Advising Communication, Strategies & Tools

What’s the point?

* To explore multiple viewpoints and perspectives offered in advising
* To reveal how advising habits both enhance and restrict our advising effectiveness
* To raise awareness of the importance of developing fresh viewpoints
* To remind us that advising messages are not passively received, but actively processed

Developmental Advising involves…

* The whole person (i.e. students don’t live in an “academic vacuum”)
* On-going conversations (i.e. schedule follow-up appointments)
* Trust & respect (i.e. being “present” in the moment)
* Identifying & cultivating passions (i.e. helping students identify what is a good fit for them)
* A learning focus

Collective Knowledge:

We can learn from how other advisors approach common advising situations

* How do your habits make your life easier
* How do your habits restrict you?
* How can we learn from each other to make our routines more effective?

**Topics covered**

* Characteristics of effective advisors
* Effective communication skills
* Advising scenarios
* Strategies for implementation

Understanding style and balancing approach -- Scheduler, Teacher, and Counselor

Advisor Styles

Teacher

Focus is on learning

Counselor Scheduler

Focus is on Development Focus is on Classes

The **teaching-advising style** focuses on educating students in their majors, institutional policies and procedures, and university resources. The objective in the teaching-advising style is learning outcomes in order to move the student toward degree completion.

The **counseling-advising style** focuses on addressing developmental issues which inhibit students in their academic success. This approach utilizes student development theories to promote students’ positive growth toward their personal, professional and academic goals.

The **schedule-advising style** emphasizes building the student’s class schedule for the semester and focusing on their immediate academic endeavors. The ultimate goal is academic progress through directive advising and disseminate information in order to assure retention and degree completion.

 The academic advisor with the ability to utilize all three advising styles according to the needs of the student will better serve a diverse population. Additionally, a flexible approach to advising increases the likelihood of addressing the multiple needs of the students in their goal to graduate.

**Characteristics of Effective Advisors**

* Genuinely enjoys students
* Relate to advisees of many cultures, ethnicities, educational backgrounds
* Committed to accuracy and clarity
* Open and friendly
* Know their limits and make referrals accordingly
* Excellent listeners
* Organized
* Caring, empathetic
* Reassuring, trustworthy, inspire confidence
* Good memory
* Good sense of humor
* Can deliver hard news in a caring way
* Willing to ask for help
* Good at bringing organization and order to a disorganized process
* Effective communicators
* Creative, innovative
* Calm in a crisis
* Patient, can wait for students to come to their own conclusions
* Detail oriented
* Technologically adept
* Ask probing questions
* Know the right time to present information to students
* A good colleague and collaborator
* Flexible, adaptive
* Good at multitasking
* A quick study
* Nonjudgmental

**Tips for Applying Concepts of Developmental Advising Practices** – Mark Hurley

* Get Personal
* Practice Active Listening
* Treat Advising as an Ongoing Conversation
* Avoid the Temptation to Decide
* Make Silence an Ally
* Challenge Students’ Misconceptions
* Make Students Active Partners in the Advising Process
* Challenge and Support
* Make Meaning out of the Curriculum
* Take a Holistic Approach

Reference: NACADA Monograph Series No. 16 – The New Advisor Guidebook: Mastering the Art of Advising Through the First Year and Beyond – The characteristics of an effective advisor list is a compilation of responses from academic advisors in the Academic Advising Center at the University of Iowa as well as the Content Review Board for the NACDA New Advisor Guidebook.

Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Advisors

### The Absent Minded Advisor

Becoming distracted, finishing appointments quickly, answering multiple phone calls during appointments, “daydreaming”

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: control the office environment, (turn phone ringer off, shut or crack door, review notes, schedule time in your day for e-mail queries), time management, and stress control.

### Great Answer, Wrong Question

Assuming the issue, jumping to conclusions, stereotyping.

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: work on improving listening skills, restate questions, learning to use silence.

### Judge & Jury

Advising students that they either ‘absolutely” can or cannot do something, especially as it relates to the students goals (administrative policy is another story!)

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: help students create and realize their own goals, decision making info, plan “B’s”, setting goals, gentle confrontation skills.

### The Lo-Calorie Advisor

Avoiding discussing issues that you don’t feel comfortable with or knowledgeable enough in an area. Issues handled by other offices on campus.

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: Use understanding & empathy, work on listening skills, interact with other services on campus, role-play tough situations.

### The Fairy God Advisor

Doing the work for the student, making that phone call, going on the internet to find career information, etc. Not encouraging self-initiative or self-responsibility.

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: help advisors understand themselves and their advising styles so they can reflect on that, and then understanding that helping others doesn’t also mean doing everything for them.

### The amazing Human file cabinet

Being an experienced advisor has its drawbacks. Assuming that since you know the information, it must be correct. Not recognizing that things change often, not making the effort to update your information, not double-checking.

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: life-long learning concept, on-going training and professional development, professional networks to keep you up-to-date.

### The All-Knowing Oracle

Knowing the answer to EVERYTHING; not knowing the answer to ANYTHING (referring too much), Assuming the advisee knows NOTHING!

Ideas on how to “kick” the habit: understanding student populations, having faith, purpose of referrals, networking with colleagues, on-going training, understanding self-motivation.

Revised from Ryan/Woolston NACADA Presentation 2005

**Six Habits of Highly *Ineffective* Listeners**

1. **On-Off Listening**

Occurs because most of us think about four times as fast as the average person can speak. Thus, the listener has ¾ of a minute of “spare thinking time” in each listening minute to think about such things as personal affairs, concerns, and troubles.

(One can overcome this by paying attention to more than the words, watching non-verbal signs like gestures, eye contact, hesitation, voice tone to pick up the feeling level.)

1. **Red Flag Listening**

Sometimes, when we hear certain words, ideas, or opinions expressed, we become upset and stop listening. These expressions, often cultural, political, or religious in nature, become “like a red flag to a bull.” We find ourselves reacting and thus, tuning out the speaker.

(The first step to overcome this barrier is to discover our personal red flags. Also, try listening attentively to someone more sympathetic to the issue.)

1. **Open Ears- Closed Mind Listening**

Sometimes we decide rather quickly that either the subject or the speaker is boring, and what is being said makes no sense. We decide we can predict what the person knows or will say; thus we conclude there is no reason to listen because we will hear nothing new.

(Better to listen and find out for sure if our predictions are accurate, rather than assume so.)

1. **Glassy- eyed Listening**

Sometimes we look at a person intently and seem to be listening. However, our minds are far away absorbed in our own thoughts. We get glassy-eyed with a dreamy expression on our faces. We can tell when other people look this way, and they can see the same in us.

(Postponing daydreaming until another time. If others appear glossy-eyed, suggest a change of pace or break.)

1. **Too- Complicated-For-Me Listening**

When we are listening to ideas that are too detailed, wandering, or complex, we often stop paying attention and “give up” trying to understand. Our thoughts then go elsewhere.

(It’s important to keep trying to understand by asking clarifying questions.)

1. **Don’t Rock the Boat Listening**

We don’t like to have our favorite ideas, prejudices, and points of view challenged or overturned. So, when someone says something that clashes with what we believe, we may unconsciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a counterattack.

(Best to keep listening carefully and non-defensively, so we can do a better job of responding constructively.)

Adapted from Strength to Your Sword Arm: Selected Writings, Brenda Ireland, Holy Cow Press, 1992

**Effective Communication Skills**  
  
Effective communication skills are essential for advisors. Providing information in a meaningful way serves as a basis for decisions which can have a profound influence on a student's entire life. Advisees are not simply deciding what courses they will take or what they will major in; they are also deciding, if only indirectly, their futures.  
  
[**Listen carefully**](http://www.psu.edu/dus/cfe/actvlstn.htm) and check your understanding by paraphrasing what advisees have said or by asking a question. Ask yourself whether advisees have asked the right questions. Too often, the correct answer is given by advisors--but the wrong question was asked by students, and communication fails.

 Use **open-ended questions** and similar techniques that enable you to discuss topics with advisees rather than allowing only “yes” or “no” responses.

* **Discuss** with your advisees their backgrounds and experiences, progress on their goals, and future plans. Such a discussion will provide you with helpful information, and it will reflect your concern for advisees as individuals.
* Most communications have both an intellectual and an emotional component. Listen for the **emotional message**. If the emotional part of the message seems to be out of proportion or inconsistent with the intellectual part, you may need to examine this discrepancy before a rational decision can be made.
* Always **keep notes** about what decisions have been made and why. A quick review before seeing students again will help you recall specific details. This is an important way to demonstrate your interest in students as individuals.
* The more effective approaches to academic advising go beyond informing and begin to involve some counseling skills including **helping** and **empowering**.
* **Respect** your advisees as people and show them that you respect them. One way to do this is to make a sincere effort to do an effective job of your advising.
* Encourage **informed decision-making** of your advisees. They are adults, and, more importantly, they must live with their decisions.
* Respecting advisees does not mean that advisors must agree with all of their decisions. The advisor role is to help them make **realistic decisions**. If advisors have reason to believe that students will fail or are making a poor choice, they should honestly discuss this perception with them.
* Know enough to recognize when one of your advisees needs help beyond your capability and know how to make a [**referral**](http://www.psu.edu/dus/cfe/referral.htm).
* **Be available**; you cannot provide even the basics to an advisee if the advisee cannot find you.

*Adapted from the NACADA Faculty Advising Training Program*

From <http://www.psu.edu/dus/cfe/actvlstn.htm>

**Effective Listening**

**Pay attention to what you say**

Listening is the most basic advising skill. The elements of listening behavior include eye contact, body language, verbal responses, and vocal tone. Most helpful to advisees are involved advisors who practice active listening skills. Examples of active listening skills for advisors are as follows:

* Let your advisees tell their story first; do not interrupt their sentences.
* Relax and try not to give advisees the impression you want to jump right in and talk.
* Appreciate the emotion, e.g. voice intonation and body language, behind your advisees' words.
* Establish good eye contact.
* Use appropriate facial expressions.
* Use affirmative head nods.
* Avoid nervous or bored gestures.
* Fight off external distractions.
* Constantly check your understanding of what you hear, not what you want to hear.
* Intermittently respond to your advisees with “uh-huh,” “yes-s-s,” “I see.”
* Ask clarifying or continuing questions to demonstrate to your advisees that you are involved in what they're saying.
* Constantly check to see if your advisees want to comment or respond to what you have previously said to them.
* Take notes, if necessary, where certain facts and data are important.

*Adapted from the NACADA Faculty Advising Training Program*

We are drowning in words: e-mail (most of which are spam!), text messages, junk mail, phone bills that have more pages than a high school annual, talk radio shows, and TV news shows where it isn’t enough to have a talking head and a stock ticker, but we have to have a crawler with the latest on whatever tragedy is unfolding.

In this flood of words, we barely pay attention to what we ourselves say anymore. Yogi Berra made himself famous through oratorical double exposures (“You should always go to other people’s funerals because if you don’t, they won’t come to yours.”) George Bush seems to be crowding in on Yogi’s turf (“"Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.")

Don’t try to compete with these experts! Listen to what you are saying yourself, and you will have a better chance of being listened to, and understood, by whomever you are talking to!

**Use effective listening with students**

Reflective/Interactive Listening

“Listening looks easy, but it’s not simple. Every head is a world.” ~Cuban proverb

Reflective listening is a primary “listening” skill. It is a means for engaging students in the relationship and building trust. Even though reflective listening appears easy, it takes practice to do it well.

Sometimes our work with students does not include “reflective listening” and we may experience roadblocks to effective communication, including misinterpretation and assumption. Good reflective and interactive listening should include an interest in what the student has to say and respect for that person’s perspective. In other words it is a hypothesis testing approach to listening. Listening breakdowns can occur in any of three places.

• Speaker does not say what is meant

• Listener does not hear correctly

• Listener gives a different interpretation to what the words mean

Reflective and Interactive listening is meant to close the loop in communication to ensure that you understand what is being said and that breakdowns don’t occur. The listener’s voice turns down at the end of a reflective listening statement. This may feel presumptuous, yet it leads to clarification and greater exploration. Interactive listening acknowledges feelings.

There are three basic levels of reflective (interactive) listening that may increase the effectiveness of the exchange. In general, the depth should match the situation. Examples of the three levels include:

**Repeating or rephrasing (clarifying)**: listener repeats or substitutes synonyms of phrases; stays close to what the speaker has said. Clarifying is using facilitative questions to clarify information, get additional information, and explore all sides of an issue. Rephrase the content. If you restate comments word for word, you may appear to be parroting. Not only does it sound awkward, it may be annoying.

**Paraphrasing (verifying)**: Listener makes a major restatement in which the speaker’s meaning is inferred. Verifying is paraphrasing the speaker's words to ensure understanding and to check meaning and interpretation with him or her.

**Reflection of feeling:** Reflecting is making empathetic remarks that acknowledge the speaker's feelings. Statements like those listed above work well because they are noncommittal. Make educated guesses! Your own intuition about what the student might be feeling may well be right on.

In conclusion, when you want to improve your listening skills, a good rule to remember is that you have two ears and one mouth--you should use them in their respective proportions. To succeed in advising, you must understand the needs, wants, and motivations of your students. To understand those needs, you must hear. To hear, you must listen.

"You can see a lot, just by listening." ~Yogi Berra

**Summarizing**

Summaries are special applications of reflective listening. They can be used throughout a conversation but are particularly helpful at transition points, for example, after the person has spoken about a particular topic, has recounted a personal experience, or when the encounter is nearing the end.

Summarizing helps to ensure that there is clear communication between the speaker and listener. Also, it can provide a stepping stone towards change.

**Structure of Summaries**

1. Begin with a statement indicating you are making a summary. For example:

* Let me see if I understand so far…
* Here is what I’ve heard. Tell me if I’ve missed anything.

1. Give special attention to Change Statements. These are statements made by the client that point towards a willingness to change. Miller and Rollnick have identified four types of change statements, all of which overlap significantly:
   * Problem recognition “My use has gotten a little out of hand at times.”
   * Concern “If I don’t stop, something bad is going to happen.”
   * Intent to change “I’m going to do something, I’m just not sure what it is yet.”
   * Optimism “I know I can get a handle on this problem.”
2. If the person expresses ambivalence, it is useful to include both sides in the summary statement. For example: “On the one hand…, on the other hand…”
3. It is legitimate to include information in summary statements from other sources (e.g. your own clinical knowledge, research, courts, family).
4. Be concise.
5. End with an invitation. For example:

* Did I miss anything?
* If that is accurate, what other points are there to consider?
* Anything you want to add or correct?

1. Depending on the response of the client to your summary statement, it may lead naturally to planning for or taking concrete steps towards the change goal.

(Adapted from Motivational Interviewing materials by David B. Rosengren, Ph.D. and from Motivational Interviewing by Miller & Rollnick, 1991)

\* Be cognizant of over-communication. “Over-talkers” tend to repeat themselves, tell stories, forget what’s been said, go over irrelevant information, have an agenda or “script”, interrupt a lot, don’t ask questions, finish sentences for others, always thinking of what to say next, stray from original topic.

**Open-ended Questions**

Open-ended questions are questions that encourage people to talk about whatever is important to them. The help establish rapport, gather information, and increase understanding. If a question is constructed properly, the natural reaction from the student will be to provide more explanation and information. They are the opposite of closed-ended questions that typically require a simple brief response such as “yes” or “no.”

Open-ended questions invite other to “tell their story” in their own words. They do not lead people in a specific direction. Open-ended questions should be used frequently, though not exclusively, in conversation. When asking open-ended questions one must be ready and willing to listen to the response. Open-ended questions should lead students to think analytically and critically. Ultimately, a good open-ended question should stir discussion and exploration.

To illustrate closed-ended vs. open-ended questions, consider the following examples. The topic is the same in both questions, but the responses likely will be very different.

* Did you have a good relationship with your parents? (closed-ended)
* Tell me about your relationship with your parents. (open-ended)

Examples of open-ended questions:

* How can I be of help?
* Would you tell me more about \_\_\_?
* Could you help me understand \_\_\_?
* What are the good things and less good things about\_\_\_?
* What do you think you will lose if you give up\_\_\_?
* What have you tried before?
* How have things changed?
* Why is that important to you?
* What do you think about \_\_\_?
* How would you do things differently?
* What do you want to do next?
* How do you typically approach this kind of situation?

**Affirmations**

Affirmations are statements and gestures that recognize client strengths and acknowledge behaviors that lead in the direction of positive change, no matter how big or small. Affirmations build confidence in one’s ability to change. To be effective, affirmations must be genuine and congruent.

Examples of affirmation statements:

* Thank you for…
* I really like the way you…
* That was very creative how you…
* If you showed a lot of self-control in the way you…
* It may not seem like much, but I think it was very impressive how you…
* You have a real gift for…

SILENCE IS POWERFUL

Silence is powerful. And sometimes silence can be very scary. . . .But silence can be so powerful in so many positive ways. In our day-to-day activities we are so driven into constant talking and doing. It seems that a successful day is determined by the amount you have talked and the amount you have done. But you lose points for being still and being quiet. . . .

Silence was not something I was always comfortable with. I remember as a beginning counselor how uncomfortable I felt when I was in the middle of a counseling session and there would be a period of silence. I would wait for someone to say something. And if no one said anything I would feel I had to say something-even if I didn't have anything relevant to say.

It took me a while before I was able to use the power of silence in counseling sessions. I began to see how the silence was like a time out. The silent period was a time when people could reflect and allow an issue to sink in. Or it was a time when a topic was completed and the silence provided a natural time to move on to another issue. Or it was a signal that the session was over.

--The above is excerpted from letter written by George McGurn, retired school counselor and practicing family counselor, on February 9, 2000. Complete letter available online at http://home.comcast.net/~gmcgurn/silence.html

**Sounds of Silence**

By Richard Boyum

UW-Eau Claire Counseling Services - <http://www.uwec.edu/counsel/boyum/Sounds.htm>

Sometimes the noise of our words gets in the way of what we are really feeling and thinking. It is often in the best interest of both counselor and client to use silence as a way of getting at the heart of a person's issue. An exercise that can be used both in a session and as a homework assignment involves using the sounds of silence. Ask the client to sit quietly and say nothing. As thoughts in the forms of words or pictures come to mind, have the client either utter a phrase that the counselor can record or have the client write a phrase or sentence down that captures the sounds of silence. Suggest to the client that they are then to clear their head and create an empty space and wait for the next sound of silence to come. Again, whatever thought or word appears is to be written down or spoken to the recorder. Sometimes the same sound of silence may appear. There may be overlapping sounds or each may be distinctly different. After approximately fifteen minutes ask the client to begin discussing in any order they choose their various sounds of silence. They can describe them in more detail or they can talk about the various meanings of the sounds of silence. Silence in our culture is a very precious commodity. We can use it more in counseling to create better understanding of a person’s issues. Talk counseling or therapy can use silence as a way to both inform and transform a client.

**Body Language**

Understand and mirror student’s non-verbal cues

* Appreciate the emotion behind your advisee’s words (voice intonation and body language)
* Establish good eye contact
* Use affirmative head nods and appropriate facial expressions
* Avoid nervous or bored gestures
* Face your advisee squarely.
* Maintain an “open posture. This is a sign that the helper is open to what the advisee has to say. It is a non-defensive position.
* Lean towards the other, another indication of availability or involvement.
* Recognize the advisee’s non-verbal behavior. Examples are gestures and facial expressions. Also recognize para-linguistic behavior. Examples are tone of voice, inflections, spacing of words, emphases and pauses. This will enable you to respond to the advisee’s total message and not just words.

--Adapted from the University of Texas at Arlington’s “The DO’s of Academic Advising” available online at <http://www.uta.edu/advisorhandbook/dos.htm>

**Recognize & utilize your own body language**

Body Language is the unspoken communication that goes on in every Face-to-Face encounter with another human being. It tells you their feelings towards you and how well your words are being received. Between 60-80% of our message is communicated through our Body Language, only 7-10% is attributable to the actual words of a conversation.

Being aware of the cues and signals being sent to you by others is a crucial skill if you want to understand a person's attitude towards you, regardless of what they are saying.

QUICK TIPS:

* NOTHING CROSSED. Keep arms, legs, and feet relaxed and uncrossed. Also, if you are wearing a jacket, open it up. It relays the message... I am open and honest with you.
* LEAN FORWARD. Move within 6 to 8 feet of your client. Lean slightly forward. Interested people always pay attention and lean forward. Leaning backwards demonstrates aloofness or rejection.
* MIRRORING. Pay attention to your clients breathing and the pace that they are talking at. Is it fast or slow, then mirror them. If they cross their legs...slowly do the same.
* DIRECT EYE CONTACT. Direct eye contact is a compliment to most people and builds trust in you. But be aware of the customs of people from other countries. It may be a sign of disrespect.
* HANDSHAKE. Not too hard and not too soft. Pay attention to how you are shaking someone's hand.

**Ten tips on how to use your body:**

**Eye contact** is one of the most important aspects of dealing with others, especially people we've just met. Maintaining good eye contact shows respect and interest in what they have to say. (NOTE: there are wide cultural differences regarding eye contact, be careful).

**Posture** is the next thing to master. Get your posture right and you'll automatically start feeling better, as it makes you feel good almost instantly. Next time you're feeling a bit down, take a look at how your standing or sitting. Are you slouched over, your shoulders drooping down and inward? This collapses the chest and inhibits good breathing, which in turn can help make you feel nervous or uncomfortable.

**Head position** is a great one to play around with, with yourself and others. When you want to feel confident and self assured keep your head level both horizontally and vertically. You can also use this straight head position when you want to be authoritative and what you're saying to be taken seriously. Conversely, when you want to be friendly and in the listening, receptive mode, tilt your head just a little to one side or other.

**Arms** give clues as to how open & receptive we are. Keep arms out to the side of the body or behind the back. This shows you can take on whatever comes your way and you meet things "head on". The more outgoing you are, the more you tend to use your arms with big movements. The quieter you are the less you move your arms away from your body. Try to strike a natural balance and keep arm movements midway.

**Legs** are the furthest point away from the brain, consequently they're the hardest bits of our bodies to consciously control. They tend move around a lot more than normal when we are nervous, stressed or being deceptive. Keep them as still as possible in most situations.

**Angle of the body** in relation to others gives an indication of our attitudes and feelings towards them. We angle toward people we find attractive, friendly and interesting and angle ourselves away from those we don't, it's that simple! Angles includes leaning in or away from people.

**Hand gestures** are so numerous it's hard to give a brief guide but here goes. Palms slightly up and outward is seen as open and friendly. Palm down gestures are generally seen as dominant, emphasizing and possibly aggressive, especially when there is no movement or bending between the wrist and the forearm. This palm up, palm down is very important when it comes to handshaking and we suggest you always offer a handshake upright and vertical, to convey equality.

**Distance from others** crucial if you want to give off the right signals. Stand too close and you'll be marked as "Pushy" or "In your face". Stand or sit too far away and you'll be "Keeping your distance" or "Stand offish".

**Ears**, (yes, ears) play a vital role in communication with others. You've got two ears and only one mouth, so try to use them in that order. If you listen twice as much as you talk you come across as a good communicator who knows how to strike up a balanced a conversation.

**Mouth movements** When thinking, lips can purse or twist from side to side—perhaps to hold back a comment we don't wish to reveal. Nevertheless, it will likely be spotted by others and although they may not know the comment, they will get a feeling.

Taken from http://www.bodylanguagetraining.com/

**Move beyond your own cultural norms**

Cross cultural advising holds special challenges. Beyond the obvious language comprehension issues caused by fast, prolific talkers, there is the general need to slow down, use extra care, and reflect on the possible barriers to effective communication. Among the most common are differences in how we (meaning those who grew up in the U.S.) and they (meaning students from other cultures) view time and space issues. Of course, “we” and “they” could easily be reversed, given the number of advisors who work at U.S. universities, but grew up in other countries.

Time

The life of an advisor is clock and calendar-driven. In our Western culture, which some call a “chronocracy” because of the mania we have for punctuality, we see time as an arrow of logical progress. As advisors, we need to recognize that while we have a “monochronic” or straight-line view of time, other cultures see time as a swirling cloud (“polychronic). In Eastern cultures, even birth and death are not clear demarcation points in a time line. A case in point is the Native American culture (or First Nation culture as it is known in Canada), which reveres story telling and the weaving of the future into the past. A constant stream of directives from an overly talkative advisor, with no regard for a Native American student’s past or family context, is a sure recipe for ineffective advising. Slow down; relax and stop looking at the clock, and you will be a much better advisor of any student, but especially one from a culture that is not so time driven.

Space

Interpersonal Communication classes often comment on the cultural differences in how we view interpersonal space. People from the Mediterranean region and Russia are comfortable with touching and standing closely to another person; people from mid-East are not. Some experts on cross-cultural communication go farther to say that those of us in the U.S. and other “frontier” cultures even view fate in a different way than do those who come from settled, older civilizations used to confined space. We may see great possibilities for students to elevate themselves and do extraordinary things, while a student from China might strongly believe that an academic set back was a matter of fate, to be accepted rather than combated. Think about that in the ample time you give students from other culture to explain to you how they feel!

Adapted in part from: Cross Cultural Communication: Beyond Intractability, A free Knowledge Base on More Constructive Approaches to Destructive Conflict: [www.beyondintractability.org/m/cross-cultural\_communication.jsp](http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/cross-cultural_communication.jsp)

**Cultural Competency Reflection Questions for Academic Advisors**

**General:**

What is my current level of cultural competency?

* + What personal responses should I be aware of that indicate one of my biases may have been triggered?
  + What do I wish I had learned during my education / training to have helped me be a better advisor?
  + What are my plans for expanding my current competency level?
  + When can I set aside time to reflect more deeply on my own cultural identity awareness (intracultural competency)?
  + Where can I go to learn more about cultural groups that I am not familiar with (inter-cultural competency)?

**Specific Areas:**

How has my racial/ethnic cultural background prepared me to advise these students?

* + How would I describe my racial/ethnic cultural background?
  + If I am a first-generation immigrant, what country did I come from? If not, what countries did my ancestors come from? How long ago did they arrive in the United States?
  + What kinds of experiences did the first members of my family to arrive here have?
  + Do I still have contact with any family members in our country of origin?
  + How assimilated am I into the dominant culture?
  + How much emphasis was placed on my race/ethnicity when I was growing up?
  + How much racial/ethnic diversity was I exposed to in my neighborhood(s) and school(s)?
  + How has discrimination – or the lack of it – as a result of my racial/ethnic group impacted my life?
  + What racial/ethnic group(s) do I currently identify with? How important is this identification to me?
  + Do I participate in any ethnic clubs, activities, or celebrations?
  + How has my racial/ethnic background influenced my behavior, attitudes, and values?
  + How might the experiences that I (and my family) have had be similar to or different from those of my advisees (and their families)?

How does my worldview help or hinder me in understanding my advisees' perspectives?

* + Am I oriented more towards individualism or collectivism?
  + Am I more comfortable with separateness or connectedness?
  + Am I more drawn toward competition or cooperation?
  + Do I view "nature" as something to be "mastered" or do I strive to be in harmony with it?
  + Do I place a greater value on property rights or human rights?
  + Do I place a greater value on objectivity or subjectivity? on detached observation or involved participation? on facts or on feelings?
  + Do I place greater value on the ability to organize (future-oriented) or the ability to improvise (here-and-now-oriented)?

What other cultural groups do I identify with (i.e gender, sexual orientation, age cohort, regional group, language group, exceptionality group, religious group, etc.)?

* + What is my current social class identification? How important is this identification to me?
  + What level of importance does each of these identifications have to me at the current time?
  + Have any of these identifications had greater or less importance to me during other periods of my life? Why might that be?
  + How might experiences related to my socioeconomic status be similar to or different from those of my advisees?
  + Are these groups dominant or oppressed in the overall society? Is identification with each group an empowering or disempowering experience for me?
  + How does my identification with each of these groups affect my values, beliefs, and behaviors?
  + What biases or stereotypical ideas do I hold about people who belong to the same groups that I do, or to groups that I do not identify with?

How has my socioeconomic background prepared me to advise these students?

* + Into which social class did the majority of my neighbors fall?
  + What was the class of the majority of students in my high school?
  + How did class influence my educational aspirations?

How much awareness do I have of behaviors that have variable meanings in different cultures? How might my awareness (or lack of awareness) of behavioral variety affect my interactions with my students?

* + What is my cultural norm for speaking patterns?
    - What is my norm for directness/indirectness of communication? How do I feel about "small talk"?
    - How do I feel when a student is very direct and straightforward in their manner of speaking? Do prefer linear communication?
    - How do I feel when a student always seems to "beat around the bush" in communicating?
    - Do I prefer circular communication?
    - How do I feel when a student talks very loudly or very softly?
    - How comfortable am I with a speaking pattern that is different from my own?
  + What is my cultural norm for openness about personal life?
    - How do I feel when a student asks questions about my family?
    - What is my comfort level with students who desire to talk about their personal matters?
  + What is my cultural norm for eye contact?
    - How do I feel when a student makes (or does not make) direct eye contact with me?
  + What is my cultural norm for time orientation?
    - Do I view time as something that can be saved, lost, or wasted?
    - How important is punctuality to me? How do I feel when a student arrives late for an appointment?
  + What is my cultural norm for personal space and physical contact?
    - Do I prefer to sit/stand close to my advisees, or am I more comfortable across a desk?
    - What level of physical contact am I comfortable with?
    - What level of physical contact is "safe" in my institutional environment?
    - How might I feel if an advisee attempted to hug me?
  + How comfortable am I with cultural symbols?
  + How do I respond when a student exhibits a cultural symbol that I find incomprehensible or distasteful?

What have I learned (or do I need to learn) about the campus culture of my Institution (or an Institution I am considering joining) that might impact my interactions with my advisees? What biases might I have brought into my current advising situation (or a situation that I am considering)?

* If the Institution at which I am currently employed (or am considering employment) is not in the geographic location where I was raised – or is not the type of institution at which I was educated –what assumptions might I have made about its students and/or campus culture because of its institutional type or geographic location?
* Or, if the institution is similar to one I have previously encountered (either as a student or professionally), what assumptions might I have made as the result of my prior experiences?
* Are we located in an urban or rural environment?
* How large is our student population?
* What is the level of student diversity on our campus?
  + - What is our male / female ratio?
    - What degree of socio-economic diversity is represented? Into what socioeconomic class do the majority of our students fall?
    - What is our racial/ethnic composition?
    - What age cohorts are represented? Is our population primarily of traditional age or is there a large age spread among our students?
    - Do we have any awareness of the LGBT population on our campus? Is this population acknowledged and/or welcomed? What religious groups are represented? Is religious diversity accepted/supported?
    - What is the level of native-language diversity? Is English the first language of all or most of our population, or do we have a large ESL population? What languages are represented?
    - Are Exceptional students identified/acknowledged on our campus? Are their talents and challenges encouraged/supported?
  + What is the level of faculty/staff/administration diversity and support for diversity on our campus?
    - How does our personnel population compare to our student population?
    - What attitudes and behaviors are modeled for our students?
    - Are we able to openly discuss biases and any perceived instances of racism, sexism, ageism, or other types of prejudice or discrimination?
    - Are there any types of difference which our institution defines as unacceptable? If so, do I agree with that definition?

What might I need to learn about my advisees' individual cultural backgrounds to ensure that I am relating and communicating effectively with them?

* + What are some characteristics of my cultural behavior that might be different from advisees who have a different cultural experience?
  + What values do I hold that might be different from advisees who have a different cultural experience?
  + Are these characteristics and values time independent (have they always been a part of my culture) or are have they changed according to the times?

Partially adapted from Gollnick, D.M. and Chinn, P.C. (2006). *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society, 7th ed.* Columbus, Ohio; Pearson / Merrill Prentice Hall.

Taken from NACADA DCD01C - **Foundations of Academic Advising CD 3: *Understanding Cultural Identity and Worldview Development***

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Kansas State

**Sample Sound Bites by Scenario or Situation**

**Students who seem to be…**

* **Apathetic** – “Are you happy with where you are right now?”
* **Dependent –** “I can give you advantages & disadvantages. The decision is yours”
* **Depressed –** “Are you sleeping & eating well? Are you enjoying things?”
* **Disengaged or unresponsive** – “For me to be helpful to you, I’m going to need some feedback”
* **Entitled** – “What do you think your role is in this situation”
* **Motivated & conscientious** – “What strengths do you want to focus on or enhance?”
* **Over-Committed** – “How important would you say it is for you to (graduate on time? Play lacrosse? Work two jobs?) on a scale of 1-10”
* **Overly Anxious** – “What can you do to break down these challenges into tasks you can handle”
* **Struggling (last chance)** – “How is your current approach to academics working for you? Tell me how this semester is going to be different”
* **Unfocused** – “What do you think will happen if you don’t change anything?”
* **Unrealistic in their expectations** – “Would it be okay if I tell you some of my concerns regarding your plan?”

Sound Bite Ideas

**General Greeting**: Make sure to try and at least glance at the students file before they come in so you can personalize it in some way. Remember who holds the power when asking “what can **I** do to help you?” Try to reframe so the student has the power by trying some of the following:

Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_\_ (your office). Thank you for coming in today.

What’s up?

How are you doing today? What brings you in?

What shall we work on today?

I’m sure you have some questions for me today. Let’s make sure we get to those first.

Are you enjoying the day?

What are you hoping we will accomplish today?

What’s the best thing that has happened to you so far today?

This behavior is out of character for you.

What advice would you give to next year’s entering class? (ask about 4-6 weeks into the semester – also gives telling information about this student)

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you understand your program curriculum?

Do you know why you have to take these specific courses?

A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.

Tell me what you already know about \_\_\_\_ (program, class, profession, etc).

Tell me more about that.

I look forward to your success.

Who’s your hero? Why?

Do you want to make a follow-up appointment now or come back when you are ready?

All I can do is give you the advantages and disadvantages. The decision is yours.

(Freshmen) How is living in the residence halls treating you?

**Academic Progress**

Where do you think you’re at in completing your degree?

What is your plan B?

Let’s develop a parallel plan.

What pressures and influences are you feeling from family and friends for college success?

What was going on last semester?

Don’t make it a mountain.

I understand you want to drop a class this semester. Do you have any scholarships or financial aid that requires a certain number of credit hours?

I’m concerned that you may be taking a heavy course load.

How is that working out for you?

College doesn’t have to be difficult to get anything out of it.

Tutoring is an exercise in persistence, not a measure of intelligence. You can be persistent, right?

Explain to me how you prepare for this class, what you do during class, and what you do afterward.

Are you having a good experience this semester?

You don’t have to make a 100% this semester. Just do the best you can.

I can’t fix this for you, but I can give you some options or ideas.

Where are you at now? Where do you need to be? How would you like to get there?

Is this something you would like to pursue?

What does academic success mean to you?

Help me assist you with finding options rather than doing damage control.

What strategies have you used that were helpful or successful? What strategies were not as helpful?

If you want different results, you have to start doing something different.

How will \_\_\_ (adding that class, double majoring) help you?

Tell me about an assignment you are working on for a class.

Is your study space set up for you to be motivated, successful, organized?

(Re-taking failed course) How are you approaching this course differently from the start of the semester?

(Students who want complex combination of majors and/or minors) It’s like buying a car. When you add the moon roof, leather upholstery, etc, the price goes up. Same for your education – can’t do all these things in 8 semesters. You need to make a decision that works for you.

(Struggling student) How are you going to feel about completing and/or not completing your degree five years from now? Put yourself in the future looking back.

(Probation) Was there anything particular that happened last semester that added an extra burden to your work load?

(Probation) What do you think will be different this semester from last? Do you have a plan for this semester that will assist you?

(Probation) What GPA are you planning for or predicting this semester? What specific plans do you have to achieve this goal?

**Personal Situations**

I am concerned about you because I have observed \_\_\_\_\_.

If you were me, would you be concerned?

Are you sleeping and eating well?

Are you enjoying things?

(Follow up to “Well, I’m paying for this, and I should be able to…) You are actually only paying a small fraction of what your education costs (all the taxpayers of the state are helping to fund his/her education).

You are not paying for an education. You are paying for the opportunity to earn one. What you do with that opportunity is up to you.

What strengths do you have that could help you succeed in making this change?

It sounds like you have a lot of commitments. Do you feel you have enough time to fully participate in them all?

Are things moving along or are you stuck?

(Parental pressure) What do YOU want to major in?

(Parental pressure) Is your \_\_\_\_ (mom, dad, etc) going to that class for you?

**Add your own!**

**Recommendation Letter**

I don’t know you very well. By example, what would you write about me?

If I was going to write a letter of recommendation for you, what would I include? What would I leave out?

Get to know one professor each semester. That will provide you with several references when you need them.

If I came to you with this request, how much time would you want to fulfill it?

What do you think I could say about you?

**Exploration**

What do you find most challenging about…

“What are you passion about?” or “What fascinates you?”

I saw you took “x” class. Can you tell me about it? Other students ask me what it is like. Can I tell them what you thought?

Professors don’t “give” grades – students earn grades.

Imagine what a day in the life of an \_\_\_\_\_\_ would be like.

What are your dreams and ambitions?

What is you favorite class? Least favorite class?

Think about your ideal resume. What will be on it when you graduate?

What is your understanding of what \_\_\_\_ (name a career or job) do everyday when they show up at work?

Date the major first…you don’t have to marry it right away.

What do you want your contribution to the world to be?

What are you hoping to gain from your college experience?

What are some areas or careers that you would like to pursue after this degree?

If you couldn’t go into \_\_\_\_\_\_ (career area or field), what are some other careers you would be interested in?

If you \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), what is the worst thing that could happen?

Learning what you don’t like is just as important as learning what you do like.

A major is not necessarily a ticket to a career. The good news is you have lots of options. The challenge is exploring what you want to do and how you want to apply what you learn – in class and out of class – to the world of work.

Don’t confuse your degree with your education.

What experiences do you want next?

What kind of problems do you want to learn to solve

(Education interests) With what age group do you think you’ll work best?

**Add your own!**

Critique your “tapes”

How effective are the tapes you’re currently using? Can you add some new ones? Do you sound like a broken record? Can you delete the tapes that are no longer effective?

Here is a sampling of ours:

Becky’s favorite tapes:

1. Your education is the sum of your college experiences, not just the name of your major.

2. The magic for choosing a major lies in finding those academic areas that you both ENJOY and DO WELL in.

3. Finding a good fit academically is like taking the UP escalator to go UP (as opposed to taking the UP escalator to go DOWN).

Don’s favorite tapes:

1. Don’t confuse your education with what you have to do to get a degree here.

2. It’s not what happens to you that is important—it is what you do about it.

3. If you want good grades, just do what the good students do.

Emily’s favorite tapes:

1. There’s more to career exploration than taking courses and choosing a major. Employers need to see that you’ve been involved in other ways too—volunteering and joining student organizations, for example.

2. A lot of things have changed since high school, and the time you need to spend studying outside of class has greatly increased.

3. Many people work in business-related careers without a Business school major—for example, my sister Abby…

YOUR favorite tapes:

1.

2.

3.

On and On Anon Presentation by Emily Dickmann, Rebecca Ryan, Don Woolston @ NACADA 2005

**Techniques to use in an advising session….**

**Clarification & Exploration**

Identify concerns, explore locus of control:

“Tell me about things you’ve liked. What kinds of things are you interested in?”

“What do you tend to do best in?” What things do you prefer to avoid?”

**Reality-Testing**

Prove that you’ve accurately assessed the situation and get feedback from the student:

“I understand what you’d like to discuss is….”

Assist student to make realistic decisions regarding their individual situations:

“In what ways can you test whether this is a good major/career for you?”

“Tell me about some of your career goals. How does what you’re doing relate to your goals?”

**Information-giving (and receiving)**

Provide accurate and relevant information; help determine alternatives if necessary; listen to student feedback and inquiries:

“Here are some ideas to help you: (career exploration activities, major requirements, creative electives)….”

**Task-setting**

Help student brainstorm next steps; encourage goal-setting:

“What specific things can you do to explore this major/career?”

“What can you accomplish short-term to help you move toward your goals?”

The Exploration Center for Majors & Careers, 2005

**When advising, choose Quality over Quantity. . .**

It’s not about how much you know, but how much you add to a student’s education. Our advising goals are all more easily achieved when we are receiving as much as, and as skillfully as, we are transmitting.

1. Pay attention to what you say

3. Use Reflective Listening with students

4. Admit that silence has a positive potential

5. Critique your “tapes”

6. Understand and mirror student’s non-verbal cues

7. Recognize & utilize your own body language

8. Move beyond your own cultural norms

9. Find a balance in your exchange. Is what you’re saying relevant?

10. Quality before quantity

*There’s a great power in words, if you don’t hitch too many of them together. - Josh Billings*

*Have something to say; say it, and stop when you’re done. - Tryon Edwards*

*The more you say, the less people remember. The fewer the words, the greater the profit. - Francois Fenelon*