

Personal Philosophy Statement

Student persistence and success is enhanced when students have access to advising, access to information, and access to resources so that they can be empowered to make well-informed decisions regarding their educational, career, and life goals.

The University of Central Florida (UCF) has been my home for nearly 14 years, and I have proudly served UCF students in admissions and advising nearly every day since starting in 2004. I have assisted students from admissions to graduation and with everything in between. As a first generation, low income, college student, I understand first-hand the need to remove barriers and create access in higher education. I truly believe that even small adjustments to ingrained policies, procedures, and resources can help to ease the pathway to student success. After reflecting on my time as an advisor at UCF, I noticed a common theme emerge- **access**.

My personal philosophy of advising is informed by the Theory of Access (Ribot & Peluso, 2003) and the Invitational Theory and Practice (Purkey & Novak, 1996). The Theory of Access identifies categories of access: technology, capital, markets, labor, knowledge, authority, identity, and social relations. This theory focuses on the *ability* to benefit from access rather than the *right* to access. According to Shaw, Siegel, and Schoenlein (2013), the basic assumptions of Invitational Theory and Practice are the following:

1. People are able, valuable, and capable of self-direction, and should be treated accordingly.
2. Helping is a cooperative, collaborative alliance in which process is as important as product.
3. People possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human development.
4. Human potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that are intentionally designed to invite development, and by people who consistently seek to realize this potential in themselves and others, personally and professionally.

My personal philosophy statement of advising is this: **Student persistence and success is enhanced when students have access to advising, access to information, and access to resources so that they can be empowered to make well-informed decisions regarding their educational, career, and life goals.**

My personal philosophy of advising aligns with the CAS Contextual Statement that “academic advising encourages students to cultivate meaning in their lives, make significant decisions about their futures, and access institutional resources” (para. 8). I also take inspiration from UCF’s President, Dr. John C. Hitt, who believes that “developing the leaders of the future begins with access”.

My personal philosophy of advising is the underlying tenet in all of my advising interactions, projects that I choose to take on, and resources that I choose to invest in. I will further outline some examples of how I carry out my personal philosophy of advising.

Access to Information via Websites

In my roles in both Interdisciplinary Studies Office and the College of Nursing, I worked to redesign websites to make information **accessible** and understandable. For the College of Nursing, I was the primary contributor for the content in the Undergraduate Program Admissions <http://www.nursing.ucf.edu/admissions/undergraduate=programs/index> and Undergraduate Student <http://www.nursing.ucf.edu/students/undergraduate-students/index> sections. I separated the content

by track and incorporated only relevant resources on each track's page making pertinent information easily **accessible**. New website information included: GPA calculation instructions and examples, background check information, admission statistics for recent cohorts, sample curriculum plans for each track, sample costs, a page on the military medical enlisted commissioning program requirements, links to information session presentations, information on immunization requirements, orientation information, and informative videos. **Making this information accessible in an online format** has allowed students to be proactive in their educational research. I can easily share links and pages with students during or after an advising appointment so that they can return to the information at a later time.

Access for Transfer Students

Transfer students make up a large majority of the students at UCF, and unfortunately, these students have a higher attrition rate and take longer to complete a degree than students who start as freshman. In both offices, I eliminated steps and barriers within the transfer course evaluation process. In the Interdisciplinary Studies Office I was able to make this an online submission process, and I worked to streamline and shorten the evaluation progress in the College of Nursing. Allowing students to quickly and efficiently **access information** on how courses transfer, helps them to make sound educational decisions. I also created the Nursing content for the UCF Virtual Orientation. I worked with two of my team members in the College to create a very thorough 10 module online orientation for our online post-license BSN students including an 11 question quiz. All new transfer students admitted to an online BSN program are invited to complete this orientation, giving new students additional access to **major specific information**.

Access to Advising Appointments and Information Sessions

According to the CAS Standards and Guidelines, Academic Advising Programs (AAP) must "make advising available to students" (pg. 3). Upon starting my position in the College of Nursing I noticed that there was a huge demand for academic advising, but there were only two designed academic advisors including myself. This resulted in students waiting for week or even a month before they were able to see an advisor. To alleviate this problem, I implemented bi-weekly group information sessions. In January 2014, I began using an RSVP site called Smore. This site allows students to access all of the available information sessions and RSVP online. We are then able to access the RSVP's for each event and send email reminders and notifications to those students. The Smore site also tracks analytics. To date, since January 2014, there have been **58,695** visits to the site with **8,714** RSVPs. On average we see about 30-50 students at each information session.

I also created a very convenient and accessible online appointment scheduling system within the College of Nursing. This system allows anyone, even non-UCF students, to access **up to the minute advisor availability**, schedule an appointment, and receive an instant confirmation email with individualized, program-specific information based on the appointment inquiry from that they complete. Students also receive an automatic reminder email the day before the appointment with additional resources. Our receptionists no longer have to schedule advising appointments for students or send our confirmation emails, freeing them up for other tasks. **Over 7,500** individual online appointments were booked for a College of Nursing advisor since October 2014.

I have also been able to increase the number of full-time advisors **from just two advisors to four**, which increased **advisor availability** for students.

Access to Admissions Decisions

The College of Nursing had a goal to create a student-facing application status website before my employment. I was tasked with making this goal a reality. In spring 2014 my team and I met numerous times with web developers to design, develop and test a website that allows students to check the status of nursing applications. This new site went live on July 1, 2014 and since then nearly **5,500** students have applied using the online Nursing application system and had **access to the new application status dashboard**.

Information Access to the Advising Community

Not only do I want to make sure that students have the information necessary to make them successful, but I also want to ensure that advisors have the information that they need to assist students. My goal for academic advising at UCF is to strengthen a united community of advisors who can communicate goals and plans with a unified voice. As current chair of UCF Academic Advising Council (AAC) and coordinator of the Advisor Enhancement Program (AEP), I lead the monthly programming for nearly **200 advisors** and advising support staff. My objectives are to: enhance the current communication network between and among advising units so that all advisors are aware of important information and can best serve UCF students, update the online training courses for new academic advisors, provide relevant, timely topics at each monthly AEP meeting, and coordinate with professional development subcommittee to provide regular professional development opportunities throughout the year.

These little projects may not constitute major innovations in advising, nor are they unique or outstanding on their own, but together, this group of projects has **increased access to a large number of students** interested in attending the University of Central Florida.

Student Success Increases

Have these initiatives helped with the bottom line? It is hard to tell causation when we talk about student success, but I do have some positive results overall. By observation, it appears that students are more informed and better prepared to apply for a nursing program than they were four years ago. Our average admitted student GPAs and entrance exam scores have also **increased each year**. First year retention for freshman nursing students was at 81.7% in 2012, the year before I started working in the College of Nursing. This percentage had increased to **86.3% in 2016**. Our goal for 2017 was **88%** and we surpassed that goal! Student satisfaction with academic advising in the College of Nursing is rated by all graduating students. In the 2016-17 year, **87.7%** of students gave positive ratings for academic advising compared to only 79.6% of students university-wide.

By creating **accessible** information and pathways for students and advisors, academic advising empowers students seek to diverse and challenge educational and social experiences, utilize available resources, make well-informed decisions regarding their academic careers, and develop a regard for lifelong learning. **Student persistence and success is enhanced when students have access to advising, access to information, and access to resources so that they can be empowered to make well-informed decisions regarding their educational, career, and life goals.**

References:

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