

NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Guide (PG23) (Abridgement)

Core Competency Areas: Conceptual Component

Core competencies in the Conceptual component (concepts academic advisors must comprehend) include understanding of:

1. The history and role of academic advising in higher education.

The history of academic advising directly impacts current advising practice and context; advising philosophies, theories, and approaches prevalent in academic advising today are a result of the history of the field. “Although academic advising has been a defined region within education only a few short decades, it has been a prevalent concern since the birth of the college institutions of America” (Gillispie, 2003, para. 1). Academic advisors are benefited by “an understanding of the ways the history of advising affects their daily interactions with students and the role of practice within higher education” (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016, p. 1). A basic knowledge of the history and evolution of academic advising provides a foundation for the development of effective advising practices.

2. NACADA’s Core Values of Academic Advising.

Damminger and Drake (2016) report that a year-long conversation by the NACADA Board of Directors Core Values Task Force with member constituencies in a variety of venues (e.g. regional conferences, summer institutes, and webinar) has resulted in identification of seven core values that members consider most important in guiding their practice: **caring, commitment, empowerment, inclusivity, integrity, professionalism, and respect**.

Values, by definition, reflect beliefs about issues of perceived importance that guide and ensure the integrity of practice. A code of ethics specifies the values and beliefs that guide behavior. Many in the academic advising profession use the NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising . . . as their ethical compass. (Campbell & McWilliams, 2016, p. 67).

3. Theory relevant to academic advising.

Academic advising is “an educational activity that depends on valid explanations of complex student behaviors and institutional conditions to assist college [and university] students in making and executing educational and life plans” (Creamer, 2000, p. 18). While “daily practice can exist without theory . . . academic advising is richer for having various theories to draw from in working with students, parents, staff, and faculty” (Sullivan-Vance & Hones, 2009, para. 2). Hagen and Jordan (2008) contend that “academic advising cannot be performed or studied without theory” (p. 19). Theory, according to Hagen (2008), “gives us lenses through which we can see academic advising more clearly” (p. 16). Theories “describe, explain, and help predict student behaviors; offer a framework for interactions with students; and generate a solid basis for advisors’ questions, advice, and actions” (Roufs, 2015, p. 67).

4. Academic advising approaches and strategies.

There are many different approaches to advising students. Each approach has a slightly different take on how an advisor might interact with a student, types and style of questions that might be asked, goals of each encounter, and how the advising session can be structured. While there is no correct way to conduct advising found in any of these approaches, all of these attempt to provide a basis for an organized positive approach to working with students. (NACADA, n.d.)

5. Expected outcomes of academic advising.

Since the 1990s in particular, higher education has undergone an inevitable and necessary evolution in assessment approaches that has moved accrediting organizations away from the sufficiency of “credentials of the faculty, adequacy of facilities, coherence of the curriculum, number of library holdings, and fiscal soundness” (Kuh et al, 2015, p. 3). With increased external pressures for accountability coming from state and federal agencies, rising costs, student debt, time to completion, and emerging technologies, institutions have turned to assessment approaches that gather evidence about student achievement—student learning outcomes. What students are expected to demonstrate they know, do, and value now serve as markers for institutions to define student success, to enhance teaching and learning, and to guide institutional policies.

6. How equitable and inclusive environments are created and maintained.

Equitable and inclusive academic advising requires the understanding that “culture not only influences our behavior, but also colors our interpretation of the behaviors of others” (Dreasher, 2014, p. 4). Multicultural awareness underlies the development of equity and inclusivity. As humans, cultural identity effects what we perceive, how we make meaning from our perceptions, and how we express our experience of the world (DuPraw & Axner, 1997). Culturally competent advisors know and understand their own cultural values and how they differ from those of other cultures (Dreasher, 2014).

Core Competency Areas: Informational

Core competencies in the **Informational component** (knowledge academic advisors must master) include knowledge of:

1. Institution specific history, mission, vision, values, and culture.

Academic advisors must be familiar with the history, values, vision, mission, goals, and culture of the institution in which they work. Most institutions were founded for a specific purpose: to serve the citizens of that particular region, to act as the land-grant institution for their state, or, as a religious-based institution, to focus on service to those in need. That vision is expressed in every part of the institution—from its vision statement to its requirements and curriculum.

2. Curriculum, degree programs, and other academic requirements and options.

Even in this time of expanding technologies to aid information retrieval and distribution, it is crucial that academic advisors have a firm grasp of requirements and policies for their specialty, program, major, or college. This knowledge of their core area(s) should include efficient management of information for its most effective use with students and colleagues. “The advisor must never provide an un-researched answer and must know where to find the vetted source, such as a website, hand-out, or other official notification, for answers to student questions” (Yoder & Joslin, 2015, p. 302). Credibility is critical if academic advisors are to retain students’ trust. *I don’t know the answer to that question but I can find out* is a far more trustworthy response than an unreliable, off-the-cuff answer that jeopardizes the student’s situation and ultimately, the student-advisor relationship.

3. Institution specific policies, procedures, rules, and regulations.

New academic advisors “spend many hours learning their institution: its structure, programs, policies, and procedures” (Kolls, 2015, p. 177). Academic advisors “serve as information central for students who need clarification regarding institutional policies and procedures” (Miller, 2016, p. 46). While excellent institutional publications and websites delineate policies, rules, and regulations, students rely on academic advisors to explain nuances, make needed connections, and outline potential ramifications of student actions. Therefore, academic advisors must possess intimate knowledge regarding their institution’s internal workings and know whom on campus to contact when clarification is needed.

4. Legal guidelines of advising practice, including privacy regulations and confidentiality.

“Bodies of law provide some of the most important and complicated areas of institutional and external knowledge that new advisors need to learn” (Rust, 2015, p. 159). Academic advisors need to research and gain understanding of relevant local, state, province, and national laws and customs. Legal practice and privacy laws vary among the nations of the global advising community. “The confidential and trust-based nature of the advising relationship requires that advisors remain current on the policies and procedures in place to protect students’ legal rights and to fulfill institutions’ legal obligations” (Rust, p. 159). Academic advisors should consider the laws governing confidentiality and documentation in their nation, and they should be familiar with the legal resources available on their campus.

5. The characteristics, needs, and experiences of major and emerging student populations.

Student demographics are changing, as are the motivations for seeking higher education and the mechanisms for financing education. For example, large numbers of adult students and veterans are seeking higher education; more students with identified (or unidentified) learning disabilities or mental health concerns are pursuing college degrees; and students from a wide variety of socioeconomic situations and educational preparedness are entering college with the understanding that most stable job opportunities now often demand a college degree.

6. Campus and community resources that support student success.

Higginson (2000) identified three areas to which academic advisors need to connect: “the higher education community, the local community surrounding the campus, and the broad world of work” (p. 304). Academic advisors “enhance students’ engagement or connectedness to all areas of the college campus. Anytime students have problems negotiating the bureaucracy of college, they should know they can ask their advisor for clarification and assistance” (Beres et al, 2013, p. 17). Advisors should be familiar with campus support personnel and resources, such as the Registrar’s Office, International Student Support offices, Financial Aid and Scholarship offices, Scholastic Integrity units, and even student legal services. Advisors are also “in a unique position to help students and to encourage them to take advantage of co-curricular activities the college or university offers. Student clubs, study abroad, service learning, and leadership opportunities are all ways advisors promote connections to campus” (Beres et al, p. 17).

7. Information technology applicable to relevant advising roles.

As noted by NACADA Executive Director Charlie Nutt (2016), “the use of technology on campuses is going to be essential over the next decade for institutions that truly want to make a difference in their graduation and completion rates.” As academic advising is intentional, so must be the use of technology in academic advising. Academic advising programs incorporate technology for both content and service delivery for advisee-centered approaches. The best use of technology is when its capabilities align with advising goals to help advisors achieve better student learning outcomes and improve program assessment (Pasquini & Steele, 2016).

Core Competency Areas: Relational

Core Competencies in the **Relational component** (skills academic advisors must demonstrate) include the ability to:

1. Articulate a personal philosophy of academic advising.

“Even if we have never read advising theories or thought about our own personal philosophy of [academic] advising, each one of us has an advising philosophy” (Beres et al, 2013, p. 11). Whether or not we have considered it, “we do bring a set of assumptions and beliefs about student behavior, institutional goals, and success in college to our advising appointments” (Beres et al, p. 11). All academic advisors “enact their personal philosophies in their interactions with students and others in academe” (Campbell & McWilliams, 2016, p. 76). Values, beliefs, and assumptions “shape responses to the other ways advisors think about students and can powerfully influence advising” (Kimball & Campbell, 2013, p. 6). Research on classroom teacher performance (Cornett, Yeotis, & Terwilliger, 1990) also supports the influence of values, beliefs, and assumptions—coupled with academic training—on behavior (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Thus, reflection regarding the content and role of philosophy, as these relate to personal advising behavior, helps “advisors develop the intentional advising practices necessary to support student success” (Kimball & Campbell, p. 7).

2. Create rapport and build academic advising relationships.

The role of an academic advisor “is to engage in a ‘series of intentional interactions’ with students for the purpose of facilitating student-learning outcomes” (Hughey, 2011, p. 22). Fundamentally, academic advising “relies on communication” (Uhlik, 2005, para. 3). An academic advisor’s “ability to communicate and develop a relationship with a student provides a foundation for meaningful dialog and interactions” (Hughey, p. 22). Academic advising relationships develop

through effective communication, which is interpersonal interactions that promote understanding, learning, and trust through active listening, clear verbal interchange, and body language that is consistent with the speaker’s words. Through effective communication advisors build rapport with students, which is a mutual understanding that leads to a bidirectional trust between advisor and advisee. (Beres et al, 2013, p. 19).

3. Communicate in an inclusive and respectful manner.

The groundwork for effective, inclusive conversations must be laid before academic advisors begin seeing students. Beres et al (2013) contend that it “is almost impossible to be an effective advisor if we have not spent some time asking ourselves, *What are my biases?* . . . Our cultural, spiritual, and educational backgrounds will certainly play into our relationships with students” (p. 10). While academic advisors may not be able to or even want to change all of their biases, they “do need to find ways to manage them so they don’t get in the way of

developing these relationships" (p. 10). As noted by the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at Georgetown University (n.d.), a defined set of values and principles is the foundation for cultural competence.

4. Plan and conduct successful advising interactions

While the face-to-face advising session is important, facilitating effective academic advising appointments requires time and effort beyond the time spent meeting with the student. Elements of successful academic advising interactions include planning and preparation, content determination, session processes (e.g. collaborative goal setting), and documentation (Nutt, 2015, p. 256). These elements build upon the five-step sequence outlined by Virginia Gordon in 1992 for organizing an advising session: (1) opening the interview, (2) identifying the problem, (3) identifying possible solutions, (4) discussing implications for each solution (if two or more are identified), and (5) summarizing the transactions.

5. Promote student understanding of the logic and purpose of the curriculum.

Lowenstein (2014) contends that integrative learning is an essential goal of academic advising. Integrative advising helps students "construct, intentionally and reflectively, an overall understanding of how the pieces of their education fit together" (Lowenstein, para. 43). Integrative learning involves (at least) students

- formulating a set of overall learning goals for their education, and relating those to the overall goals of the institution's and program's curriculum;
- gaining an understanding of how their courses work together to make a coherent whole, which is greater than the sum of its parts;
- actively finding—and creating—connections between each course or group of courses they encounter and their previous learning experiences, in terms not only of information content but especially modes of thought and ways of knowing, and conversely re-evaluating past experiences in light of new ones;
- continuing this activity of connecting and integrating throughout their education and beyond; and
- making choices, such as course selections, not only in light of graduation requirements but also in light of the above factors.

6. Facilitate problem solving, decision-making, meaning-making, planning, and goal setting.

Gordon (1992) described the advising process as "a complex set of interactions that identifies a problem, provides and evaluates information, produces a tangible solution, and implements the solution by taking action" (pp. 50-51). Steele (2013) further explained that "the intent is not just to help students reach a decision, but also become aware of how they make decisions . . . to help students develop an awareness of their own learning or thinking process" (para. 4). This includes facilitating reflective thinking and encouraging ownership of the problem by the student. Hughey (2011) adds, "Advisees gain in cognitive development when advisors challenge them to critically think about relationships and patterns between academics and their career and academic goals" (p.27).

7. Engage in on-going assessment and development of self and the advising practice.

The changing climate for higher education requires the constant education and development of its academic advisors. For that reason, every institution committed to student success must invest in training and ongoing professional development of academic advisors and advising administrators. Training should encompass institutional, college, and departmental levels to ensure advisors are fully trained on all aspects and requirements of their roles. If an institution does not make a comprehensive commitment, individual schools, colleges, or programs should commit resources to ongoing development. If a major or course of study does not prioritize development, individual academic advisors must commit to their own development.

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