



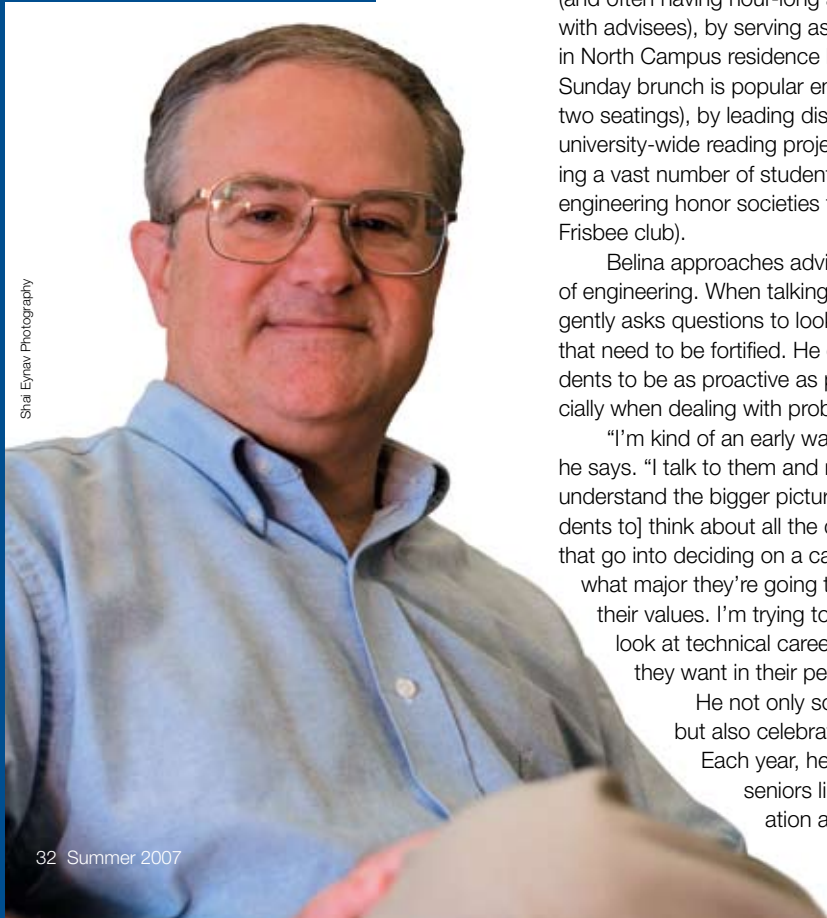
HOMETOWN HERO

Vitamin P and proactive problem solving

ADVISING BELINA-STYLE



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Shah Eynaw Photography

In a big sunlit office where the door is always open, Assistant Director of Electrical and Computer Engineering John Belina expounds on his Vitamin P theory below a clock made of a real pizza and a poster of Ed and Ralph from the Honeymooners.

It's a relaxed environment that undergraduates find very reassuring, and

Belina has planned it that way. His avuncular manner and openness are the reasons he has recently been awarded the university's Kendall S. Carpenter Memorial Advising Award. The \$5,000 award recognizes "sustained and distinguished contributions of professional faculty and senior lecturers to undergraduate advising." Previously, he was named the 2006–2009 Rosenblatt Endowed Faculty Fellow for his sustained contributions to students outside the classroom and to the life of the residential communities.

"Advising is one of the most important things at Cornell because [the university] is very decentralized," says Belina. "Students really need help figuring out what's out there."

Belina helps students in many ways—by teaching courses, by serving as an adviser (and often having hour-long appointments with advisees), by serving as a faculty fellow in North Campus residence halls (where his Sunday brunch is popular enough to require two seatings), by leading discussions in the university-wide reading project, and by advising a vast number of student groups (from engineering honor societies to the co-ed Frisbee club).

Belina approaches advising as a form of engineering. When talking to a student, he gently asks questions to look for weak spots that need to be fortified. He encourages students to be as proactive as possible, especially when dealing with problems.

"I'm kind of an early warning system," he says. "I talk to them and make sure they understand the bigger picture. [I want students to] think about all the different pieces that go into deciding on a career—not just what major they're going to be, but also their values. I'm trying to get people to look at technical careers to go with what they want in their personal lives."

He not only solves problems, but also celebrates successes.

Each year, he helps engineering seniors line up for graduation and marches with

them. And he keeps in touch with alumni. He enjoys in particular when students who have gone on to medical school come back and tell him, "We hear how everybody is saying this is impossible and it's so difficult. I didn't find that at all. It seemed very doable."

"I think they were well prepared," he chuckles.

"John is extraordinarily attentive and generous with his time," says David Delchamps, the electrical and computer engineering advising coordinator, who nominated Belina for the Carpenter award. "[He's] willing to talk with any student about essentially anything, including academic interests; concerns about whether he or she is following the right path in school and/or life; and questions about majors, colleges, and special programs at Cornell. He has extraordinary success. His touch is truly magical."

"As a faculty fellow, John sponsors and attends a large number of programs that we do for residents," says resident adviser Branden Wells Buehler '08. "He's gone on a bus trip to New York City to see "Avenue Q" with residents, sponsored movie nights at Cornell Cinema, been to our study breaks, and so much more. John is everywhere!"

"John Belina is the best professor I've had," says Matt Haberland '07, the 2006 president of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, which Belina advises. "Although John did not technically receive his doctoral degree, all of his students warmly call him 'professor,' and we certainly consider his long history of service with students more than sufficient tenure."

Belina, 55, is originally from Fairfield County, Conn. He came to Cornell in 1970 as a freshman in engineering. After completing his bachelor's and master's degrees, he worked on his Ph.D. but put it aside to take an advising position in the College of Engineering in 1982.

Belina's Vitamin P theory is his playful way of letting advisees know that to develop their whole person, they need to take care of themselves and have fun, as well as study hard. "Vitamin P," he laughs, "is a micronutrient that isn't quite discovered yet. It's responsible for keeping the immune system healthy and keeping the brain activated so you can do a lot of work. There are only two natural sources of Vitamin P—pizza and pasta. It's water soluble like Vitamin C so you have to replenish it two or three times a day if you want your Vitamin P level to stay high enough."

—Bridget Meeds