each student holistically and balance meeting their immediate needs with helping them problem-solve — making sure students know how to find and use various institutional resources. Coaching sessions may touch on personal aspects of a student's life, especially those that are impeding the student's overall wellbeing and/or ability to succeed. InsideTrack coaches are trained in trauma-informed, healing-centered support frameworks, meeting learners with awareness and understanding in challenging moments. Coaches are also trained on when to suggest licensed counseling services and have a list of appropriate resources to share.

InsideTrack coaches can offer additional support through our [Crisis Support Services \(CSS\) team](#) when situations escalate beyond the normal parameters of coaching services — such as food insecurity, family trauma or suicidal ideation. This adds another level of support for students needing emergency assistance.

## ONE SCENARIO, TWO APPROACHES

Imagine a first-generation learner who is balancing a full-time job and a heavy course load. Lately, they have been missing classes and feeling a deep sense of anxiety about whether they will be able to balance all their responsibilities.

**A licensed counselor** provides a safe space for the learner to explore the root causes of their anxiety. They might work together to identify triggers, process related past experiences and develop positive coping mechanisms. The counselor focuses on the learner's mental health and emotional wellbeing, helping them move from distress to stability.

**The coach** meets the learner with curiosity and clarity by helping them look at the big picture through a holistic assessment. They might discuss how the learner's work schedule is impacting their sleep and study time, for example. The coach may empower the learner to advocate for themselves by drafting an email to their professor or developing a strong study plan to keep them on track amid their busy schedule.

## A powerful team

When licensed mental health counselors and student success coaches collaborate, support is transformative. Students who are struggling with mental health, wellness and/or academic challenges can benefit from working with both coaches and counselors, as this powerful combination of holistic support can help them persist and complete their degree.





# Mentoring and Coaching:

Both encourage participation and success while helping students reach their full potential

## What is mentoring?

Mentors offer advice drawn from their own lives and serve more of a teaching function, with their “training” often coming from personal and work experiences. They’re typically volunteers, serving as mentors in addition to their schooling or work. Mentors are usually chosen for their specific experience — their position in a particular job or field — and may be able to introduce the student mentee to people of influence within an industry or organization. Many students view their mentors as role models who can help guide them along a particular career path.

## What is coaching?

Coaching is also based on building trust and personal connection, though it tends to be more formal and structured than mentoring. InsideTrack Coaching follows a research-proven methodology that includes holistic assessment across eight focus areas using a framework called the [focus wheel](#) — focusing on topics ranging from academics and wellbeing to finances and managing commitments. Coaching is proactive, creating a collaborative, individually tailored approach to each student’s needs. Coaches nurture long-term personal growth and development through [small, meaningful changes](#) and the integration of new strategies, habits and mindsets into learners’ lives.

## ONE SCENARIO, TWO APPROACHES

Let’s say a student is leaning toward engineering as their major. They’re thinking about becoming a civil engineer, but they want to explore other engineering paths and related careers that could require a different degree.

**The mentor** starts by getting to know the student and building a personal connection. The mentor might be a student in the college’s engineering program or an alumnus who works as a civil engineer. The information they provide is informal and based on their own experience. The mentor provides advice to the student and tells them what they recommend, based on conversations the mentor and student have had about the student’s personal hopes, challenges and goals for their degree.

**The coach** starts with a holistic assessment, asking the student a variety of questions to get to the heart of their goals in pursuing an engineering-related degree. In doing so, the coach learns that the student had difficulties with algebra in high school and is now struggling with their first college calculus course, which is a prerequisite to their engineering degree. Working together, the coach and student make a plan for accessing tutoring for additional math help. Over the course of multiple sessions, they create a roadmap that will help the student determine the best engineering pathway for them based on their core values and career aspirations — and help them thrive once they’re on the right path.

## Better together

Mentors and coaches both play a positive, supportive role. In their own way, each one helps students build skills they will use every day while working to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. The work of mentors and coaches is complementary and ultimately gives students the knowledge, skills and beliefs to persist and complete.



## Strong alone, stronger together

On their own, advising, counseling and mentoring are each crucial resources in the student support toolbox. Adding coaching to the mix of existing institutional services creates a collaborative process that integrates with and furthers institutional efforts — whether that's enrollment, retention, re-enrollment or career support. Providing one-on-one student success coaching also gives learners the reassurance that they have a team supporting them to completion.

Through capacity-building and training for student support staff, InsideTrack can help institutions develop an on-site coaching program and integrate a holistic coaching methodology across student support teams. Our specialized coach trainers provide in-depth and ongoing training using our evidence-based, research-proven coaching methodology, allowing institutions to create scalable, sustainable impact for years to come.

The bottom line? Aligning cross-functional student support roles creates the ideal partnership to address student challenges, support institutional goals and improve student outcomes. Together, we can make that happen.



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