

A Multi-Vocal Exploration of Advising Pedagogy

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Introduction

Being able to communicate with others in a multi-modal fashion is essential for any professional individual, but it can be especially helpful when working with undergraduate students. In my advising experience, I have observed that students rarely act on information after encountering it only once. Whether they are registering for classes, preparing to apply for professional school, or asking about their graduation timeline, students need to receive the same information in multiple modes—most often conversation, email, and visual guides—before taking action. This aligns with some of the rhetorical ideas we have studied in class such as Yancey’s “Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key”, the New London Group’s “Pedagogy of Multiliteracies”, and Wysocki’s “On Multimodality”.

In this pedagogical intervention, I will present a fictionalized experience of a typical academic advising appointment that utilizes multi-vocal perspectives and how I find ways to implement academic theories, including the Universal Design for Learning paradigm, in a practical way. Please note that every student is different, and this is not meant to be seen as a “one size fits all” representation of academic advising. I also decided to make the scenario as accurate as possible, so some of the conversational language may be on the casual side.

An Advising Conversation

SETTING: My office in Upchurch Hall.

SCENARIO: Skylar Richards, an undergraduate freshman in Animal Sciences: Pre-Vet, has requested a meeting to go over their academic standing this semester and discuss concerns about their experience so far at Auburn.

Skylar is currently on academic warning due to her struggles in the Fall semester and is at risk of academic suspension as her midterm GPA is below the required 2.2. She has previously disclosed that she identifies as neurodivergent and is a first-generation college student.

JASEY

Good morning, Skylar! Come on in and make yourself comfortable, and I’ll pull up your DegreeWorks page.

SKYLAR

Okay, thanks. I'm sorry I'm a few minutes late, I lost track of time and forgot how long it takes to get from my dorm room to your office.

JASEY

That is something I wanted to discuss with you. You're now over fifteen minutes late. In most cases, that would have been a reason to mark you as a "no-show" and ask you to reschedule. However, I know your situation is pretty urgent, so I'm gonna give you some grace.

While I understand campus can be difficult to navigate, my office number and location is listed in my email signature, on AdviseAssist, and sent to you in the appointment reminder text message.

THEORETICAL CONNECTION: At this point in the appointment, I'm reminded of the New London Group's "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies", particularly in their discussion of "situated practice" which emphasizes that learning is most effective when it is grounded in the lived experiences of the learner.

In this case, Skylar has verbalized her struggles with the physical literacies of campus in not being able to find my office and hinted that her neurodivergence may be impacting her ability to manage time effectively. For these reasons, I choose to show empathy and not cancel her appointment, thus opening the door for a more impactful learning experience and guiding Skylar to take more personal responsibility.

SKYLAR

I know and I really appreciate you still meeting with me. I promise I'm trying to get better about my time management, but there always seems to be something I miss.

JASEY

I definitely remember what it was like to be a freshman and being expected to have it all figured out really fast. I don't expect that you'll have it all together right now. In fact, if you did, I might be out of a job! I'm here to help you and be your advocate. Let's start with your grades.

I've got your DegreeWorks page pulled up, and I can see that we really struggled last semester. Do you understand what this "Academic Warning" remark means?

SKYLAR

I mean, I know that my grades were not great last Fall, but I don't totally get what "Academic Warning" means. Like, does that mean if I fail anything this semester or don't bring my GPA up, I have to leave Auburn?

JASEY

That's a great question. "Academic Warning" is Auburn's way of saying "Hey, we see that you're having trouble academically, and we want to make sure you don't slip through the cracks." They notify appropriate campus partners (including me) and give you the chance to turn it around. Think of it like a "Warning" sign, not a "Stop" sign.

To stay off "Academic Suspension", which means sitting out a semester, there are a couple of things that have to happen. This semester, you'll need to maintain at least a 2.2 GPA and overall, you need to bring your cumulative GPA up above a 2.0.

SKYLAR

Is that even possible? I don't even know how to start calculating what I'd need to make. Can you show me?

JASEY

Absolutely! I know a lot of these terms like "Academic Warning" and "term" versus "cumulative" GPA can sound like a new language, especially for first-gen college students! Let's walk through what you'd need to make in each class to stay at Auburn using the Auburn GPA calculator. This is a great tool you can access on your own when you want to understand how your grades impact your GPA. I'll also send you an email later outlining what we talked about so you can discuss it with your parents or refer to it later.

THEORETICAL CONNECTION: At this point, I'm utilizing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) paradigm by providing multiple means of representation—explaining the Academic Standing policies, giving her a visual resource she can use on her own, and sending her a follow-up email that doesn't require her to rely on her memory.

I'm also thinking about transfer theory. Skylar needs my help not only to understand GPA and academic standing policy, but also to apply that understanding to future semesters, course planning, and even broader decision-making ("Should I skip class with my roommate even though this course has a strict attendance policy? How would a C in this course impact my GPA?"). If I do not take the time to explain the larger implications of academic standing, she may treat this appointment as a requirement to be checked off, rather than a transferable experience.

SKYLAR

Okay, so to stay off Academic Suspension, I need to make at least two B's, but if I make a C in any courses, I have to make an A in something?

JASEY

Correct. It's definitely doable with the right attitude and resources! Let me ask you this—what helped you stay organized in high school? Were there any systems or routines that helped you stay on top of things?

SKYLAR

I didn't really have to study in high school, but I did use a planner in one class because the teacher made us use it as part of our grade. She would check it every week to help us get better at keeping track of our assignments and due dates. I got into the habit of writing everything down, but once I filled that planner, I didn't get another one. And here, no one checks up on my stuff like that.

JASEY

That makes total sense, and is a great example of something we call “transfer”, where you take strategies or ideas that worked in one environment, and adapt them to another. It's not that your old tools don't work anymore, it's just that college requires you to find new ways to use them. What if we tried to recreate that system using a digital tool like Google Calendar or even buying a new, pretty planner that you set a reminder to go over once a week to establish what your week looks like in terms of assignments and deadlines?

THEORETICAL CONNECTION: Here, I'm actively prompting Skylar to engage in transfer theory, helping her identify a strategy from a previous academic context and reframe it to meet the new demands of university education. This aligns with Yancey's assertion that students already “(compose) in multiple spaces” but may not recognize those acts as rhetorical or academic without the help of an instructor. It also echoes the New London Group's view that learners are Designers, remixing and adapting familiar literacies to new settings.

JASEY

I know we've talked about a lot, and I don't want to overwhelm you by trying to go over next semester's classes during this appointment. Why don't we schedule another appointment later this semester to check in and plan future courses?

SKYLAR

That sounds good. I don't know if I can really think about next semester before I get caught up in this one. I'm afraid I won't remember everything we just talked about.

JASEY

That's okay. I'm going to send you a follow up email with a link to schedule another appointment, a summary of the GPA discussion we had, and some links to planners, digital and paper, that could be helpful to you. College isn't about knowing all the answers, it's about knowing what to ask and to whom, and how to adjust when things don't go according to plan. You've done a great job of that today.

Conclusion

While this appointment was fictionalized, it's a close representation of the conversations I have with my students on at least a weekly basis—especially those who are navigating higher education without the benefit of inherited academic literacies. This conversation with “Skylar” highlights how multimodal communication, intentional design, and empathetic guidance can work together to create a more effective advising pedagogical experience.

In this exchange, I drew on principles from the New London Group's multiliteracies pedagogy and Yancey's call for new composition practices, using both verbal explanation and email follow-up to help reinforce communication. I also tried to include UDL by giving Skylar multiple ways to receive, interpret, and act on information. Academic advising is not just administrative, it's a deeply personal practice that if treated as a site of learning, can allow students to make connections across contexts and take responsibility for their academic experience.

Works Cited

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