

Advising in higher education is an experience and support system that will always exist as a meaningful and crucial aspect in my success in student affairs. Throughout my time as an undergraduate student and now as a graduate student, my advisors/mentors have been some of the most core support systems as I have navigated a difficult system as a first-generation student. It was an academic advisor from my undergraduate institution that provided a light bulb moment for me when I found myself on academic probation right after my first term in college. Academic advisors were my first sense of true support in higher education and propelled me towards wanting to do the same for others that followed in my footsteps. The transition from undergraduate to graduate felt like I had started all over again and I certainly re-experienced my “first-gen-ness” and I finally got more comfortable as a graduate student after experiences with my graduate advisor and mentor. As I look forward to roles that would serve to encourage additional opportunities to engage in an advising capacity with students, I think about the tenets that will guide my personal philosophy on advising.

The first tenet is grounded in the concept of social justice, which can look like many things, but particularly is found in recognizing, respecting, and acting accordingly with the dynamics of identities that exist and interact in each advising moment with all students. Social justice begins within which emphasizes the importance of understanding the mostly subconscious ways in which my identities and privileges influence my thinking, the environment, and how the student perceives me. Social justice is not something that is fixed, meaning I understand and have a commitment to continually educate myself about the ways in which higher education operates in systemically oppressive ways, resulting in additional barriers for students from historically marginalized identities. To be aware of the oppressive structures of

higher education provides opportunities to use my own privileges as an ally and continual deconstruct, rather than reinforce the oppressive nature of higher education. Centering social justice in my practice as an advisor is vital in achieving an optimal level of support for all students, regardless of identity.

A second tenet of my advising philosophy is around the importance and influence of approaches and theory that I seek to incorporate in my own practice. Combining Self-Authorship theory (Baxter Magolda, 2008) and utilizing a strengths-based approach (Schreiner, 2013) in my work with students is a very profound way to work with students. My perspective of these two concepts put together feels very much like Freire's (1972) liberation pedagogy in which there is a mutual and reciprocal relationship between both advisor and student. It deconstructs the notion that the advisor is the knower of all information and instead equalizes both the advisor and student in a place where both parties have knowledge that is different. The student gets to "self-author" or make their own choices with the support of the advisor and when there is a question about decisions to make, relying on strengths-based advising, the advisor can support the student by bringing to the forefront the existing skills/strengths the student possesses. While this might be the starting point for me with a student, I think it is certainly important to practice flexibility and adapt to the needs of each student. Not all students will respond to this collaboration of theory and approach and it is necessary to interpret each individual student's needs moving forward in this capacity.

A final tenet of my advising philosophy statement is regarding the importance of assessment. Assessment serves two primary functions for an advising office. The first function is concerned with bettering the practice of the advisors. Working in a profession that is concerned

with student experience can be difficult to track. There are certainly numbers that can be pulled such as retention, completion, and persistence rates, but that is only one piece of the puzzle. I have learned the importance of qualitative data and learning from students is just as important in understanding and implementing the needs of an ever-changing student population. The second function assessment serves is around reporting out to stakeholders and validating the importance of advising in higher education. Historically, advisors have not been regarded as “core” elements of institutions, but more recently there is literature and data that has been centering the positive impact academic advisors have had on students’ holistic successes in higher education.

Considering the fact that funding is often concerned with results, assessment has become necessary for an advisor to demonstrate the need for maintaining or increasing financial support from the institution. It is unlikely that the emphasis that has been placed on assessment will go away anytime soon, so it is incredibly important for me to center in my practice.

Advisors have the opportunity to assist students in one of the most important aspects of their educational careers. The work of an advisor extends beyond the appointments with students and is also found behind the scenes such as professional development and assessment. I often think about the fact that the advisors that originally helped me past my own obstacles do that on an everyday basis for students. When I think of it this, I wonder how it is possible to stay in a profession that is potentially draining? My thought process furthers to the concept of sustainability and the significance that remembering one’s “why?” has. In this case, the “why?” would be, “Why did I choose to be an advisor?” My final thoughts on my advising philosophy statement is that focusing on my “why?” will serve as the foundation in which I return to when

things get rough, as they can in higher education, and will remind me of the commitments I am making to both myself and the students.

## References

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