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Academic Advising Quarterly

Reimagining Care: A Relational Framework for Academic Advisors

Plus Academic Procrastination, Reframing Retention, The 30-Minute Meeting, and More!

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Editors' Note

Welcome to the second issue of Academic Advising Quarterly. How hard can it be to turn an idea into reality? That was the biggest question, the barrier we had to overcome, for the inaugural issue of this online advising magazine. When everything went live last November, we knew that, in its own way, the follow-up issue would also depend on some fundamental yet different questions. Was the feedback positive? Would higher education professionals be interested in another issue? Would anyone else want to submit their ideas for publication? I think we can safely say that the answer to all those questions is "yes."

And that is amazing. It absolutely is. It energizes us. It reinforces our initial motivations of openness, engagement, and collaboration. The response to the first issue is such an affirmation of what we know to be true about the world of academic advising.

But it is also a little bit daunting. We certainly had our own expectations to meet the first time around, but now we are beginning to understand better what we did not know before: The pressures of admittedly self-imposed deadlines, the challenges of navigating our daily lives with this new endeavor, and the uncertainties of honoring what has come before.

So, we approach this second issue with a couple more guiding principles in mind: curiosity and gratitude. We are excited to learn even more about this global community, and we are grateful that you have joined us on this ride. Thank you so much to our authors for your impactful articles and for allowing this publication to share your voices with the wider advising community. And thank you to our readers for giving this publication a chance and seeing the value it brings.

Enjoy, and we hope to see you in a few months for the next issue!

~ Matt Markin and Ryan Scheckel

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Reaching Students Where They Are: A Reflective Approach to Academic Procrastination

Brendan Caputo, Ed.D.
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“Framing flexibility as a pilot often makes institutional buy-in more feasible.”

After nearly 20 years as an academic advisor, I can say with confidence that procrastination is not new. Advisors have always worked with students who delay, avoid, or struggle to initiate academic tasks. What has changed is the context in which this work occurs—and the student populations we are being asked to support more intentionally.

Today’s advisors manage larger caseloads, navigate increasingly complex academic systems, and are expected to provide clear, immediate solutions—often within a single interaction. At the same time, we are encountering growing pockets of students who are harder to reach through traditional advising approaches. Many of these students are neurodivergent, including students with ADD or ADHD, who procrastinate not because they lack motivation, but because academic systems were not designed with their learning needs in mind.

This reflective framework is written for academic advisors seeking a new perspective, particularly those working with students who procrastinate, disengage, or seem resistant to traditional time-management strategies.

It emerged after I presented virtually at NACADA’s Annual Conference, where a thoughtful Q&A highlighted a gap in both the literature and in practice: while these student populations are increasing, many advisors feel under-equipped to advocate for them—or unsure how to reach them effectively.

Grounded in research, professional experience, and ongoing dialogue within the advising field, this framework invites us to see procrastination not as a failure, but as an opportunity—if we are willing to view it through a different lens.

Why Time Management Isn’t the Whole Story

Academic procrastination is often framed as a planning problem. The default response is familiar: calendars, schedules, reminders, and productivity apps.

Yet research and practice suggest something more complex. Procrastination is less about poor planning and more about self-regulation, motivation, identity, and how

students understand themselves as learners. For neurodivergent students in particular, traditional academic structures can unintentionally intensify procrastination rather than reduce it.

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When we focus solely on “fixing” procrastination, we risk missing what students are communicating about how they engage, persist, and make meaning of their academic experience.

This realization led me to a three-part reflective framework: Assessment, Advocacy, and Appreciation.

Assessment: Asking Better Questions (Not More Questions)

When procrastination surfaces in advising, the instinct is often to offer tools. While tools can be useful, they rarely address the root of the issue.

In my research and practice, the most meaningful progress occurred when students were invited to define their own experiences. Questions such as:

What does academic success mean to you?

What does procrastination look like in your life?

Are there areas where you procrastinate—and areas where you don’t? Why?

These questions shift the focus from behavior to awareness. Students begin to recognize that procrastination is often situational, not a personal flaw. They identify patterns in motivation, attention, and energy, and come to understand that success can look different depending on context and capacity.

For advisors managing large caseloads, assessment does not require lengthy conversations. Even brief moments of guided reflection can foster metacognitive awareness, which is foundational for students learning how they regulate effort and engagement.

Advocacy: Supporting Students—and Systems—That Allow for Flexibility

By the time students who procrastinate meet with an advisor, many are already overwhelmed. Prolonged stress can trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response, making task initiation and academic re-engagement increasingly difficult. At this point, individual strategies alone are often insufficient.

This is where academic advisors play a critical advocacy role, not only for individual students, but with and to institutional leadership. Advisors are uniquely positioned to identify patterns across student experiences and translate those patterns into structural

recommendations that minimize the harmful effects of procrastination before students reach crisis points.

One promising approach is the exploration of shorter-term or block-style course models, where students take fewer courses at a time across different portions of a term. By reducing concurrent cognitive demands, this structure allows students to engage more fully with fewer subjects. For students prone to procrastination—particularly neurodivergent students—this can lower cognitive overload, reduce avoidance, and increase task initiation.

Importantly, flexibility does not require an all-or-nothing redesign. A mixed model allows students to combine immersive, short-term courses with full-term courses that benefit from extended reflection. Advisors can advocate for piloting these models with targeted populations, gathering data on engagement, persistence, and confidence. Framing flexibility as a pilot often makes institutional buy-in more feasible.

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Crucially, these approaches benefit more than neurodivergent students. Many students simply want options. Flexibility supports students balancing work, caregiving, health concerns, or differing motivational rhythms, making it a universal design strategy rather than a specialized accommodation.

When course structures cannot be modified, advisors can still advocate for flexibility by rethinking the sequencing of advising interactions and academic support. Rather than assuming all students are developmentally aligned or need the same information at the same time, advisors can front-load conversations that prime students for academic expectations, introduce learning strategies earlier, and normalize discussions about motivation and stress throughout the term.

Advocacy, in this sense, is not about lowering expectations—it is about changing strategies so students are supported in ways that align with how they learn and engage.

Appreciation: Valuing Peer Learning and Student Identity

One of the most unexpected findings from my research was the power of peer interaction. When students who procrastinated engaged with peers who did not, those peers often became unintentional mentors, prompting insights about priorities, effort, and alternative approaches to academic work.

Peer learning can take many forms, including group advising sessions, online spaces facilitated by student leaders, or advising-adjacent learning communities.

These environments reinforce a critical message: there is no single “right” way to succeed.

For neurodivergent students, appreciation affirms that they do not need to conform to neurotypical norms to belong or contribute meaningfully in academic spaces.

A Final Reflection for Advisors

Instead of asking, How do we stop students from procrastinating?

We might ask:

- How are students learning about themselves as learners?
- Where can we advocate for structures that support flexibility and focus?
- How are we helping students appreciate what they bring to the academic community?

Academic procrastination is not a problem to solve in one meeting. It is a process that invites reflection, experimentation, and growth.

There is hope in this work if we are willing to see procrastination not as resistance, but as an opportunity—and to approach it with a different lens. When advisors commit to assessment, advocacy, and appreciation, we create space for students not only to persist, but to understand themselves in ways that extend far beyond the classroom.

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Lift as you Climb: Mentoring as a Culturally Responsive Advising Practice

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The phrase “lift as we climb” is more than a guiding principle in my advising practice; it is an inherited philosophy. I learned it first not from a textbook or professional training, but from Regina Curry, a mentor who embodied what it meant to lead with intention, accountability, and care. Ms. Curry did not simply encourage students to succeed; she taught us that our success carried responsibility. To climb without reaching back was to miss the point entirely. That lesson has shaped how I approach advising, mentoring, and student success work to this day.

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I did not enter higher education believing advising was only about course selection, policies, and degree audits. I entered believing it was about people. My advising philosophy is rooted in mentoring because mentoring was what allowed me to persist. As a TRIO alum, I understand firsthand what it means to navigate higher education without a roadmap. I was a student learning how to decode academic language, institutional expectations, and systems that often felt opaque and unforgiving. TRIO provided more than academic support; it offered community, structure, and consistent mentorship that affirmed my belonging when doubt was loudest.

In the Center for Black Studies and the TRIO Office, I learned that culturally affirming environments are not supplemental; they are essential. These spaces allowed students like me to bring our full identities into academic conversations. We were encouraged to ask critical questions, to see our lived experiences as sources of knowledge, and to imagine futures beyond survival. Advisors, faculty, and staff in these spaces practiced mentoring as an act of care and resistance, meeting students where they were while pushing them toward who they could become.

That foundation informs how I show up as an advisor today. Mentoring is not an add-on to my advising practice; it is the framework. Before discussing degree requirements, I ask students about their stories, where they come from, who supports them, what motivates them, and what barriers they are navigating. Many students enter advising spaces expecting a transactional exchange. I work intentionally to disrupt that expectation. I want students to experience advising as relational, affirming, and empowering.

Culturally responsive advising requires acknowledging that students do not enter institutions as blank slates. Their identities, communities, and histories shape how they experience college. As an advisor, I name these realities rather than sidestep them. This means validating students' cultural capital, recognizing systemic barriers, and helping students develop strategies to navigate institutions that were not built with them in mind. Often, mentoring shows up in small but meaningful ways, normalizing struggle, reframing setbacks, and reminding students that their presence on campus is not accidental.

One of the most transformative experiences that deepened my mentoring approach was studying abroad in Beijing, China. For many students from historically underserved backgrounds, global learning opportunities can feel distant or inaccessible. Studying abroad pushed me beyond my comfort zone and challenged my understanding of identity, belonging, and resilience. Navigating a different language, culture, and educational system required adaptability and confidence I did not yet know I possessed.

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That experience now serves as a powerful mentoring tool in my advising practice. When students doubt their ability to succeed in unfamiliar or high-impact spaces, I share my story, not as a highlight reel, but as evidence that growth often happens with the right support and encouragement. My time in Beijing expanded my worldview and reinforced the importance of exposure in shaping students' aspirations. Mentoring, in this context, is about helping students imagine possibilities they have not yet been told are available to them.

"Lift as we climb" also requires modeling vulnerability and accountability. I am transparent with students about my own academic challenges and moments of self-doubt. These conversations are especially impactful for students navigating academic probation or questioning their place in higher education. When students see that success is rarely linear, they are more likely to persist rather than disengage. Mentoring allows advising to move beyond compliance and into transformation.

Ultimately, mentoring within advising is an act of collective responsibility. As advisors, we hold institutional knowledge, but we also hold influence. How we use that influence matters. I view my role not only as helping students graduate, but as helping them develop confidence, agency, and a sense of belonging that extends beyond the classroom.

"Lift as we climb" is not just a phrase passed down to me; it is a commitment I pass forward. By integrating mentoring and culturally responsive advising, we do more than guide students through curricula. We help them recognize their power, honor their communities, and understand that their success is most meaningful when it creates pathways for others to rise alongside them.

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Ad for [Effective Personal Tutoring and Academic Advising in Higher Education](#) from Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

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Reimagining Care: A Relational Framework for Academic Advisors

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“What we practice at a small scale can reverberate to the largest scale.” - adrienne
marie brown

The landscape of higher education, like the broader world, has been shaped throughout the 2020s by rapid, often unpredictable change and deepening inequities. Pandemics, increasingly severe climate events, mass shootings, genocides, laws targeting marginalized communities, and policies that defund higher education have affected nearly every student, staff, and faculty member—often disproportionately impacting those with marginalized identities. Navigating these conditions is exhausting and can drain advisors of the emotional capacity needed to imagine and enact change.

For advisors committed to creating more just and equitable institutions alongside students, understanding systems of oppression is necessary but insufficient. Advisors also need the emotional and relational capacity to reimagine and reshape higher education. One way to cultivate this capacity is through practicing contextualized, multidimensional care that attends to both individuals and communities.

This approach differs from the individualized, sometimes “toxic” self-care that gained prominence early in the COVID-19 pandemic, which often shifts institutional responsibility onto individuals. Individualistic models of care are frequently inadequate and can reinforce inequitable systems by obscuring interdependence, disconnecting people from collective power, and framing care as something that you must earn. In contrast, when care is understood as relational, the practice of care itself can become part of the work of dismantling oppressive systems.

A relational framework for self-care begins with the recognition that we are not isolated individuals, but relational beings embedded within communities. We are shaped by our communities and, in turn, shape them in a reciprocal dynamic. Both individuals and communities also exist within a multigenerational context, influenced by those who came before us and responsible to those who will come after. Care is linked to what those in the past have built for us and what we will build for the future, individually and collectively.

This understanding supports the development of multidimensional self-care strategies and is central to transformational social justice work. A defining feature of many systems of domination is the severing of individuals from community; when connection

is disrupted, both individuals and communities are weakened. Caring simultaneously for individuals and communities—and attending to the intersections between them—can therefore function as a form of resistance to systems such as colonialism, white supremacy, and ableism.

Conversations about self-care often focus narrowly on practices such as spa days,

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massages, or retail therapy—all individualized approaches. While these can be valuable, a sustainable and transformative approach to care requires broader attention to multiple dimensions of need. What care looks like is shaped by identity, culture, history, and context. Multidimensional self-care asks not only what feels restorative in the moment, but what supports wholeness over time.

It is also helpful to distinguish between care that supports survival and care that supports thriving. Both are essential. Kristianna Smith, a liberation cultural worker and author, describes survival as a state of contraction in which wholeness is held close for protection—centered around the question, “How do I get safe?” Survival-oriented care may include code-switching, altering appearance to meet professional norms, remaining silent in the face of injustice to preserve safety or relationships, or numbing and dissociating to endure the workday. People with marginalized identities are often required to spend significant time in this state and to devote substantial care simply for survival.

Thriving, by contrast, can be understood as embodiment and expansion—when one’s full self is able to emerge and be expressed. Thriving is rooted in the question, “What is possible?” It is a creative state, and creativity is essential for imagining and building more just institutions. While survival-oriented care may be necessary at times, advisors can also ask how to cultivate care practices that support thriving: practices that allow more of our full selves, and our collective creative power, to shape the future of higher education.

Reflection and self-inquiry can provide an opportunity for deeper change by connecting our personal experiences to ideas. Developing awareness of what is meaningful for our lives is a first step in embodying the change. This is an action. This is one way we grow and push change forward. This is care for ourselves and our communities. So we invite you to engage in inquiry and practice around the question, “What is possible?”

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Some potential starting places include:

- Understanding your embodied experience
 - What am I feeling? What kind of care do I need/want to engage in, communally or individually, as a result?
 - What information can I get from my embodied experience?
 - What possibilities can my embodied experiences open up?
- Finding and making space for community
 - Who are people in my work life whose company I enjoy or who I admire?
 - What are some possibilities for spending more time with them?
 - Examples: spending time reflecting on advising practices together; developing a work project to collaborate on; or making time for socializing.
- Working collaboratively to cover work and center rest
 - What kind of rest restores me?
 - How can I coordinate rest with those around me?
 - What ways can I collaborate with others to center each person's strengths and ease each other's struggles?
 - Examples: closing for a shift to dream new ideas; reading; walking with a friend or colleague; pausing work that is draining to work on something that revives you; sitting under a tree.
- Recognizing change can be slow and non-linear
 - How can I support myself and my community when change is still germinating?
 - How can I appreciate the process of change?
- Celebrating the small
 - What are ways to celebrate successes?
 - How can I incorporate celebration as a self and community care practice?

As advisors continue to navigate an era of profound uncertainty and inequity, care must be understood as more than an individual coping strategy. Contextualized, relational, and multidimensional care strengthens both advisors and the communities to which we belong, expanding our capacity to imagine and enact change. Through this, we can sustain ourselves and one another while participating in the ongoing work of creating more just and equitable institutions of higher education.

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NACADA Events ad

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Serving As A Scholarly Discussant: The Whats And Hows Of This New Role

William E. Smith III

In May, 2021, I forwarded an email to my boss. Wendy Troxel (Director of NACADA's Center for Research) had sent a call for discussants for scholarly paper sessions over a listserv. I wanted my boss's thoughts on whether I should apply for this new role. You may have seen one of these calls yourself or run across discussants at the NACADA Annual Conference. If so, you may have wondered what being a discussant entails and if you have what it takes to serve in this capacity.

My boss enthusiastically encouraged me to apply, and I am grateful that he did. I was accepted and have served as a discussant at each of the past five Annual Conferences. Discussants are a newer feature at the conference and is a less familiar role to many of us. I want to help demystify what it means to be a discussant. I have found being a discussant rewarding and suspect many others working as advisors and advising administrators will too.

The job of a scholarly discussant, at its most basic, is two-fold: 1) Provide feedback to authors on their scholarly papers with the aim of helping to improve the pieces, and 2) to help discussant apprentices learn how to serve in this capacity in the future. Normally a discussant is paired with one or two apprentices. Through this structure, a discussant can positively impact both the present and future of knowledge production in our field. The discussant provides authors feedback verbally at the conference as well as in writing afterwards, so that authors have something to refer back to while revising their essay.

That might seem like daunting tasks.

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To make them more accessible, I share below some best practices I've gleaned over the past five years.

How To Serve The Authors

Supporting authors via constructive feedback on assigned papers is the animating work for discussants. The biggest goal is generating feedback that helps authors get their project closer to a publishable state. In this regard, discussants, as Ryan Scheckel (Assistant Director for Pre-Professional health Careers at Texas Tech University) says, are authors' "critical friend."

Another goal I have concerns the authors themselves. As I tell my apprentices, I want the authors to still talk to me afterwards. So be kind in what you say and share! Remember, authors put themselves in a vulnerable place when they share their research and ideas. With that in mind, here are some principles I employ when preparing my feedback for authors:

Read the papers at least twice before writing up your remarks.

Believe in each piece's future no matter how rough of a state it might be in presently.

Don't share all your thoughts on a paper; be selective in what you opt to include in your remarks (public and private).

Always highlight things that are working well in the paper.

Speak the truth about what could be improved but speak it kindly.

Give both assigned papers roughly equal time and consideration in your remarks.

Focus comments on some of the bigger issues and ideas in the project.

Aim to provide feedback to author(s) that helps push the piece into a better version of itself.

Conversely avoid asking authors to write what you would have written. If you feel strongly about the virtue of a fundamentally different approach to the work, consider embarking on your own project.

Consider if there are scholarly works that might beneficially be brought into conversation with the project and say why you think it would be helpful to do so.

Leave it to editors and others to point out and fix typos, citation errors, and other copy-editing type issues that don't impact the argument as a whole.

How To Serve The Audience

As a discussant, your first responsibility is to the authors. But you will be giving public remarks after authors have presented a summary version of their argument. Part of having discussants give feedback at the Annual Conference is to help model knowledge production to a larger segment of the advising community. Thus, the audience in the room is another important stakeholder in this process. This then raises an important question: How do I write a response that speaks to the audience as much as to the authors? Here are some approaches that have served me well in this regard:

Think of your remarks as a presentation or performance. Give it an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Write out your remarks in full (versus just taking notes) to ensure coherence.

Leverage the session theme to help organize your comments.

Provide a short summary of each assigned piece's argument at some point in your remarks. While you have had the chance to read each paper and hear the authors' presentation, audience members have only heard the presentations that day and this helps them to track things.

Scholarly remarks don't have to be dull. Are there any quotes or rhetorical flourishes you can add to liven up your comments that align with what you are saying? If so, include them.

Practice, practice, practice! I always practice reading my remarks around 20-30 times. I practice for several reasons: To be less nervous, to depend less on my written version while speaking, and to hear if I need to clarify anything.

Importantly, look at the audience, and not just the authors, while delivering your remarks

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How To Serve The Apprentices

The apprentices serve as an important part of the pipeline for future discussants. I reach out to my assigned apprentices and schedule a one-hour meeting with them. I aim to hold this meeting about two weeks before the conference. This timing permits everyone to read the assigned pieces. I solicit what the apprentices' goals are and try to modify the conversation to meet their needs. That said, I always go over my goals and best practices so that apprentices know what I am aiming to accomplish. This is, in part, to help demystify the process for them.

During this meeting, we also discuss what we think the authors are trying to accomplish and the strengths and weaknesses of each piece. This conversation helps the discussant as much as the apprentices. It provides an opportunity to clarify my thinking and what I want to prioritize. The apprentices' work – their thinking about the pieces – is valuable in its own right. Thus, I include at least one contribution from each apprentice in my public remarks and give them credit, by name, when doing so.

For me, being a discussant has been intellectually stimulating. Contributing to knowledge production in our field is a reward in and of itself. But this work has also been beneficial in other ways. It is, for example, an organic way to network. Though this role, I have made new friends in the advising community and gotten to take part in other interesting opportunities. Additionally, serving as a discussant provides another way to

embrace a practitioner-scholar approach to advising and enrich our profession in the process.

I hope you'll join me as a discussant in the years to come!

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At Promise, Not At-Risk: Reframing Retention Through Care

Dan Wienecke

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As an Academic Advisor and part-time instructor at the oldest community college in the Denver metro area, my advising role presents unique challenges and opportunities. While most of my advising colleagues are "Pathway Advisors" (they advise students in specific meta-majors or degree paths), my own advising caseload is broader but serves a slightly different purpose. My secret job title is "Retention Advisor." And my secret, secret job title is "Success Coach."

What does this mean?

Mainly, I advise students who are at risk of not achieving their academic goals. More specifically, these are students who are typically on or returning from suspension or academic probation. But the Arapahoe Community College Advising Office doesn't like the harsh-sounding term "probation." We call our process "Performance Support." Why? Because our role as advisors is to SUPPORT students who, despite experiencing a rough semester, year, or time in their lives, make the brave decision to continue their education.

Though I prefer to say "at promise" instead of "at risk," because this includes ALL of us. We are all at promise. Every student who starts a degree, certificate, or even a one-off class begins with the intention of completing their goal. But many stumble along the way.

This is where advising and campus allies play such a vital role in lifting students up.

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What can individuals do?

Anyone who meets with a student, regardless of title, is an “advisor.” We can practice empathetic listening. We can reserve judgment. We can even, counterintuitive as this may sound, refrain from “giving advice.” Yes, it’s a good-natured instinct to want to give advice, but often what a student needs most is a guide on the side to help talk through setbacks, hurdles, and aspirations. Someone to help them vocalize their concerns and reach their own conclusions. A thought partner.

What can institutions do?

At the campus level, it’s important to remember that no matter your job title (or secret title!), WE ARE ALL RETENTION ADVISORS. We all play an important role in welcoming students and helping them stay engaged.

As higher education professionals, we often hear the reasons why student retention remains a strategic priority. Much of this is rooted in budgetary concerns. But setting aside policies and strategic priorities, there is a simple reason to focus on student retention: it’s the right thing to do.

Again, every student starts a class, degree, or program with the intention of finishing. Helping them reset or continue along the path towards their own personal finish line requires many hands, hearts, and minds working in concert. Data and strategic priorities matter, but only when paired with a culture of caring.

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So, what can institutions do?

First, break those silos! Talk about retention, both within and across departments. What challenges are staff witnessing? What are students telling us? What success stories can we share? What victories can we celebrate?

Second, collaborate. One of my favorite activities at Arapahoe Community College is the “Suspension Appeals” event we host each semester. A week before classes resume, Academic Advisors, faculty members, and Student Affairs representatives from across campus come together to help students submit appeals for academic reinstatement, extenuating circumstances, and financial aid.

While students come to this event for help navigating processes, what’s just as important is the symbolic message projected from having staff across every department show up. Students see that, as a campus community, we are all here to support them. Regardless of past circumstances, we are all invested in their future academic and personal successes.

Lastly, take care of yourself, and remember to celebrate your own victories related to supporting at promise students. Our work often involves internalizing the emotional toll students feel. Just as you do with students, take time to thank yourself for showing up. Practice self-gratitude. Recognize that you were there when it mattered. You listened empathetically, collaborated creatively, and celebrated enthusiastically.

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A Conversation About the Humbling Art of Owning Our Belly Flops

Mykel Beorchia

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Belly flop: A complete and often painful or embarrassing failure (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

nny: I remember learning how to dive off the diving board at Indian Acres Swim Club in Champaign, Illinois, at the age of 10. I had practiced and practiced, but more times than not, I ended up accomplishing more of a belly flop than the clean, crisp dive that I intended. My body inevitably turned red, but my face was even redder as I was embarrassed by my belly flop. Although I was not destined to be an Olympic diver, over time, I managed to minimize my belly flops. However, my belly flops did not end at the swimming pool. Throughout college and my professional career, I have continued to make belly flops, despite my efforts to avoid embarrassing myself. After all, we all make belly flops in our personal and professional lives. Later, I learned from my colleague and friend, Mykel Beorchia, that there is power in the belly flop if we are willing to own our belly flops.

I first met Mykel in 2016 when I had the good fortune of having her serve as my host during my visit to Utah State University to present on Appreciative Advising. She soon became an integral member of our Office of Appreciative Education (OAE) team as a trusted facilitator of the Appreciative Advising Institute and later as the Course Director for our online Appreciative Administration class. In 2024, when the Director of the Office of Appreciative Education position became available, Mykel immediately became the obvious choice to lead the office. Although Mykel had experience as a facilitator at multiple in-person and virtual Institutes, she had never had the chance to “see behind the curtain” at what it takes for the OAE team to support the facilitator teams. Mykel dubbed herself the “Junior Intern” as she was determined to position herself as a learner about the Institute despite her extensive experience. Positioning herself as an intern gave her the space to learn while also gradually taking on additional responsibilities as her self-confidence grew.

Mykel: As I prepared to begin a new role, I wanted to honor the expertise and knowledge of the team that hired me. As a new person, you have the gift of noticing – noticing processes, procedures, and opportunities – and the questions new people ask through their onboarding can become a contribution to the team. The questions about

how things work invite conversations about the values that drive the team and the purpose behind the policies and processes in place. Through the experience of onboarding others, I have come to realize that questions from the new person can initiate possibilities for improvements that the existing team had not noticed. At the same time, a new person coming in and making suggestions can come across as a know-it-all. I wanted to begin my new role as a learner to build trust with my colleagues and supervisor. I wanted to learn the office from the ground up so I could make strategic and informed contributions when the time was right. Putting on the hat of the intern was one way to enact my hopes for approaching the first three months on the job.

Jenny: One of the most powerful things that Mykel did during her “internship” besides coming into the space as a learner was to own her early mistakes completely. Despite her eagerness to impress everyone, she too was human.

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Mykel: I have onboarded several staff to my own team, so I know that the onboarding period comes with many hiccups. I knew that if I approached my onboarding to avoid risks, I would not be taking advantage of the grace extended to new employees. At the same time, I did not want to take risks so significant that I might jeopardize the trust I was trying to build with my new team. After sending an email to one of our partners that contained the wrong hyperlink, I explained to my team that I had “belly flopped.” This term took on a life of its own, allowing me to bring an appropriate lightness to the mistakes I made and continue to make. In regular staff meetings I lead, I include “Failure Sharing Moments” as a standing agenda item. This is a time for us to share our own mistakes. When one person shares a mistake, the whole team can make a practice of collaboratively solving problems.

Jenny: It was so inspiring to see how Mykel handled her belly flop. By coming into the position as the intern and inserting humor by naming the mistake a belly flop, she made it safe for our entire facilitator team not to be afraid to make mistakes. One seasoned facilitator said, “Mykel, thank you for owning your belly flop because you made it feel

safe for me to make mistakes.” Mykel had role-modeled one of the six ingredients of the Appreciative Mindset: recognizing that we are all perfectly imperfect.

Fast forward to spring 2025, Mykel quickly stepped up and into her role as Director of the Office of Appreciative Education. I started playing pickleball in 2024 and joined a pickleball team for the first time. As a former physical education teaching major, I always prided myself on being a quick learner of new sports. Therefore, I was looking forward to the upcoming pickleball season and the opportunity to demonstrate my pickleball skills. However, the first match of the season was humbling as I lost both of my first two matches. The same was true for the third, fourth...as well as every match of the season. The belly flops continued no matter how hard I tried (taking lessons, playing lots of practice games, etc.). Yet, the whole time, I realized that for the first time in a long time, I was learning a new skill. I kept thinking back to how Mykel had role modeled how to graciously own belly flops six months earlier. So, I reminded myself that it was okay to be a humble learner, to own my mistakes, and to keep focused on practicing and getting better. Although I did not win any pickleball matches in the spring 2025 season, I am currently sporting a 7-3 record so far in the fall 2025 season. Getting my ass kicked at pickleball in my inaugural season, despite my best efforts, was a crucial reminder that learning is not a linear process.

Jenny and Mykel: In summary, the lessons we have learned through belly flopping include:

- Learning is a process (an often humbling one)
- Humor can be a powerful practice for connecting through mistakes
- Humbly owning our mistakes is crucial for building trust in teams
- Work hard not to repeat the same mistakes
- Give grace to other people who are learning

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The Power of the 30 Minute Meeting

Michael “Brody” Broshears
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Ten years ago, this spring, I settled in to deliver my keynote address on happiness and meaning making at the Iowa Academic Advising Network (IAAN) conference when I was approached by one of the almost 150 attendees, who had been instructed to deliver a message to me from his supervisor at the community college. He explained that his supervisor, Mary, was my advisee at the University of Northern Iowa years ago, and that I had made a significant impact on her life. I was surprised for two reasons. First, it is always affirming to hear these stories. Second, and more honestly, I had no recollection of any conversation with Mary at all. I thanked her colleague for sharing the story with me and delivered my keynote with little fanfare. Or so I thought.

Days later, though, I got curious about what I had done or said that had made such an impact on Mary’s life, so I reached out to her. To my surprise, she sent an email, and we even chatted on the phone about her interaction with me almost 15 years earlier. She explained, “I started at UNI as a music major but did not have peace about it. I didn't want to spend my life in the music building. I knew I was good at music, but I wasn't sure what else I might be good at and I wanted to know, so I became "undeclared" or "General Studies". That decision made my parents uncomfortable. I was the youngest child who fit the mold perfectly. I challenged everything and worried my parents. It turned out that UNI was a great fit for me, I did well my first semester at UNI, I surprised myself and many around me, but I worked hard and learned to study.

For my second semester I came to see you, I think it was about registration, but I left feeling like it was more career/major planning meeting. I only vaguely remember meeting with you, I just have feelings and a few glimpses of the meeting but what was

most powerful to me was that you gave me the confidence to be ok with not knowing my exact path. You were interested, engaged and supportive. I remember telling my parents that it was ok that I didn't know because of our meeting. You were confident in me that I would figure it out. You asked challenging questions, but questions that I knew the answers too, and it just took time.”

This phone call and email interaction came five or six years after I had stopped carrying a full caseload, but it was a great reminder of the impact our work has on students and the power of the 30-minute meeting. I use this story often when I speak to advisors and administrators about the importance of our work, because it reinforces the concept and advising reality that relational moments almost always outlive the transactional elements of our work.

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Advisors want to be good practitioners, but in 2025, the practical realities of the work make that increasingly difficult. Advising is more complex than ever before, with increased caseloads, growing pressures tied to retention and graduation outcomes, and students whose needs are more nuanced than in years past. Advisors also work across multiple systems that rarely communicate with one another, adding administrative burden to an already demanding role. The job is hard, and these current conditions leave little margin for reflection or deep connection.

Having said that, students continue to report that their interactions with faculty and staff are among the more meaningful parts of their undergraduate experience. And while course scheduling is the most common reason students seek out academic advisors, we need to remember that even the earliest definitions of advising highlight the necessity to connect with students beyond course selection. Advising, at its core, is about supporting and facilitating the life, career, and academic development of the students we serve. Approaches like Appreciative Inquiry, Developmental Advising, Advocacy Advising, and Advising as Teaching all place the student at the center (interactive process, relationship-driven, with both the advisor and student benefitting from the process).

What does this mean for today's advisor and our work with students? It means we must be more intentional with the time we have. How can we ensure that every interaction with our students packs the most punch? How might we trade efficiency for intentionality and presence? How can we utilize tools that move us effectively past the course scheduling component of our sessions with students, so that we can reconfigure our conversations to focus in on life and career goals or help us better connect with our students at a personal level? What role can AI play in assisting us with the more technical and transactional components of our advising sessions? Every student deserves our best efforts, even in the busiest of times. What questions can we ask that help the student share their unique story and provide contextual information that can aid the advisor in developing a meaningful relationship with the student and move them forward toward the accomplishment of their goals?

As advisors, we may never know which meeting becomes the one a student remembers decades later. I can tell you that students (advisees) who have kept in contact with me have never started their conversations about my impact on them as an advisor with, "Brody was the best! He killed that four-year plan for me." The power of the 30-minute meeting has never been about just perfectly constructed four-year plans. It lies in the quality of our presence we bring to an individual conversation. When we approach each interaction with intention, care, and respect for the student's story, we increase the likelihood that our work will matter long after the appointment ends.

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Balancing Peer With Professional: Student Assistants in an Advising Office

An Interview with Student Assistants Christian Hurtado, Robyn Childress, & Brian Castillo

AAQ: You all work in an advising office and we think that that's an interesting perspective. To get started, would you introduce yourselves?

Christian Hurtado (CH): Yeah, I'll start out. My name is Christian, I'm from Lubbock, and I'm a sophomore, thinking about majoring in business.

Robyn Childress (RC) I'm Robyn Childress. I'm from Houston. I'm a junior, and my degree is nutritional science.

Brian Castillo (BC): Brian Castillo. I'm a junior here, business management major at the Rawls College, from Fort Worth, Texas.

AAQ: Okay, so first question: How long had you been at Tech before you started working in this office?

CH: I'd say probably a couple weeks. I got this job fairly early into my freshman year.

RC: I was here for around two years.

BC: Like a year and a half? I started as I was just about going into my spring semester my second year.

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AAQ: And how did you find out about the student assistant position in this advising office?

CH: I had the director of the office teaching my Raider Ready [first year seminar] class, and she mentioned how they were looking for student assistants. So, I emailed her after class, and I was like, hey, I'm interested in this position.

RC: I was talking to my Student Success Specialist, and I was complaining about my current job. He was like, oh, you should just work as a student assistant here. And I was like, Sure!

BC: I met the director my freshman year at orientation in the summer, and I remember asking if she knew of any job opportunities at the time. She didn't. But then my sophomore year, I got in contact with her again, and she had an opening.

AAQ: So, I'm guessing y'all had done some advising before, but what did you think about academic advising before you started working in an advising office?

CH: Honestly, I had no idea what advising was. I just remember orientation, meeting in this big room, you know, hearing the presentations, and that's really it. I remember my advisor Jacob was pretty chill, cut straight to the point, so I didn't really have a difficult time with advising.

RC: Before working here, to be honest with you, I think I never really had an advisor coming to Texas Tech. So, my first time ever dealing with advising was when I first got here. I felt like I knew what to do, since I was so used to doing everything on my own.

BC: Before I started working here, I didn't really know I had more than one advisor I could go to. So, I always thought advising is like them being a mentor to me or, if I have any questions about something, I could always just turn them to them. My meetings with advisors went well, mostly just course planning and what degree do I want to do.

AAQ: Once you started working here, what was the biggest surprise?

CH: I would say parents. I didn't expect that. Parents will call for their students and I'm like, this is really something your student should be asking, not you.

RC: Yeah, I was not prepared for parent involvement, but I was also not prepared for the types of questions we get asked. I mean, sometimes we'll get questions where I'm like, you're in college, you should probably know this.

BC: I would definitely say parents, too. I've even had a couple phone calls with grandparents.

AAQ: Have you learned anything that's been helpful for you just as a student, not in the sense of employment and the pay and that kind of stuff?

CH: I would say, just registration. I remember my first time registering for classes and I was like, whoa. How am I going to do this the next time? But when I started working here, it was like butter. It's not that hard.

RC: I got really good at navigating campus, especially helping students with all these classes and their locations on campus. The Biology building is pretty far from, like, X, Y and Z. I wouldn't recommend doing that to yourself.

BC: Not just that, but now I know where a lot of helpful resources are, too. If someone asks me a question, I know not just where it is on campus, but what the right office is to help them with their question. And I've learned a lot about the importance of dates and deadlines. That's been really helpful.

AAQ: What's it like working with academic advisors?

CH: It's awesome! If you have a question that you are curious about you can just pop in and ask them. You get help really fast. You don't have to go through the whole process of sending an email or scheduling an appointment.

RC: And if you have an off-the-wall question, they always try to help out as much as possible.

BC: I think it's really cool just seeing everybody do their routine every morning, you know, coming in the morning, making coffee and just how everybody gets along in the office too.

AAQ: How is this different from other jobs that you've had?

CH: Very different. Before I started here, I was doing construction, so it was like a day and night difference. It's so relaxed here, and we're just sitting at desks.

RC: I moved from the Rec Center to here, so the Rec is more physical, too. I got used to moving around weights and equipment and being on my feet. But I remember the first week I got here, they asked me to get up and do something, and I was, Okay, cool. Do I gotta carry, like, some 45 pound weight? And they were like, Oh no. You just have to put up some flyers.

BC: I've had a lot of past jobs. I've worked in a barbecue restaurant, grocery stores, and they're all been pretty physical, too. Here, you get to manage everything in one spot. It's way different, but I like it. You can do your job in one spot without having to run around, which was a big difference for me.

AAQ: Have you found it difficult at all to manage working here and being a student?

CH: No. Because this job is on campus and I'm already here, it just fits in. And we never work past five, so it doesn't really interfere with the other parts of my life.

RC: This job definitely helps me. I might have to make reminder calls at a specific time, but I'll probably also have a break at other times. That means I can study for a good hour and then I can move onto something else. It gives me time to balance the job and school

BC: This job definitely helps me with school. I'm already on campus, so, after I can just go to the library, or I can go to class; it helps me stay on track.

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AAQ: Is there anything that you would change about this job to make it better or more enjoyable?

CH: That's a really tricky question. The student in me would change the 8am start times. I'm not the biggest fan. But besides that, I would say, No, it's a very good work environment. Everyone's chill and this job is made for a student.

RC: Yeah, I agree with that. Like, y'all have the idea of we're students, then assistants. And so I really respect that. But I'll say the one thing I would change is probably more snacks.

BC: Yeah, more snacks. No, but I wouldn't change a thing. I feel like everything runs smoothly.

AAQ: All right, I guess our last question is, what piece of advice would you give to students about working with academic advisors now that you worked in an advising office?

CH: Just look at them like normal people. I feel like some people have the conception that advisors are only taking care of the institution or its rules. Or that they're going to tell you to take the wrong classes or something. But I feel like if you treat them like normal people, and you ask the right questions, you're doing your part of the advising too.

RC: Some might say I still have a bleeding heart for people, but I've had to learn to say, No. Sometimes you can't just drop in and talk to your advisor. You know, they're busy, too. You have to schedule an appointment. I've had to put my foot down a little bit and stand up for our advisors' time and energy.

BC: I'd also say just come prepared. And if you're falling behind, contact your advisor before it gets too late. Waiting can cause a lot of dilemmas, but if you reach out to your advisor and if you prepare and schedule your appointments early, if you're just on top of it, I think you'll have a great relationship with your advisor.

AAQ: Thank you!

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