



Academic Advising Portfolio

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Introduction

This portfolio contains a personal résumé, my philosophy of academic advising, and three case studies. The résumé is intended for a job search as an academic advisor. My philosophy of academic advising is a living statement that will undoubtedly be updated periodically as I gain experience in higher education. Does a published philosophy have meaning in the world? “Research suggests that there is a relatively high consistency between an advisor’s stated philosophy of advising and the behaviors he or she actually utilizes” (Creamer & Scott, 2000, p. 342). By periodically reviewing my philosophy I will reinforce my commitment to providing effective academic advising.

The three case studies in this Academic Advising Portfolio demonstrate my knowledge and competencies regarding:

- advising strategies for institutional advising programs and individual academic advising,
- theories of learning, student development, and career development,
- potential multicultural influences on advising relationships, and
- the needs and characteristics of special groups of students.

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Philosophy of Academic Advising

As an academic advisor, my primary mission is to help students successfully navigate through their academic careers while exploring their educational and career options. My advising sessions are designed to be educational experiences where students connect who-they-are-now with what-they-are-learning and who-they-want-to-become (Pettay, 2007).

My office is a comfortable environment conducive to relaxation and the encouragement of candid conversation. During my advising sessions I listen actively and without judgment while identifying the most effective method for communicating with the specific student in front of me. I identify special needs and make appropriate referrals.

As an advising professional, I accept the responsibilities for advisors as stated in the NACADA Statement of Core Values (NACADA, 2004). It is also my responsibility as an academic advisor to be fully knowledgeable about the informational, relational, and conceptual components of academic advising (Habley, 1995).

The *informational component* includes a solid grounding in knowledge about the institution, the academic catalog, policies and procedures, degree requirements, and campus resources. Communicating accurate and timely information to students is a necessary condition of being an effective academic advisor. Successfully meeting the informational needs of students, sometimes through prescriptive methods, is fundamental to the advising relationship. Until the basic needs of a student have been met it is useless to attempt to work with a student on their higher-level developmental needs (Fielstein, 1994).

The *relational component* includes the one-to-one relationship and trust between advisor and advisee which is critical to the advising process and to the student's satisfaction with the advising session and the institution. Without productive one-on-one relationships with students, building a level of mutual trust, I will not be able to effectively address my students' developmental needs.

A thorough understanding of the *conceptual component* will enable me to increase the effectiveness of my advising sessions. A commitment to lifelong learning is essential in improving my conceptual knowledge of the profession of academic advising and my knowledge of the theories of student development and career development. Although there are no recognized unifying theories of academic advising, knowledge of theories relevant to academic advising are still useful because they reduce a complicated interpersonal situation to an understandable number of elements (Creamer, 2000).

Bringing the three components of academic advising together, after the basic informational needs of students are met, I help students understand the relationship between their university course work, their intended career, and their desired lifestyle. I challenge students' unrealistic or unreasonable beliefs. I encourage students to exercise their problem-solving and decision-making skills to advance their level of personal development. I encourage students to turn their talents into strengths and use those strengths to achieve their personal and career goals (Schreiner, 2005). Through my knowledge and understanding of the framework of the three components of academic advising, I help students realize their educational plans and dreams. It is my passion to help each student, through their education, to become the person they want to be.

Theories of academic advising and student development are useful to know, but, even so, they have their shortcomings. Since reality is more complex than any theory can fully describe, advisors must synthesize multiple theories to craft a multilayered response to a student's specific situation (Creamer, 2000). An "understanding – of anything – always requires a field, a gestalt, of background knowledge which provides analogues, taxonomies, definitions, and precursor concepts" (Hendey, 1999). A thorough knowledge of theories about student and career development, and approaches to academic advising, will provide a solid foundation for my advising sessions and will enable me to maintain a full toolbox of ideas and techniques I can use with students as appropriate.

As an academic advisor, I consider myself as not only an advisor, but also an academic. I take an academic interest in the process of advising students; I take an academic interest in the administration and assessment of advisors; I take an academic interest in improving the quality and effectiveness of my advising and the advising performed at my institution. I am an advisor-practitioner, but I also strive to be an advisor-scholar.

I have a curiosity about advising and participate in research projects to learn more about the advising process and environment. I encourage an institutional culture of evidence-based decision-making. I promote and encourage a professional climate within academic advising and throughout the institution (Troxel, 2008).

Through thoughtful interactions during academic advising process I can teach each student I see how to successfully navigate their educational career and ultimately help them to become the person they want to be.

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Case Study 1: Ellen Brewer

Ellen Brewer has come to the Community College's Advising Office to complete a graduation application to receive an Associate's Degree at the end of the next semester. She has one semester left before she transfers to the local university with an Associate of Arts degree, a degree that is designed to prepare students to transfer into university majors in the liberal arts, humanities, social and behavioral sciences and education. Ellen is an excellent student, a member of the debate team, and has a GPA of 3.85.

As you review Ellen's graduation application she admits to having no idea which subject she wants to major in at the university and is feeling pressure from her parents to make a decision. Ellen has never held a job and does not understand the connection between her educational course of study and her career options. She communicates that being undecided about a future career is beginning to make her dread her final semester instead of being able to celebrate achieving an educational milestone.

Response to Case Study 1

What began as a simple request to sign a graduation application has turned into an opportunity for her advisor to help Ellen begin to explore her life goals and interests in preparation for beginning a career exploration. Advisors should always be aware that any student contact can result in a different type of interaction. "Every advising contact is a precious opportunity for meaningful interaction" (Kuh, 2000, p. 79) and conversations with students can easily turn to subjects different from the original topic.

Ellen is undecided in choosing a course of study, but she does not appear to be chronically indecisive or postponing a decision. She just has not yet begun to think about her career. On the continuum from "very decided, somewhat decided, unstable decided,

tentatively undecided, developmentally undecided, seriously undecided, and chronically indecisive” (Steele & McDonald, 2000, pp. 146-147), Ellen describes herself as undecided about her future career plans. Students at a different location on the continuum may require different advising approaches. Due to her limited experience with working, Ellen is truly not aware of the career possibilities she has and appears to lack enough knowledge about herself, possible careers, and the education required for various careers to be able to make an informed decision.

Students often see being undecided as a problem, but advisors should encourage students to view being undecided not as a problem, but as the beginning of an exciting developmental journey. Some students may understand that, but many students will need help in understanding there is a process they can follow to help them decide upon a major and a career path. Just knowing there is a path to follow can lend comfort to students who are feeling stress from being undecided about a major.

In 1992 Gordon proposed a model for the career development process that included four elements: self-knowledge, educational knowledge, occupational knowledge, and decision-making knowledge. “The goal of this model is to provide a framework to help students gather the kind of information needed to make realistic and satisfying choices” (Steele & McDonald, 2000, pp. 147-148).

To explore her career options, Ellen first needs to identify and understand her abilities, aptitudes, interests, and personal limitations. Then she needs to understand the type of education that is required to be qualified for different types of jobs and careers, what jobs are possible, what the work environment is like for those jobs, and what the actual day-to-day work is like (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). After Ellen has gathered

and thoughtfully considered this information, she should be prepared to make a decision. If the student cannot make a decision after a period of reflection and enough time to consider the options, she may be chronically indecisive and should be referred to a counselor.

Advising Strategies

Ellen has several options for her career exploration – she can set up a series of meetings with her advisor to perform career advising and learn more about the “complex relationships that exist between academic experiences and career fields” (Gore & Metz, 2008, p. 104) , she can work with a career counselor in the Career Center to take “formal psychological assessment of career-related variables” (Gore & Metz, 2008, p. 104), and she could enroll in a class in career decision-making. The Career Center at Ellen’s educational institution can provide a variety of self-assessment tools to help her understand her interests, abilities, and values. She can also volunteer in areas she is interested in or perform job shadowing and informational interviewing to learn more about various careers and the day-to-day responsibilities of someone working there.

Ellen’s advisor can help her understand her educational options in relation to possible careers, and the Career Center can help her expand her knowledge of possible careers based upon her interests. A career advisor, a career counselor, or an instructor of a career decision-making class may use a workbook such as Gordon and Sear’s (2004) *Selecting a College Major* to provide a framework to organize and manage the career exploration process.

To determine how much Ellen already knows about career planning and the world of work, she could take the Career Development Inventory (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). At the Career Center Ellen could take one or more interest inventories, such as the

Strong Interest Inventory, to identify her interests. While computer-based interest inventories and career guidance systems can be very useful to students, Ellen should be encouraged to talk with her advisor or a career counselor to understand what is being suggested by computer software such as the Internet-based DISCOVER program which will assess her interests, abilities, and values.

Connected to DISCOVER, the World-of-Work Map is useful to initiate discussions about the types of careers available and how each career type primarily works with data, people, ideas, or things. This enables students to begin linking their personal preferences to specific types of careers and enables them to begin focusing on the areas they are most interested in. To further focus her energies, using Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities and Environments will help Ellen identify her personality type and the type of work people who are like her enjoy.

Career Development

Holland's theory enables students to match their personality style to occupational titles and classifies personality and environments into six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Creamer, 2000). The theory asserts that people will prefer jobs where they can work with other people who are similar to themselves and will be happier and more satisfied in employment environments that enable them to use their skills and abilities and are similar in type to their personality. Various instruments exist to assess the student's personality type: The Strong Interest Inventory, the Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI), and the Self-Directed Search (SDS), and others (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). A career counselor in the Career Center can help her with these instruments.

It would be helpful if her advisor could determine Ellen's level of differentiation, identity, and congruence. "A differentiated person has interests that are characteristic of mainly one type," identity refers to "the 'clarity and stability' of the person's goals, interests, and abilities," and congruence refers to "the degree of 'match' between a person and an environment" (Evans et al., 1998, pp. 230-231). If Ellen's interests are not characteristic of the personality type suggested by her Holland code, the advisor should discuss with her why that might be the case. Any student who is considering a career that is highly incongruent with their personality type should be questioned about their reasoning. Using the Holland Classification system to discover a student's personality type is not the end of a career exploration, but only the beginning of a conversation with the student.

Summary

By being aware of her personality type as identified by her Holland code, Ellen can increase her potential to select a satisfying career. By using a specific career exploration framework with Ellen, giving her a career exploration roadmap to follow, her advisor will be able to provide Ellen with needed information, developmental tasks, and the encouragement she needs as she navigates through her academic career and continues in her career exploration process.

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Case Study 2: Javier Villaverde

In February a student named Javier came into the Community College's advising center and asked to meet with an advisor. After a few minutes, it is clear to you that Javier cannot articulate a clear reason why he is here today, but he is frustrated and did not know where else to go. He has many questions about college that he hopes you can help him with.

Javier is half Native American with a Hispanic father and attended high school on a nearby reservation. He is a first generation college student and was successful academically in high school. His family and friends, while initially supportive of his desire to attend college, are not so supportive now that he has been less than successful in his first semester and are encouraging him to drop out and return home.

Javier is discouraged with his grades – mostly Cs with one D in College Algebra which he is repeating this semester. He describes being frustrated with reading and rereading his textbooks without improving his retention of the information. He did not have to study much in high school and, although he knew he would have to study more in college, he is disappointed with his results in college so far. He is beginning to think he is not smart enough for college.

Response to Case Study 2

Javier is clearly a student at risk, but it is a good sign that he is seeking help instead of just disappearing from the campus. "Every advising contact is a precious opportunity for meaningful interaction" (Kuh, 2008, p. 79) and effective academic advising at this specific time in Javier's life will be critical to helping him stay in school and pursue an education. Javier is underperforming in college when compared to his previous academic history, and has described poor study habits. Javier is not receiving familial support for continuing his

education and is questioning his decision to attend college. Helping Javier handle his lack of support from his family, and improving his study skills, will be critical in enabling Javier to be more successful and stay enrolled in school.

Multicultural and First Generation Considerations

As a first generation student who does not have anyone in his family who has attended college who can advise him, Javier needs to be shown specific techniques for improving his studying. Javier is experiencing several issues common to students new to college and to first generation students in particular. Like many first generation students, Javier is seeking help from academic advising not only for academic advice, but also for “the guidance considered necessary to navigate day-to-day campus life” (Sickles, 2004). It will be very important for Javier to feel that his advisor cares about his future (Sickles, 2004) since his advisor may be the only person he knows who is actively encouraging him to stay in school.

Because many multicultural students are most concerned with specific issues and not developmental concerns, it may be most effective to use a more directive, prescriptive approach to add structure to the advising relationship with Javier (Cornett-DeVito & Reeves, 1999). The first priority of the advising relationship will be to work to remedy his immediate concerns by identifying the behaviors and skills he needs to develop to maximize his potential for success. It is essential for students to learn information such as “knowing where to study, *how* to concentrate when studying, and *how* to form study groups (Rivas, 1988)” (Brown & Rivas, 1995, p. 124). Perhaps even more important for Javier because of his cultural background than it might be for some other students, it will be important for Javier to, “be able to measure and experience, in concrete, tangible ways,

(his) progress toward goal achievement” (Brown & Rivas, 1995, p. 124). An advisor can help Javier with identifying specifically what he needs to learn and what resources are available to him for achieving his goals – in this case a better academic performance as evidenced by higher grades and higher satisfaction with his efforts at learning the material.

Because of his poor academic results and a lack of support from his family, Javier appears to be questioning his decision to attend college. Many Native American students feel pressure to quit school and return home even if they are doing well in school. Although as educators we believe education is important, advisors should be aware how their worldview affects their interactions with students who may have a different worldview (Cunningham, 2003). Doing poorly in school can be used as an easy excuse to drop out if not challenged by an advisor.

Native American students may also have to respond to “American Indian” stereotypes, feelings of intellectual inferiority, and feeling more like a “Native American student” rather than just a “student.” They may see the campus as hostile and not supportive of their needs (Clark & Kalionzes, 2008).

Advisors should be comfortable with diversity and with advising students different from themselves. To better advise Native American students advisors should strive to understand the student’s family and tribal background, build trust with the student, understand identity development of minority students, develop multicultural competencies, and make an attempt to be in the student’s world by seeing students outside the formal advising environment (Clark & Kalionzes, 2008). It is important for advisors to “use specific advising approaches and demonstrate cultural awareness and competency to

work successfully” with students of color such as Native American students (Clark & Kalionzes, 2008, p. 222).

Advising Strategies

Native American students may feel that their community and tribal goals should take precedence over their individual goals (Clark & Kalionzes, 2008), but advisors should encourage students from reservations to see how their personal goals can complement tribal goals. Javier needs to hear that returning to the reservation with a degree will enable him to be a leader and an effective role model for others. It would be particularly helpful for Javier to meet with a peer advisor with a similar Native American background to discuss the influences in his life that are encouraging him to return to the reservation.

To improve his connection to the school, Javier should be encouraged to join one or more study groups, and a student club or organization such as a Native American Student Association. Every school has number of organizations that would welcome a new member. Making new friends who support his efforts to attend school would give Javier a new perspective on his educational career.

Without improving his study skills Javier will continue to be at risk of performing poorly in his classes and dropping out of school. An advisor can help Javier with learning specific study skills, but he should be encouraged to enroll in a study skills course to explore the topic in more depth and to learn more techniques than can be taught in a few advising sessions. Such a class will teach Javier the importance and methods of using an active reading strategy such as questioning, predicting, organizing, elaborating, and summarizing the material to improve retention of the information. The class will highlight the importance of organizing the material, creating internal connections within the

material, recognizing external connections to the material, creating practice tests, and practicing taking those tests under test conditions.

Summary

Javier is at risk for attrition due to his poor academic performance and lack of support from home, but these are issues that can be overcome or handled effectively with the help of an advisor. He can learn new study skills and enroll in a study skills class, he can meet with a peer advisor to learn he is not alone, and he can join a study group or student organization and make new friends who will support his decision to attend college. By taking a positive and constructive approach with Javier, his advisor will be able to provide Javier with information and the encouragement he needs to continue his academic career.

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Case Study 3: Robert Clarke

Robert is a sophomore at the state university majoring in Business. His GPA is a respectable 3.0 after his freshman year, but that is much lower than his high school GPA. He needs his GPA to be much higher to be accepted into the Lewis College of Management next year. He is a member of the theater construction crew and enjoys creating sets for the school's theater company, although he expresses disdain for the actors and doesn't really have any friends in the theater.

During your meeting Robert expresses frustration with the teaching methods of his instructors who seem to focus entirely on theory without consideration of its application to the real world. Robert says he wants to 'get his hands dirty' with the material, not talk about it all day. As a consequence of his frustration, Robert is beginning to doubt his ability to keep up with his peers who seem to him to enjoy talking about theories without actually doing anything with them. He has had several outbursts during class discussions where he pleaded for everyone to stop talking about the same thing over and over again.

Response to Case Study 3

Robert is a good student, but he is not performing academically as well as he could because he does not understand his own preferred learning style and the teaching styles of his instructors. With a little help and advice from his advisor in helping him understand himself and the academic environment, Robert will be able to improve his academic performance and gain more satisfaction from his time spent at college.

Learning Theory

Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning describes a four-stage cycle of learning where knowledge is created through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract

conceptualization, and active experimentation. “Concrete experience forms the basis of observation and reflection. These observations are in turn used to develop one’s ideas, including generalizations and theories. From this development of ideas, new implications for action can be discerned” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 209). Advisors can help students understand this learning cycle to help their students be more effective learners.

Kolb’s theory also defines four learning styles which are related to the theory’s cycle of learning. Through conversations with the student over one or more advising sessions, it may be possible to determine which of the four learning styles Robert prefers:

- Assimilators, who learn best through examining sound logical theories,
- Convergers, who learn best through practical applications of theory,
- Accommodators, who learn best through ‘hands on’ experiences, and
- Divergers, who learn best by observing and collecting information.

It is undoubtedly useful for students to know their own primary learning style, but it is just as important for students to understand its weaknesses as well. For example, accommodator can find themselves “caught up in activity for activity’s sake, engaged in insignificant efforts” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 211). Advisors should caution the student about locking themselves in a specific learning style – the student will feel more personal fulfillment during the course of their life when they learn to use other learning styles as appropriate (Evans et al., 1998).

Student Development Theory

Chickering and Reisser’s revised Theory of Identity Development identifies seven vectors of development that students move through – although not necessarily in order, at

similar rates, or without repeating. The seven vectors are developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Evans et al., 1998).

Developing competence means increasing the student's capacities in intellectual, physical, manual, and interpersonal areas. Managing emotions means developing the student's "ability to recognize and accept emotions, as well as to appropriately express and control them" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 38). The vector of moving through autonomy towards interdependence means not looking to others for continual validation and reassurance. Developing more mature personal relationships means developing "the capacity for healthy and lasting intimate relationships with partners and close friends" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 39). Establishing identity includes "comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one's social and cultural heritage" (Evans et al., 1998, pp. 39-40) and positive self-acceptance and self-esteem. The vector of developing purpose means developing clear vocational goals and strong interpersonal commitments. Developing integrity means developing and following a personal value system (Evans et al., 1998).

Chickering and Reisser's revised Theory of Identity Development is a useful framework for advisors to help understand their students' level of personal development and how they can help their students grow and mature. Advisors should be aware there are several instruments for assessing a student's progression through the seven vectors which include the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Inventory and the Iowa Student Development Inventories (Evans et al., 1998).

Advising Strategies

Robert is an Accommodator in terms of Kolb's learning styles. He is someone who enjoys and learns best with hands-on experience, so it is no mystery why he is frustrated with professors who are assimilators and enjoy the discussion of theory for its own sake. His advisor can help Robert understand not only his own learning style, but also the teaching styles of his instructors. It is likely Robert will be surprised that his instructors have preferred styles just as he does and that they are not trying to make the subject difficult for him – that is just the way they think. This insight alone should enable Robert to work with his instructors in a more mature manner resulting in a closer teacher-student relationship.

Three of Chickering's vectors – developing competence, managing emotions, and developing mature interpersonal relationships – can be the framework through which his advisor can understand Robert's issues. Robert had been competent in high school as demonstrated by his good grades, but he is frustrated by his average grades in college.

Because Robert focuses too much on his weaknesses, it could be very effective for his advisor to focus on identifying and working with his strengths. "Strengths-based advising is predicated on students' natural talents and is used to build their confidence while motivating them to acquire the knowledge base and skills necessary for college-level achievement" (Schreiner, 2005, p. 22). This is exactly what Robert needs. Once Robert recognizes his strengths it would be useful to explore how his strengths could be used to develop personal competence to be more successful in college.

Working through the managing emotions vector, an advisor could help Robert come up with strategies for channeling his frustrations with his fellow students and instructors

into more productive areas. For example, instead of pleading for everyone to stop talking about a subject, he could offer to summarize the conversation so the group could move on to the next topic. This would require Robert to be more involved in the group's conversation so he would be able to condense everyone's thoughts into a short summary.

Like many students, Robert is experiencing a self-imposed feeling of isolation. He should be encouraged to talk with other students in the theater company and get to know them as people. Through interaction with others Robert will have the opportunity to learn to appreciate the differences and the similarities between himself and his fellow students.

Summary

Knowledge of theories applicable to academic advising will enable Robert's advisor to reduce his complicated situation to the essential elements that need to be addressed (Creamer, 2000). Focusing on these elements, singly or in combination, can be used to suggest directions Robert should take towards gaining the outcomes he desires for his educational career. Robert's advisor, with the proper education and motivation, can be an integral part of Robert's education.

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