



Voices from the Field

Advisement Philosophy

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Early in my advising career, I attended a NACADA Regional Conference workshop on developing an advising portfolio. The workshop facilitators opened the session with the suggestion that advisor portfolios should prominently feature the advisor's advisement philosophy. "An advisement philosophy—that sounds important." I thought to myself: "Do most advisors have a philosophy? Am I the only person in this portfolio workshop without a philosophy?" I quickly thumbed through the conference program to see if there was a workshop on developing an advisement philosophy. Much to my dismay, no session was being offered. I left the workshop not sure why I needed a philosophy but determined that I should have one.

I began by researching the literature on how to create an advisement philosophy. I did not find much guidance for developing a personal advisement philosophy, but I did locate a wealth of resources on developing advising-program mission statements, including Habley's (2005) *Developing a Mission Statement for the Academic Advising Program*. In paragraph 4, Habley noted,

The [academic advisement] mission statement should serve as a guide to the decisions [educators] make about what [they] do and how [they] accomplish what [they] do. The operant term in this consideration is the word "guide." . . . The mission statement [is] the driver of goals and objectives for advising which in turn "anchor" program strategies and delivery.

This sounded very much like what a personal advising philosophy should do: guide my decisions, determine my goals and objectives, and form a foundation for my advisement strategies and delivery. So I began adapting suggestions for the development of program mission statements to the development of my personal advising philosophy.

My colleagues suggested starting with the Academic Advising Standards and Guidelines of CAS (2005) and the NACADA Statement of Core Values

of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2004). In addition, I discovered *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Gordon & Habley, 2000). Combined, these resources provided guidance regarding mission statements.

For example, White (2000, pp. 187–88) suggested that advising mission statements include the following goals:

- developing suitable educational plans,
- clarifying career and life goals,
- selecting appropriate courses and other educational experiences,
- interpreting academic requirements of the institution,
- making students aware of all the available resources that enhance their education,
- evaluating student progress toward their degrees,
- developing decision-making skills,
- helping students become independent learners, and
- collecting data about students' educational needs, their history in the institution, and how these data might affect institutional decisions and policies.

I also learned from White (2000) that advising mission statements should

- be coherent, consistent, yet never static;
- align with the college and university mission statement;
- include roles and responsibilities, expectations, and desired outcomes for constituents;
- be based upon a theoretical framework;
- consider advisees' needs, perspectives, culture, values, and expectations regarding advising conferences;
- assume that learning inside and outside of the classroom is essential to student success and that advising in and of itself is a learning experience;
- acknowledge that students in all majors need experiences that will aid in the improvement of their communication skills;
- promote student success in both collaborative and independent work; and
- foster students' development of self-appraisal skills and appreciation of diversity.

Armed with these guidelines, I set down my personal philosophy:

Academic advisement facilitates student development. Academic advisement involves advisees learning more about three major components and the interrelatedness of these three components in making well-suited academic, career, and life goals, plans, and choices. The three major components are the self, the college environment, and the environment that is external to the college.

The component of the self involves the students' examining their values, personalities, cultures, likes/dislikes, strengths/challenges, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. Successful students will learn more about each of these aspects of the self and they will become aware that they are in a constant state of evolution, creating the need for their evaluation and reevaluation of the self. In effect, students should learn means by which they can maintain a sense of self throughout the life span.

The second component, the college environment, involves students learning how to navigate themselves through their academic careers, becoming aware of the purposes of higher education, seek diverse and challenging educational and social experiences, use available resources, make well-informed decisions regarding their academic career, and develop a regard for lifelong learning.

The third component, the environment external to the college, mandates that the student cultivate a worldview, achieve a sense of purpose in life, and develop in ways that foster personally defined success, well-being, happiness, and fulfillment in an ever-evolving world. Ultimately, the student will achieve a comprehension of the connections between these three components and will strive to achieve ongoing development in each. Such could result in the student's long-term development, self-direction, and personal potential well beyond the college years.

My advisement philosophy serves me well. It allows me to explain my role to advisees while it gives structure to my advising sessions and my advisement programming initiatives. My philosophy gives me a sense of clarity and focus in my day-to-day interactions with students and in my long-term career goals. It also helps me incorporate theories of student development into my advising and provides a clear rationale for my work with students. Because I attended that eye-opening workshop nearly 5 years

ago, my philosophy has been a work in progress. I am sure my personal advisement philosophy will change as I become a more seasoned advisor and as my institution's mission changes.