TIP: When in Crisis, See Your Advisor

by Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., ACSW

National research indicates an unexpected cause for students failing and dropping out of college.

I ask my freshmen the question, “What is the number one reason that students bomb out of college?” I get a variety of answers that include ideas like “party too much,” “not ready for college,” “poor study habits,” and “just being lazy.”

None of these are correct. The most frequently occurring reason that students fail and drop out of college is personal crisis. For example: a close family member or friend has died. I warn students to remember that college grades are permanent—that completing college requires emotional strength more so than intelligence. To be accepted into college, the student has demonstrated that he/she has met the intelligence requirement. In today’s world, coping skills are probably more important than intellectual skills.

I advise student this: If you are facing a crisis, see your advisor. Your advisor must know the situation (even things like being pregnant). Your advisor can help you manage your schedule and can become your advocate. Most importantly, if your coping strategies can’t handle the situation, DROP OUT! You can always come back later. Students will not learn when their head is wrapped in a crisis.

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., ACSW, is a professor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.