

## Advising Community for Wellbeing & Advisor Retention

### Rationale

In 2018, an advisor at the cusp of burning out attended the “Conversation with NACADA Leaders” at the Region Six Conference. The advisor, with a shaking voice, explained that advisors are stressed and struggling, and NACADA should play a role in helping these advisors, especially since they are the “Global Community for Academic Advising.” After attending this meeting, Amy Sannes, former President of NACADA, put out a call to advisors to see if there would be an interest in creating this advising community to help advisors. The result was an overwhelming “yes!”

Many higher education staff leave the profession within the first five years due to burnout, which creates stress for students as well as the remaining staff (Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery 2016). The nature of working and learning in higher education is in flux, disrupting the work and learning for staff and students alike. Not only do conversations about wellness impact staff, it directly impacts how advisors support and interact with students. Students are coming to our campus with higher reported rates of stress and health issues. At the University of Minnesota alone, one-in-three students report being diagnosed with a mental health condition at enrollment, and nearly 35% of college students report being unable to effectively manage stress. Oftentimes, these students first turn to their academic advisor for support and guidance. ***The purpose of this community is to help advisors navigate conversations on wellbeing with their students, and to encourage wellbeing as a valued practice for advisors and the advising profession.***

Upon discussing the implementation of this potential advising community within NACADA, we contacted the *Advisor Training & Professional Development chair*, Gavin Farber. Gavin has been an ardent supporter of the creation of the Advising for Wellbeing & Advisor Retention Community, expressly stating that this community should be a stand-alone and not under the Advisor Training & Professional Development Advising Community.

### Inclusion and Engagement

One of the goals that the potential community will address in the next year is a diversity and equity charge. Recognizing that self-care and wellbeing can be “buzzwords” amongst privileged identities, we want to ensure that advisors understand the depth that wellbeing can have for themselves, their practice, and for their students. Informed, inclusive conversations about wellbeing will help advisors and students navigate intersecting oppressions and privileges as the nature of higher education continues to change. We want our diversity and equity charge to be a living document, and we want it to be ingrained in all of our work.

At its root, ***actual self-care involves ensuring student and advisor needs are met***, thus we want to encourage advisors to consider this in their discussions with students, with their colleagues, and supervisors. Including wellbeing in an advising practice will truly lead to holistic advising. Given the anecdotal and academic evidence on attrition in the field, and the continuously shifting needs of college students, discussions like this are necessary to retain both students and advisors.

### Advancement of NACADA’s mission and goals

Currently, NACADA members Liz Sutton and Olivia Miller are co-chairing research within the field of wellbeing and retention. Specifically, they hope to do a survey of NACADA members related to wellbeing and retention, and how these issues show up in our work - see the attached goal sheet for more information.

The community is also hoping to pull research from other fields (social work, nursing, counseling) that is related to advising to start to have a better understanding of the work already being done and how it can be applied to our work with students and our profession, which will enhance NACADA Strategic goal number 2 (*Provide professional development opportunities that are responsive to the needs of advisors and advising administration*).

Additionally, by encouraging wellbeing to be considered in all facets of advising, this will in turn have an overlay effect of encouraging sustainability of advisors, and the NACADA organization and leadership, which will enhance strategic goal number 5, *develop and sustain effective Association leadership*. We hope that this advising community can encourage research about wellbeing and the benefits of it in an advising practice and the advising relationship (to serve students and advisors alike). We would also want to showcase how a focus on advisor wellbeing can increase advisor retention within the profession, hopefully improving the student experience of advising. We want to help advisors with learning how to take on the emotional burden that can come with the advising profession and empower holistic conversations on wellbeing in the advisor/advisee relationship.

We see this group as an avenue to focus conversations on healthily supporting the holistic growth of students. By empowering advisors to have tough conversations on wellness issues, we hope to make a positive impact on the student experience as well. With our desire to also have wellbeing woven into advising practices, we also hope to enhance NACADA's goal number 3 to *promote the role of effective advising in student success to college and university decision makers*.

***Conversations on wellbeing with students can improve their learning and retention, while these discussions within the profession can improve the working and learning experience of advisors.***

Kacey Gregerson will serve as chair of the community. Steering committee members include:

- Allie Funkhouser (Region 2 Co-liaison)
- Allison Ramsing (At-large)
- Banks Blair (Co-Lead Innovative Practice - Advisor)
- Chanda Walter (Co-Lead Innovative Practice - Student)
- Di Dingman (Region 5 Liaison)
- Edna Renee Macbeth (Region 2 Co-liaison)
- Holly Green (At-large)
- Jake Rudy (Co-Chair)
- Kathleen Vancheri (Co-Lead Innovative Practice - Student)
- Liz Sutton (Co-Lead Research)
- Lizzy Harman (Co-Lead Innovative Practice - Advisor)
- Mercedes Gonzales (Region 7 Liaison)
- Olivia Miller (Co-Lead Research)

*See attached goal sheet.*

### **Evidentiary Support**

As of this writing, our numbers are as follows:

- 148 NACADA members who receive emails and have expressed an interest in joining this community
  - 26 expressed interest during or immediately following the 2019 NACADA Annual Conference in Louisville, KY
- 185 individuals who have joined our group on Facebook

- 97 NACADA members who took our survey about the potential advising community
  - 92 were interested in joining the advising community
  - 87 would change one of their four advising communities to include this one
- Participated in the AC Fair at the 2019 Annual NACADA Conference in Louisville, KY and had 14 individuals sign up at our booth (many more stopped by to learn more).
- There are a number of NACADA regional and national sessions focusing on health and wellness, which appear to be well attended. This also shows the significance of this community need.
  - For example, at Annual Conferences, there has been a “health/wellness” track with - the vast majority of which had components related to wellbeing and self-care either for the professional or in advising work with students.
    - 2019 Annual Conference in Louisville, KY: 20 sessions listed in the official track.
    - 2018 Annual Conference in Phoenix, AZ: roughly 15 sessions on similar topics offered.
    - 2017 Annual Conference in St. Louis, MO: roughly 17 sessions on similar topics offered.

### **Potential Partnerships**

We hope to partner with *Advisor Training & Development*, and have spoken with Gavin Farber about opportunities to do so. Additionally, wellbeing shouldn't solely be a training topic; it should be pursued every day and thoughtfully woven into an advisor's professional practice and student relationships. We also hope that this community can partner with the *Advising Administration* Community as well, to encourage supervisors to consider their advisors from a holistic lens - similar to what advisors do for students. We would like to have liaisons in each *region* to encourage wellbeing at regional conferences and at a more local level - as such, we currently have named liaisons in place for Regions 2, 5 and 7. At present we do have representation from every region on our listserv. We also hope to work with the *Annual Conference Advisory Board* and NACADA staff/regional leaders who work with those conferences. For example, last year, we contacted Farrah Turner from the NACADA Executive Office. Farrah saw potential partnerships with the Health & Wellness Track, and ensuring there are wellness options at each conference. We hope to have our regional liaisons do the same for their own regional conferences.

We feel that NACADA, as the global community for academic advising, is the best avenue for this conversation. Higher education will continue to change, and focused work on the wellbeing of advisors and students will lead to a more just and equitable profession and learning experience in the coming decades.

**Works Consulted**

Sarah M. Marshall, Megan Moore Gardner, Carole Hughes & Ute Lowery (2016) Attrition from Student Affairs: Perspectives from Those Who Exited the Profession, *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 53:2, 146-159, DOI: 10.1080/19496591.2016.1147359