

Personal Advising Philosophy

I had it easy. High school was a breeze. I padded my “resume” with extracurricular activities, sports, and strong academics. As I headed to college, I had thoughts about who I was and what I would be. And then I took my lumps, had little guidance, did poorly in school, and found I was more wrong than right. My higher education was about more than grades and that’s what I want for my students as well. It’s easy for students (Honors especially) to forget that sometimes. Instead it’s about taking “real selfies,” discovering who you are. That idea guides how I advise, teach, and lead. It makes sense then that I titled my first freshman seminar, “A Real Selfie” because it hints at the ability of higher education to reveal deeper truths about one’s self.

You can’t receive a grade on finding yourself. Becoming the person you want to be is doable, you just have to let yourself. I had my first advising “eureka” moment in my very first appointment. He was pre-med for no discernible reason and was struggling in his courses. I asked a simple question: why? Not so simple, in fact, because it led us in a million different directions. Eventually, we started to piece together exactly who he wanted to be. His passion lay in language studies and the liberal arts. This student had been pushed down a path his entire life. When he realized he wasn’t a doctor at heart, we found a path more fitting. This student changed his major, his grades rose, and his quality of life along with them. Sometimes holding a mirror up to students--making them take that selfie-- is the only way to achieve self-exploration. Students can get lost in their schedule and grades. I find it helps to reframe these concerns in respect to the student’s whole life, not just their to-do list. How does this class fit into what you want to do with your time? Why are you taking it? Often these are questions that reach beneath the surface and shed light on what they SHOULD be doing with their time.

Teaching a first year seminar was daunting at first and then I began to think of the course as a unique venue to engage in group advising. Through exercises in reflection, exploration of values, and goal setting, students begin to show themselves truthfully. I find it truly helps to make them uncomfortably comfortable, creating a new paradigm that encourages sharing and group examination. By the end of the semester, people are laughing, supporting, and understanding each other. This can lead to a variety of changes from switching majors to discovering one’s true passion and realizing sometimes it takes longer to do so. It’s easy for me to relate, when I was growing up, I had a few ideas: in preschool, I wanted to be an aircraft carrier (not a typo, I wanted to be THE SHIP), a soccer player, maybe a screenwriter. All of these were dreams, but none seemed like a calling. I often tell students I love my job and I didn’t even know it existed until late in college. You can see the anxiety slowly drip away when they hear someone say something like that. In class, I strive to give students a “selfie” they know and identify with. With the peer mentor seminar, it’s like an extension of my advising philosophy. Take what you know about yourself and help other students develop on their own. We work very hard on reflecting on personal experience and applying that in mentoring practice. In my experience, storytelling is vital to the creation of a strong relationship, it makes one relatable and you can only find stories about yourself through reflection and gaining a deeper understanding of who you are. One of the things I love about “advising” in the classroom is that students often don’t know it is happening. They are unaware of the importance of the work they’re putting in or the impact it may have. And then it hits them and it’s truly exciting to witness the transformations.

From an advising perspective, my best work has done during a week in Kentucky rehabbing and building homes with 30-40 advisees through our service immersion program, Temple Honors Appalachia. This

may not seem like the most obvious place to interact with students, but in my experience clarity is achieved in a completely different way. One of the critical pieces of our work is encouraging students to reflect in order to explore the incongruities between their lives at school and on the trip and to incorporate past experience to better inform their future. For instance, this semester I had two student leaders: one very passionate about social justice and one very strong on logistics. In practice, their roles were flipped creating confusion and weakening the team. So I returned to my favorite question: why? They hadn't taken the time to think about how best to collaborate. After a second of reflection, things changed. While as a team, we are constantly forward-facing, we plan for it by incorporating our experiences and individual strengths. Leading a group of peers is not easy, but by the time we roll out from 1809 N. 13th Street at dawn with 100 students in tow, these student leaders have created a new piece of their selfie and includes LEADER (deservedly in all caps). For participants, the hard work we put in while serving in Kentucky can reveal character in a way no advising session can. Pairing this with nightly reflection and guided group discussion creates a stealth group advising session with depth way beyond CRNs. This trip exposes students to a new culture, new people, and to each other in a stark, open way. More than one student has claimed it has changed their lives and I am no longer cynical enough to see why. The trip puts demands on a student that requires them to wrestle with questions not asked in class.

I have not been advising for my entire life, but I feel that it is what I am meant to do. College was a transformative time for me and I strive to give my students a similar experience. If I can get them to stop and think deeply about their lives, pursuits, and beliefs for a moment, the grades will come. But I would already give them high marks.