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My experience at the 2008 NACADA Annual Conference was a very memorable one. As a graduate student with limited experience in advising, I found the conference very informative and beneficial. Going into the conference, I really did not know what to expect and was focused on attending with an open mind. I would first like to say that I was impressed with the preparation and organization of the event as well as the Hyatt Regency as a host site. Chicago has much to offer, and I could not imagine a better location for this conference. I was also fortunate to meet many wonderful people and have conversations about what exactly they do in their careers. With so many people from all over the country, it was refreshing to speak with advisers from different backgrounds and areas of expertise.

I have had limited experiences in academic advising, so the breadth and range of topics covered at the conference was very eye-opening for me. I was inspired from the start by hearing the keynote speakers. I especially enjoyed Dr. Joseph White's comments. He emphasized the impact that academic advisers can have not only on student's academic careers but on their lives as well. I felt that this point reinforced the importance of the job done by advisers and set the tone for the entire conference. I personally know the impact my advisors had on me in college and was reminded by Dr. White how important those relationships can be.

One of the hardest things to do was select which sessions to attend. There were many I thought would be interesting. In my position at Mississippi State, I deal with student-athletes only. This led me to select speakers and topics I considered relevant to what I do and encounter on a daily basis. I was interested in the sessions dealing with advising athletes, but I also felt I would get the most out those topics involving undecided students and dealing with diversity issues on campus. The latter two areas are of high interest to me.

In covering some of the highlights of the conference, I would have to start with Mr. Thomas Brown. On Friday I attended his session entitled "Enhancing the Academic Climate for Black Male Students." Mr. Brown was one of the most eloquent and inspirational speakers I have heard. His blend of knowledge and humor captured the attention of the room, and I felt extremely fortunate to have been able to hear him speak. He addressed issues such as stereotypes facing black male students as well as pointing out the obstacles to be overcome for many of these young men. He presented the different dynamic present when dealing with certain multicultural students. In dealing with black male student-athletes who have so much ahead of them, I now know the responsibility facing myself and my peers to understand and be sensitive to the issues facing them. I feel as though I can effectively "put myself in their shoes" after reviewing Mr. Brown's presentation.

In the sessions dealing with student-athlete advising, I was able to see the way others deal with common issues arising in this field. I think that sometimes here at Mississippi State we get stuck in our own little world, and it was great to hear what others are doing to enrich the lives of their student-athletes. This information I felt I could share with the other members of the Office of Athletic Academics at MSU. The Commission

Meeting on advising student-athletes was also a good experience for me. There were many issues raised that related well to what I do in my position. A major concern discussed here was advising for eligibility versus advising for life and career preparation. Many times in athletics, students are placed in majors determined by their percent towards degree or eligibility requirements rather than what they really want to do or what really interests them. This is an unfortunate consequence of collegiate athletics that is important to keep in mind when advising these young men and women. I felt this was important information to relay to the other members of our staff.

I attended sessions dealing with advising students who are undeclared or undecided in their majors, because I experience these issues very often when handling incoming student-athletes. I feel as though these students are to be handled carefully as the decision laying ahead of them is one that will have a major impact on their lives. Most Americans today list their number one regret as their college major. Rushing into a decision like this could be very detrimental, and advising these students becomes a challenging task. Two sessions that stuck out to me were "Why Am I Here? Real Strategies for Helping Undecided Students" and "Being Undeclared May Be the Best Choice of a Major." I will take away from these sessions the fact that most students will be more capable and prepared to make a major decision after experiencing some of what college has to offer. It could therefore be argued that being "undecided" for an initial period helps students discover what their real interests are and what types of academic programs are available. The first thing that can be done as an academic advisor to foster success is to ensure the major selection process is handled seriously and appropriately.

I have only touched on a few of the highlights from the conference, but the experience is one hard to describe. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to attend the 2008 conference, and I will take forward with me many things I believe will only enhance my ability to positively influence the lives of those student-athletes I encounter. Only a couple of months ago I had no idea an organization like NACADA existed, but I am now aware of the resources available to help myself and all those I work with be better at helping students succeed. Thank you again for the opportunity to attend the conference, and I hope to be able to attend many more in the future.

Sincerely,

Drew Hubbard