The College of Charleston established the Distinguished Advising Award in 1994 to recognize a faculty member who has demonstrated sustained dedication to students in the area of academic advising. This year’s recipient is Dr. Robert Westerfelhaus from the Department of Communication.

Part of what distinguishes Robert’s advising is how he customizes his approach to individual students and their needs. He knows that students differ dramatically in a host of ways – in terms of academic ability, personality, professional aspirations, discipline and drive, intellectual curiosity – and he understands they need different kinds of assistance from their advisor. Some need a guide to help them wade through all their curricular options and navigate their way to graduation by making wise course choices. Others need a cheerleader to pick them up when they are discouraged or struggling. He appreciates that at times advisors must challenge students; at other moments, an advisor needs to console or stop talking all together and listen to students. Robert’s approach to student advising calibrates these many dynamics and more. He weighs when to push forward and pull back, when to offer counsel and serve as a mentor, when to scold or challenge or serve as a sounding board – because at the end of the day, as different as students can be, he knows they will all need him to play many roles. For Robert, that is the essential art and craft of advising.

Though there is no “one-size-fits-all” advising to Robert, there is a common core to his approach: he takes whatever time is required to know his advisees and he devotes considerable effort to care about each of them. Whoever the student is, whatever abilities, goals or predispositions they possess, he will be there to support them. This is also what makes Robert such an effective advocate for his students; he helps them earn the recognition they deserve and attain the intellectual heights they can reach. To his colleagues and peers, it is what makes him one of the most thoughtful and thorough advisers in the Department of Communication.

It is clear that Dr. Robert Westerfelhaus is a dedicated advisor who has the enthusiastic support of his department and the gratitude of his students. We are pleased to recognize him with the College of Charleston’s 2019 Distinguished Advising Award.