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I have always had a passion for helping and teaching people. Academic advising allows me to hone in on both. The field of academic advising encompasses so much more than just lifting a student's registration hold or directing them in the right direction regarding classes. It involves the personal as well as educational bond that you build with each one of your students; a bond that personifies confidence and admiration from both sides. I was lucky enough to receive a graduate assistantship in the Office of Academic Student Instructional Support (OASIS) at Valdosta State University in August 2007. As a graduate assistant I was responsible for roughly 200 student advisees. This opportunity quickly solidified my ambitions of becoming an educator. I was lucky enough to receive a full time academic advisor position in August 2008. Since August 2008, I have been working diligently with my 600+ advisees and the 2000+ students that make up OASIS.

The 2008 NACADA National Conference in Chicago, Illinois allowed me to experience the myriad of different facets academic advising encompasses. As a budding advisor and educator, I was thrilled to get the opportunity to listen and talk with some of the United States leading experts on academic advising and higher education. I have always enjoyed problem solving and thinking critically. I found that in the world of higher education those are two good skills to possess. My skills as well as passions for critical thinking and problem solving sparked my interest in research. I sat in on all the sessions that were geared towards research and assessment. The first session I sat in on was entitled "Expanding Research in Academic Advising". This presentation presented three different perspectives on research in academic advising and ways that each could increase advisor interest in research. There is more than one way to conduct research just as there is more than one way to solve a problem. This presentation enriched me with an arsenal of different ways that I could go about conducting research. Another one of my favorite sessions was the session entitled "Writing for NACADA". Sitting in on this session opened my eyes to the myriad of different ways that I could be published in one of NACADA's numerous publications. The final session I attended on Thursday was entitled "Have You Ever Thought About Pursuing a Doctorate?". This presentation was given by Dr. Jennifer Bloom, NACADA's acting president. This was of very high interest to me because I plan on pursuing my doctorate in higher education once I finish my master's degree. Dr. Bloom provided a lot of good information pertaining to the differences between an Ed.D. and a Ph.D. She provided me with a timeline and agenda of all the things that I will need to have completed before I am accepted in to a doctorate program. She also provided me with a lot of good information pertaining to how to complete a doctorate degree.

Friday morning I sat in on a session entitled "Integrating Career Advising in Academic Advising: Taking Advising to New Heights". This session provided a lot of good information pertaining to linking the gap between academic advising and career counseling. As an academic advisor, I am faced with career counseling questions from my students every day. Although academic advising and career counseling are not synonymous, they are very closely related. This session provided me with several Web resources that I can have my students visit in order to help answer some of their questions as well as provided a list of traditional objective tests that can help narrow down my student's job occupation pool. The department I work in houses all the undecided and general studies students at Valdosta State University. The majority of the students in my department were at one time a different major than

undecided. I sat in on a session entitled “Reality Check: Advising Students OUT of a Major”. This title sparked my interest because I see students everyday that came to college one major because their parents wanted them to major in that particular field when in actuality they wanted to major in something else. Subsequently their grades suffer and they end up on academic probation. This session talked about the different ways an advisor can identify students whose majors negatively correlate with their interest. This type of advising runs hand in hand with career counseling because we are advising students out a major that doesn’t interest them and into a major that does. We do this in hopes that a more motivated and engaged student will become a better student. This could possibly lead to an increase in retention.

Besides attending the plethora of different sessions and speakers, I got to tour the city of Chicago and take in its magnificent beauty and history. I got to visit Millennium Park and the vast array of abstract art that align its cement walkways. I got to visit the Art Institute of Chicago where I saw an original Monet, Van Gogh, and Seurat to name a few. I stood before the Sears Tower in shock and aw of the tremendous achievements of its architecture and grace. I also got to catch game two of the NLDS between the Cubs and the Dodgers. Although I am not a huge fan of either team I am a huge fan of baseball and I would definitely recommend visiting Wrigley Field to anyone who is a fan of baseball. All in all my experiences in Chicago were very educational and rewarding and I am looking forward to attending the NACADA National Conference again in 2009.