

### **Evolving and Elevating Advisor Ethos**

We in the profession of academic advising are at what Bloom *et al.* (2008) referred to as “a watershed moment” (p. 6). We stand mired in a precarious state of possessing demonstrated efficacy and purpose but lacking a clearly distinguished identity and the professional agency through esteem that should come with it. According to White (2022), this moment may have started in 1972 when Crookston published his treatise on developmental advising and made explicit a tenet of the profession not widely understood by those outside of it: *that academic advisors are capable of far more than prescriptive or transactional exchanges with students because advisors are uniquely positioned to create transformational relationships capable of initiating agency in students that can act as catalysts for developing their human potential.* O’Banion, Crookston’s contemporary, also correlated advising with student development and contended that advising is teaching (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016, p. 10). Even twenty years before Crookston and O’Banion, the American Council on Education Studies (1949) advocated in *The Student Personnel Point of View* that the emerging field of student personnel should focus on the full spectrum development of students, which is unsurprising since many of these educators were heavily influenced by educational psychology and an expressed concern for the overall welfare of students (p. 7). Therefore, if we have known of this need for student development since the early 1970’s, the end of the Second Advising Era (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016, p. 6), why do we remain caught in this precarious moment still seeking to define ourselves as a profession that prioritizes student development? This article offers one possible answer, which is that developmental advising has proven to be an elusive ideal to enact, as outlined by Gordon (2019), and the reality of academic advising is often less idyllic than our professional aspirations.

Some of the reasons that developmental advising has been a difficult ideal to realize, according to Gordon in “Developmental Advising: the Elusive Ideal” (2019), include ubiquitously large advising caseloads that preclude extended conversations or repeated meetings; a lack of training or background knowledge of human development theory; and a poorly understood professional identity, which commonly leads to both a lack of administrator priority for the student development aspects of academic advising and a lack of understanding from students of how their advisors can be helpful beyond course registration. Therefore, when caseloads are high, funding is low, and time is short, what is to become of developmental advising? Beyond the required transactional exchanges that institutions need to secure student enrollment with advisor guidance, what value do institutions place on student development when the pressurized conditions of real-world advising make realizing these standards an elusive ideal? This sobering but unavoidable line of inquiry touches on the moral challenge incumbent upon us all in this profession, and the answer may help to explain why many would agree that academic advising remains a profession “still not fully realized,” to quote McGill (White, 2020, p. 5). Moreover, according to Gordon (2019), our progress as a profession cannot move forward until we impress upon our administrators that “developmental advising— or advising itself—is at the heart of the institutional enterprise” (p. 75). To evolve as a profession and elevate our ethos, we must transcend limiting views of who we are and why we are needed – in fact, why we are at the heart of the institutional enterprise. We can do this, I propose, by anchoring our professional identity in our roots as teachers and demonstrating that our highest value is produced through our professional work as agents of human development.

### **Advising Is Teaching**

As professionals with kinship to the classroom teaching profession, it may not be surprising that advisors share in the perceived lack of esteem teachers often feel. This issue is elucidated in Symeonidis' "The Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession," (2015) in which he studies the occupational prestige and status of teachers. He notes that students learn better in countries where the teaching profession is more highly valued, such as Korea, Singapore, or Finland; their positive sense of status, Symeonidis continued (2015), "is closely linked to other aspects of quality education, including continuous professional development, engagement in research, collaboration and exchange with other teachers, and involvement in decision-making" (p. 16). The effectiveness of academic advisors is similarly contingent on this occupational prestige to produce imperative student learning outcomes, but status alone is not the true end goal for advising. Our need is to secure 1) professional regard from our colleagues across the institution for what we contribute toward shared student success goals beyond course enrollment and 2) a willingness from faculty to collaborate with advisors for those ends.

We are all well served to remember the intertwined history of faculty and professional academic advisors, which is laid out, for instance, in Himes and Schulenberg's 2016 article "The Evolution of Academic Advising As A Practice and As A Profession." We can find common ground in our shared principles, such as the nine principles of effective advising listed by Kramer (2003) as being "also at the heart of the successful classroom experience [for teachers and students]. Their transferrable application to advising is why Crookston coined the term *advising as teaching*," (p. 68). Increasing advisor collaboration with faculty as collegial contributors to the learning experiences of our students is an opportunity to bring our present value and purpose back into focus from our historical roots. Moreover, as we hone our abilities to help students conceptualize the overarching curricular demands of their chosen paths, we further improve the chances that our students, especially our first-generation students, who have less family support in making these broad conceptualizations about their curriculum, are better served, since "few

students come to college with any experience in the type of thinking needed for creating a logic to the curriculum, or even with the notion that such a task might exist” (Kramer, 2003, pp. 65-71). Advisors help to ensure that this process happens consistently and that its impacts on the student begins as early as possible. We thus extenders of the positive impacts faculty can have on students as well.

Like faculty, advisors are apt and well positioned to help students comprehend the logic and sequencing of the curriculum when properly trained. The Chronicle of Higher Education (2022) sums this matter up perfectly by reminding the reader that “In recent years, the field of academic advising has emphasized the virtues of a holistic approach – that is, focusing [...] on factors such as cultural values, family obligations, and financial hardships. Yet, the quality of academic advising risks being compromised when [advisors] don’t have access to faculty input” (The Future of Academic Advising, p. 41). For this collective benefit, we should dedicate ourselves as professionals to breaking through the compartmentalization that makes “others” of departmental units in our institutions and breeds isolationist attitudes. Siloing harms each of our individual units and is truly a disservice to our students, who both fall between the gaps in our collaborations and stand to benefit the most from truly holistic, and collective, support. More to this point, our profession should be synonymous with a commitment to continual development and training. We are, after all, practitioners. In an appreciative spirit, we may therefore ask, *how do we do more of what we do well?* As go-to people and connectors for our students to institutional resources, entities, and opportunities, we help students connect ideas. The better we can connect ideas regarding curriculum the more we can help students see the big picture: how one course is related to another and why; what they will learn and might experience in courses; how to prepare for known challenges in the coursework; and what to do when they face challenges in comprehending what the program is asking of them, which also speaks to determining the right path for themselves with all of this in mind.

Much like the exploration of curriculum, the self-exploratory reflection we help students engage in speaks to our role as revealers of the *habitus* affecting their educational journey. According to Bourdieu in *Outline of Theory of Practice* (1977), habitus is “a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conceptions, and actions common to all members of the same group or class” (p.86). This social construct impacts how students perceive their potential and the limits of what they can accomplish based on past experiences and assumptions the student is not always aware they have made. Advisors are thus charged with revealing institutional and cultural influences that shape students’ existential motivations and deeply entrenched conceptions about education. Bringing these often-invisible factors to the surface so that students are cognizant of them is an imperative task for the advisor to facilitate agency in their students, as well as for developing how students perceive success as they set out on an academic path. These are critical learning moments since students are often building their academic path beneath their feet as they traverse it. In this way, “habitus is also a heuristic for exploring the complex and deep-rooted patterns that have limited access of historically underserved students” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 15). These developmental practices that advisors use to engage students are self-exploring and emancipatory in nature. They are also reminiscent of practices recommended by Crookston (1972) that include the Socratic tradition of students making sense, purpose, and direction for themselves—imperatives of the university experience.

To codify our professional identity and reconstruct our relationships with administrators, faculty, and students, we will need to assume the same agency and tools for self-authoring our professional future that we impart to our students. Accordingly, we should stress as a profession the importance of establishing an advising career ladder to design advisor ascent and broaden the potential upward trajectory within our profession. Moreover, we need asserted professional expectations regarding skills and attributes that can garner opportunities for our experienced and well-trained advisors who possess them. This will help advisors

envision a future in this profession, move into leadership roles, and further champion our professional values. For the sake of mending the divide between faculty and advisors, institutions should systematize faculty-advisor collaboration, as peer colleagues, to ensure that advisors are continually developed as experts in demystifying curricular pathways for student edification and are highly valued for their expertise in using technology, stirring innovation, and maintaining institutional knowledge.

The cultivation of advisors will help improve retention by showing new advisors that there is a path of professional mobility and therefore a future in the profession, recognized value in the skills they will develop, and a stronger likelihood that the leadership they answer to will know who they are as professionals and value the full potential of their unique contributions. Remarkable gains in professional morale, as well as the retention of students and advisors alike, stand to be accomplished when leaders invest in their advisors as advisors invest in their students. For as the authors wrote in “Appreciative Onboarding and Professional Development of Academic Advisors,” “Leaders can and should utilize a constructivist mindset, recognizing that knowing who an advisor is as an individual and as a professional and how they developed is a reliable predictor of what they can become” (Orem et al., 2007). We are equally challenged as academic advisors to know our history and draw from it to inform the design of our ethos, who we are, and the future of our profession.

### **Advising Technology**

Academic advising can be a puzzling yet highly rewarding profession where one spends their days devising means of helping students learn to help themselves, which may be why so many advisors learn and grow with their students. Much of this is accomplished through critical thinking dialogues, but an equally considerable portion is done with the help of technology.

What technology to use and how is a topic for further scholarship, but one key to the evolution of the advising profession is the perspective that our investments in technology should reap rewards in how well advisors can streamline repetitive tasks and bridge the broadening gap in how different generations communicate. With larger caseloads and diverse demands, some advisors struggle to engage their students in developmental advising and find that they are instead simply prescribing courses and helping students complete enrollment transactions. They fall into these patterns of prescriptive advising due to the sheer volume of students weighed in confluence with the urgency of seeing as many students as possible. To compound their challenges, advisors often serve manifold functions and must navigate multiple student information systems to perform routine tasks, flipping from screen to screen to retrieve needed information, which is cumbersome and costs time and stamina instead of securing it for student development efforts.

In a perfect scenario, there would be sufficient funding to keep caseloads low enough to ensure that advisors can offer developmental advising to all of their students. There are, however, financial and philosophical obstacles that are stiff barriers to the realization of developmental advising ideals; and with respect to the visceral economic challenges facing institutions, maintaining enough advisors to meet the transactional needs of registration and retention does not necessarily extend to ensuring that there are also enough advisors to provide developmental advising to each student who needs it. Moreover, as Tim Renick, executive director of the National Institute for Student Success at Georgia State University, stated in “The Future of Academic Advising” (2023) video presentation, not all institutions are aware that “good advising pays for itself.” To overcome these barriers to developmental advising under current real world circumstances, advisors will need to harness the potential for technology to maximize their reach, facilitate collaboration, and produce the best efficiency of labor possible – not simply to reduce workload but to create the needed time to secure developmental advising. This crunch for

time and funding, means technology will also be essential for identifying and communicating the benefits of our developmental advising. In other words, we must be able to use technology proficiently as a tool for teaching.

In their report, “The Excellence-Equity Imperative,” The Boyer 2030 Commission (2022) also promulgated this notion that technology can help us be as efficient as possible:

Deploying advising technology will be essential to enabling advisors at these ratios to perform the outreach and support of students required for guidance that will increase college completion ... Technology can free advisors’ time for the substantive guidance that only they can provide and thereby enables more students to be served more effectively ... Key to the use of technology to scale advising is highly trained advisors who can use it fully and effectively. (p.31).

A significant aspect of using technology “fully” comes through in our ability to harness technology as a means of telling our story and garnering collaborative support, which is supported in the Chronicle of Higher Education’s “The Future of Academic Advising” (2022) as well: “Tech tools can offer advisers more accurate and timely assessments of students’ academic status, enable students to track their progress toward degree requirements, and allow advisers to communicate better with each other and with different divisions on campus” (p. 31). Sharpening our ability to proficiently use technology and the usable data it can produce will challenge our commitment to the professional development of advisors like the pressurized conditions for advising challenges our commitment to the human development of our students. Furthermore, since data can be an effective language for communicating with administrators, it is imperative for expressing how our work can be appreciated that advising leadership fluently speak data.

User data in other industries, especially in the realm of online commerce, is regarded as “the new oil...[but] since the value of data is created by companies and depends on data analytics and the associated business model, consumers lack the knowledge to value their personal data” (Li et al., 2018, p. 33). While massive investments in data are being made across other industries, the field of education is exceptional in that advisors are optimally positioned to aim the value of data management and its potential to inform our decisions squarely at the pursuit for student success. In this model, our students are the beneficiaries of our data analysis, which is not necessarily true in other industries. This is not to assert that we need to equate our professional insights with data collection to prove their value, but this highlights that we presently have the capacity to improve institutional understanding of the student experience in both qualitative and quantitative terms. This is a leverage point, or fulcrum rather, for elevating the value of our insights as subject matter experts on the student experience—provided we can articulate this. Accordingly, it would be prudent to invest as a profession in methods for mining, interpreting, and utilizing our professional insights into the current student experience and possess the skills to express verifiable conditions through both quantitative and qualitative data articulation. This need will only become clearer as we move exponentially faster into the future of education, which calls on us to be masters of telling our story through data.

Consider what we already know about the impact of advising. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement report (2005), “The quality of academic advising [...] is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment for students at 4-year schools” (p. 60). The evolution of advising will entail advising leaders being able to interpret and communicate such institutional data effectively in order to express the value we produce and merit as professionals. More to this point, if developmental advising is contributing to these positive impacts on the student experience, the means of training advising leaders to consistently capture and express these effects is key to how we tell our story and define our

profession. We can, otherwise, only be subjects to the data reported to and about us.

### **Defining Our Identity to Elevate Our Ethos**

In a sense, the professional service we offer as academic advisors is discourse; however, this is no casual, everyday discourse because not all discourse demands the levels of the self-examination, vulnerability, trust, and honesty that students are challenged to bring into their exploration and discovery with academic advisors. Accordingly, academic advisors face an ethical charge to rise to this level of engagement to build relationships with students that are appreciative of their lived experiences and holistic in that they envelop the students with support for their entire being, all that the student has brought with them to the interaction with their advisor. The nature of this ethical calling can be traced back at least to Aristotle, who described in *Rhetoric* the substantive requirements of the rhetorical appeal through ethos as requiring practical intelligence, virtuous character, and good will; for when all are presented to an audience, it is hard to doubt the trustworthiness of the speaker (Cope, 2010, pp. 1378a6–20). So, the level of engagement is contingent on the overall sense by the student that they can trust their advisor, not only to provide accurate and timely information but to possess the ethical character to be genuinely invested in their success. This is the most essential function of advisor ethos, the mental image or instinctual sense of a human being the student can turn to when the stakes for making the right decisions are as high as they may have ever known. This trust sets the foundation for the ongoing communication and shared construction of meaning that enables the student to face challenges and grow in response.

To reiterate Maya Angelou's sentiment as honored in *The Appreciative Advising Revolution* (2008), "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people never forget how you made them feel" (Bloom et al., p. 30). Likewise, students will not remember an institution because they were able to register for courses or access services they needed in order to be a student. Those experiences are within the scope of what a student should expect in exchange for their time, tuition, and commitment to an institution. They will, however, remember how it felt when a person cared about their holistic wellbeing and desire to reach a goal—as if it were their own. They will remember when someone helped them navigate through the processes and procedures and got them where they needed to be to secure an opportunity to be successful. Is this not what their own guardians would want for them as they send them off to their first year of study? Advisors, coaches, tutors, career counselors, faculty mentors, and mental health professionals are at the front of the line providing this care, and that is possible in no small part due to our professional ethos. However, recognition is not the ask here. Praise is fleeting and not meaningful to our profession long term; what we require is *professional esteem*, which is tantamount to respect, a sense of understanding that has been earned and thus directed at the ethos of our profession as an essential utility for what advisors help the institution accomplish. Swecker et al. (2013), for instance, shared that "a student's perceptions of institutional fit as well as his or her sense of academic and social integration can influence the likelihood to persist. Therefore, advising appointments may be one of the few institutional mechanisms that consistently connect students to the academic institution in meaningful ways" (p. 49). The dimension that is left to articulate for us here is how are we doing this. I maintain that these are impacts we create through human development not transactional exchanges, and if we cannot clearly and convincingly articulate this with quantitative and qualitative evidence, it is no wonder administrators may not understand what we do and how we do it. In "Administrator Perceptions of Academic Advisor Tasks" (2020), Menke et al shared that limited contact and the hierarchical distance between advisors and chief academic officers (CAOs) might factor into

how little they know about each other. The result is that “There may be a misconception of advisors as simply transmitters of information to students and gatekeepers to ensure timely graduation, [which] supports previous work suggesting that advisors believe CAOs are not fully aware of the ‘roles, responsibilities and daily work life’ of academic advisors,” which makes it difficult for CAOs to truly appreciate what advisors do for students and their institutions (Aiken-Wisiewski et al., 2015, p.66). This can be a particularly frustrating experience for advisors who often find themselves myopically perceived by the presiding hierarchy. The consequence of being misperceived in both value and purpose is that advisors often burn out, not just from workload but from a lost sense of purpose and regard. Advisors are driven, conversely, by the sense that their work is producing a meaningful improvement in the lives of their students.

## **Conclusion**

Seeking to elevate advisor ethos and our work in human development may seem self-serving. In all actuality it is; it has to be. Our work in human development utilizing our ethos is that integral to defining who we are as a profession, as well as for developing the agency to tell our story for ourselves. No one should underestimate the preeminence of this appeal, either, since the institution itself has neither the face to warm the student’s welcome nor hands to hold the student’s concerns with care as they are ushered through to resolution. Despite its massive conglomeration of interests and resources, the institution itself is not best equipped nor is it best positioned to prioritize individual student needs and concerns, regardless of the urgency or importance to the student. Advisors and their colleagues in student support do this, and it is their ethos that endows the institution with a surrogate form of its own humanity and the means of expressing care.

Advisors foster a crucial human connection from our students to the institution, which makes all other goals possible, including retention, student belonging, and student success. These mutually beneficial relationships form resilient bonds between students and their advisors—as

well as the institution, which enables further relationship building within the academic community. To secure these prolific relationships, the integrity of advisor ethos must be protected both by the tenets of our profession and due professional veneration from our institutions. Only then will it be more evident to administrator, students and faculty how integral advisors can be in student success and thus institutional success.

Advisors and our student support colleagues need students as existentially as they need us. They are our *raison d'être*. Our symbiotic relationship calls on us to regard their experiences as dearly as our own. Our successes are that closely bound to one another; therefore, all that we do to evolve and elevate the advising profession also lifts the institution's net aptitude for producing successful students. As progenitors of the capital required to be successful in the higher education, we are essential for keeping the lights on at our institutions and the dreams attainable for our students. As the realm of higher education continues to grow more complex, costly, and prone to making students navigate a labyrinth of hurdles and bureaucratic contingencies, advisors are needed more than ever to help students obtain what they came to us for, minus any unneeded debt or accrued time. Remember the essentiality of your role here advisors. Make it manifest by looking at each other in this way, so that when we find that our institutions are staring back at us with the same look, we will know we have entered a new moment in our professional evolution.

## References

- Bloom, J.L., Hutson, B.L., & He, Y. (2008). *The Appreciative Advising Revolution*. *Stipes*
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Vol. 16). Cambridge: *Cambridge University Press*.
- Cope, E., & Sandys, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Aristotle: Rhetoric* (Cambridge Library Collection – Classics). Cambridge: *Cambridge University Press*. DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511707421
- Crookston, B. B. (1972). A Developmental View of Academic Advising as Teaching. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 13(1), 12–17.
- Dial, M., Bouknight, J. & McKeown, P. (2021). Appreciative Onboarding and Professional Development of Academic Advisors. *Journal of Appreciative Education*. Special Issue
- Gordon, V. (2019). Developmental Advising: The Elusive Ideal. *NACADA Journal*, 39(2), 72-76.
- Habley, W.R., Bloom, J. L., & Robbins, S. (2012). *Increasing persistence: Research-based strategies for college student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Himes, H. & Schulenberg, J. (2016). The Evolution of Academic Advising as a Practice and as a Profession. Grites, T.J. (Ed.), Miller, M. A. (Ed.), Voler, J. G. (Ed.). (pp. 1-20) Jossey-Bass
- Kuh, G.D., Bridges, B.K., & Hayek, J.C. (2006), *What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature*, *NPEC*
- Larson, L., Johnson, A., Aiken-Wisniewski, S.A., & Barkemeyer, J. (2018). *What Is Academic*

Advising? An Application of Analytic Induction. *NACADA Journal*. Volume 38(2).

DOI:10.12930.NACADA-16-032

Li, W., Nirei, M., & Yamana, K. (2019). Value of Data: There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch in the Digital Economy. *Bureau of Economic Analysis*.

Lowenstein, M. (2005). If Advising Is Teaching, What Do Advisors Teacher? *NACADA Journal*. Volume 25(2)

Menke, D., Duslak, M., & McGill, C. (2020). Administrator Perceptions of Academic Advisor Tasks. *NACADA Journal*. Volume 40(2)

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). (2005). *Student Engagement: Exploring Different Dimensions of Student Engagement*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Olsen, O.S. (2009). Appreciative Advising and First-Generation College Students. *PSU Journal*. Volume 11. DOI: 10.26209/MJ1161498

Symeonidis, V. (2015). The Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession: A Study of Education Unions' Perspectives. *M.Sc. International and Comparative Education*.

The Equity-Excellence Imperative. A 2030 Blueprint for Undergraduate Education at U.S.

Research Universities. *The Boyer 2030 Commission. The Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (UERU)*

The Future of Academic Advising [Zoom Presentation]. The Chronicle of Higher Education.

<https://www.chronicle.com/events/virtual/the-future-of-academic-advising>

The Future of Advising: Strategies to Support Student Success (2022). *The Chronicle of Higher*

*Education*. <https://store.chronicle.com/products/the-future-of-advising>

White, E. (2020). The Professionalization of Academic Advising: A Structured Literature

Review - A Professional Advisor's Response. *NACADA Journal*. Volume 40(1)