

Episode 3: Incorporating Career Advising

Kathryn Harth:

Welcome to *Get Online* from Great Plains IDEA. I'm your host, Kathryn Harth. Thanks for downloading this week's podcast. *Get Online* has expert advice and creative resources to inform and enrich the online educational experience for both students and faculty. In this three episode series we Get Online with Academic Advising, specifically faculty advisors who work with online graduate students.

Later in this episode we are going to chat with Kimberly Smith, assistant provost of academic advising initiatives at Virginia Tech University. Kim will explain how academic advisors stand in a prime position to serve as career influencers as students think about next steps after graduation. Also coming up, we'll take a closer look at some of the misconceptions about academic advising. But first, let's take some questions from students in this segment that we call Just Ask George.

Amanda Gnad:

Alright, let's answer some student questions. Our first question today is from Norah at North Dakota State University. Norah emailed to ask about what to do when life gets in the way of school. Norah said,

"I've been taking one class every semester and it's been going really well! I like my program and my instructors have been great. However, I anticipate needing to take the fall semester off to care for my partner who is having a major surgery. Can students take a break from classes? Will I be able to reenroll for the spring? Can my advisor help?"

George Steele:

Life does happen. Norah, you're not alone here. Lots of online students – especially adult students who usually have other life commitments like spouses, children and jobs – need to take a semester off. You may hear this referred to as a stop out. It's different than a drop out because it means you have a plan to return. It is really important that you communicate before and during your break from school. Not only will your advisor be concerned with your situation, but he or she can offer advice about how a break will impact your progress. Your advisor may be able to help you map a path through this stop out to keep you on track when you return the next semester. They can also share information about when enrollment will open for the next semester.

Amanda Gnad:

Thanks George! The next question today is from Sara at Colorado State University. Sara emailed to ask about concerns she has about an instructor in her online course. Sara said,

“When I enrolled in my course for this semester I was so excited, but that excitement has faded. My instructor is hardly communicating – we get a group message in the learning management system every couple of weeks and even though I’ve submitted all of my assignments on time I haven’t received feedback in the last three weeks. I’m worried about my grade and I’m frustrated with the lack of information coming from my instructor. Should I contact my academic advisor?”

George Steele:

Good question Sara. It’s tough when you feel like you’re not getting the information you need. Most likely, it is not your academic advisors job to monitor a faculty member’s instruction. However, your advisor CAN help you by making some suggestions. For example, the most obvious action would be to encourage you reach out to the instructor one more time. Instructors sometimes encounter unexpected events in their lives – just like students. Perhaps your instructor has run into a life challenge and is working on corrective measures.

If that fails, you can ask to visit with the instructor’s department chair. The department chair is like the manager of the faculty in the program. This is the person who communicates regularly with faculty. During such a conversation, it would be helpful if you could provide examples of messages you sent to your instructor and a copy of the course syllabus.

Remember, institutions often send course evaluations at the end of the semester. These evaluations are an opportunity for you to provide constructive feedback.

Amanda Gnad:

Thanks, George! Back to you Kathryn.

Kathryn Harth:

Thank you, Amanda and George, for that great information. In this podcast we not only have experts providing advice to students and faculty advisors, we also have resources and tools. Every episode, we give away resources tailored to you, our audience. Stay tuned until the end of our show for a free and fantastic resource that will benefit students, faculty, and everyone in between.

Kathryn Harth:

We call this next segment Get on the Same Page. My colleague, Dr. Amanda Burris, is going to pose the exact same question to a faculty advisor and then to a student. We’re going to hear how each individual answers the question, and then Amanda will help us analyze these differing views and provide suggestions to help get faculty advisors and students on the same page. Let’s hear from Amanda.

Amanda Burris:

Today we are going to get on the same page about advisors, and their responsibility to answer student questions.

First we talked to Cathy, a faculty advisor from Clemson University. Cathy, do you believe an academic advisor should have answers to all student questions?

Cathy from Clemson:

As an advisor I don't think I should have answers to all student questions. There are a lot of resources on campus and online to help the students navigate. I think they need to be able to find that information on their own.

Amanda Burris:

Thanks, Cathy. Next, we asked Tim, a student from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, his thoughts. Tim, do you think your advisor should have answers to all of your questions?

Tim from UNL:

I expect that my advisor has answers to pretty much all of my questions. I think they should be able to help me understand things like my program of study, financial aid, and give me advice about my career.

Amanda Burris:

The faculty and student in this situation have pretty different expectations. The faculty member is correct that it is not their job to have all the answers, but they should be able to connect students to resources. Because students don't always know where to go for answers, they should be able to rely on their advisor to help them navigate things. It is a good idea for students to ask their advisor questions about things like program of study, financial aid, and career advice, but they need to know that their advisor may need to connect them with someone else who has more knowledge in that area.

Kathryn Harth:

Next up on the podcast we will be talking with Kimberly Smith, Assistant Provost of Academic Advising Initiatives at Virginia Tech University. Kimberly is also the chair of NACADA's career advising community.

Welcome, Kimberly!

Kimberly Smith:

Hello Kathryn. Thank you for inviting me and I'm excited to be here today to talk about career advising.

Kathryn Harth:

Thank you for joining me to talk about career advising and how it relates to career development with graduate students. But before we dive into our topic, I want to know more about you! How did you get into academic advising? What about this field or this topic made you decide to make a career out of it?

Kimberly Smith:

Sure, I'd love to share, specifically as a graduate student, I earned a graduate teaching assistantship that was directly related to academic advising. Never knew it was a field, never knew it was a career, but I enjoyed it so much that I actually changed my graduate program to make a career out of academic advising, and more importantly, what drew me to this particular field is the fact that I was a first-generation college student and so I really did not have a lot of guidance in terms of career exploration, figuring out all my options, how a degree relates to your career. And so I wanted to make sure that other students had an opportunity to have someone guide them through that experience, changing the narrative for other first-time-college, first-generation college students.

Kathryn Harth:

We know there are all sorts of advisors in the world, and one of them is career advising. In our two previous episodes we learned that there are different *approaches* to advising and there are different *types* of advising. So, for our conversation today, let's start by defining what exactly career advising is and what it looks like.

Kimberly Smith:

Absolutely. Career development really involves the process of engaging students in self-exploration, that's where they learn more about themselves. Also, establishing a work and career identity and then finally expanding their awareness of different career possibilities that align with their academic goals, specifically Virginia Gordon, she really formed a definition of career advising that many of us have adopted because it involves helping students understand how their academic and personal interests, their abilities and values might relate to specific career fields. So it's really more about that self-exploration in relation to what options they have available out there. So that's career advising.

On the other hand, many of us who are in academic advising certainly understand we have a specific definition that sort of frames the work we do, but really academic advising is about facilitating the clarification of academic personal and career goals which combines each of these three dimensions into a comprehensive educational plan

to help students figure out how to reach those goals. So really, if you just listen to those two definitions, you can see that there is a tremendous amount of overlap between the two. What we do know is that given the structured and intentional nature of academic advising, academic advisors stand in a prime position to serve as effective career influencers. In an effort to better prepare students for life after college, for example, many colleges and universities have very structured and intentional advising approaches to ensure students engage; however, it's less common for schools to have less to have comparable strategies in place to get students engaged in the career development process prior to graduation. In fact, I was reading a recent statistic that said one out of three college seniors never visit the career center at any point in their college experience.

Kathryn Harth:

Oh my gosh, yes.

Kimberly Smith:

So this means that if we advisors have a captive audience, why not take advantage of that time to help students engage in career exploration?

Kathryn Harth:

So with the idea that- I love the how you call it a career influencer, that makes so much sense because you're certainly not going to do all of the work for them as a faculty advisor.

So we know students need to be proactive, they need to start the conversation for their career trajectory, I mean it is their life after all, but we also know that some of our students are returning to school after years--sometimes decades--away from the university setting and so this is all unfamiliar to them and sometimes you just don't know what you don't know. Or we also know there are students who are juggling multiple responsibilities, they have family, they have work-life, and now they've added graduate school to their list. So it's possible that things can slip through the cracks. In addition to being an influencer, how else can faculty advisors help? What can be their role in all of this?

Kimberly Smith:

Faculty advisors really are critical in helping students to set the expectations of the advising process and really can work very intentionally to integrate academics into career development. Now, what I will say to you is that both students and advisors alike share responsibility in the career development process. Advisors and students, again, share responsibility; however, the amount of responsibility should vary over time with the academic advisor assuming more responsibility early in the student's academic

career to develop intentional and proactive experiences that are going to help the students to reflect and gain more knowledge of their actual options in their career or discipline. So as students progress, though, over time that responsibility should shift with students being ultimately responsible for their career development but, again, back to specifically the faculty involvement, effective faculty advisors really are able to guide students in using resources that aid in career exploration.

So when advisors practice career advising they provide information on the nature of the workforce and realistic preparation for career fields and help students make sound decisions that further their goals. So some academic advisors might want to recognize that they already do this on a daily basis and other advisors may see how they can easily weave this career advising into the work that they're doing.

So I would just recommend three steps or three talking points for faculty to consider. The first is that faculty advisors really need to brush up on career development knowledge. This doesn't mean that advisors have to be career development scholars, however they should develop some background in how career development occurs and provides a solid foundation for career advising. There are theories out there such as Holland's Career Typology or Supers Theory of Vocational Choice and there are actually some resources that NACADA, the National Academic Advising Association, has developed including the pocket guide entitled Academic and Career Advising for the Undecided, Exploring, and Major-Changing Students and The Academic Handbook of Career Advising.

So, again, those are just a number of resources but there are tons out there to help faculty advisors really brush up on their career development knowledge. Second, faculty advisors really need to get to know all of the career resources available on their campus. While most college campuses have a career center, some campuses also have a separate major and career exploration center. Sometimes you'll find counseling services may also offer career counseling for students, so it's just about a matter of understanding the available resources on campus. So some questions that they might want to ask are what resources are available on campus, and where are all career development needs met at the campus career center. Or, are there other locations, what can the student expect of their appointment with any of the campus career resource offices? So we don't want to just send students over there to another unit, we want to know what would the experience be like so that we can prime the student on what to be prepared for, what questions to ask to make it a more meaningful interaction.

Lastly, is someone going to sit with a student and interpret any of the assessment results, if that's a part of their process there? The last suggestion I have for faculty advisors is to really look at how they can weave career advising into their preferred academic advising approach. So, again, you mentioned at the beginning that there are a

number of different advising approaches, understanding the wide range of those approaches and which approach works best with different students is critical. I like to say the approaches are more like a toolbox, different ways that you can work with different students. You need to have a toolbox that's loaded with different ways that are going to engage the student and so it's really critically important for faculty advisors to be aware of what those advising approaches are.

Kathryn Harth:

I mean, that makes a lot of sense. We as instructors, we encourage everybody to have tool kits, their teaching toolkit, so also having your advising toolkit ready to go, and I will let our listeners know that some of the resources that Kim mentioned, we'll link to those in our From Our Podcast website so you can go and find some of those there as well. Kimberly this is all great information you have shared with us, we have faculty advisors who can help, and there's been so many great tips. So if I'm a graduate student, how and when do I get started? What should be my first step?

Kimberly Smith:

Well, of course, that first step may be different for different students simply because we come in at a different developmental level, however, universally what I would say is all graduate students should start immediately, even at the point that they've made a decision that they wish to return or begin graduate education, and I would start by creating a plan for integrating your academic program with career development activities. Students should spend as much time creating a career development plan as they do as on developing their program of study, and they should really complement each other. The program of study outlines the coursework that you will complete to get to graduation, the career development plan on the other hand, outlines all the other experiences they're going to make to better prepare students to move into the world of work or whatever their post-graduate plans are. We have found in the literature that students who simply focus on academics while they may come out and be great, highly intellectual individuals, they're not always the students who are best prepared to enter into the workforce.

There are some skills that many employers say are very important to them, we call those career competencies, and those generally tend to be some of the soft skills and so students should then ensure that their career development plan really does give them opportunities to explore what are the essential skills needed to be successful in a given career and be able to articulate to employers how they have developed those skills throughout their career. So throughout their academic career, so those would include things like communication skills, leadership skills, being able to work with a diverse workforce, those sorts of skills and so that's how students can start, by really looking at the development of their own career plan.

Kathryn Harth:

That makes so much sense that you should spend as much time on your career development plan as you do on your academic plan of study. So is there any more that you can tell us about what the career development plan looks like? What kind of pieces go into that?

Kimberly Smith:

I would say the first part of the career development plan is really just the career exploration itself. That means do I really understand myself, have I engaged in self-reflection to know what types of work environment I would work best in, what is my personality like, will I want to be engaged with working in a high demand office, do I need to be able to work in a setting alone? Those sorts of things, but also how do my skills, my interests, and my abilities- how do they match up with current occupations or current opportunities within my discipline? So that would be the first step.

Once I have a better understanding of that, then I should be able to look within my own academic program, to see your academic curriculum, to see where I might be able to enhance my skill-set and develop specific programs that are going to again best prepare me for the world of work. For example, there are some careers out there in which being able to work with a diverse workforce is critically important, so if I am able to perhaps I would be able to define study abroad opportunities or any type of co-curricular opportunities outside of the classroom that are going to demonstrate my ability to work collaboratively across a wide spectrum and diverse group of individuals. So that's basically how the career development plan unfolds.

I would then, you know, it's very important for students to use that in relation to having conversations with their faculty advisors to get feedback to see if revisions need to be made, and then to really start to believe it or not. Look at long-term plans, where do they want to see themselves go within a particular career? Maybe they start an entry-level position but maybe they form goals that within five years they want to look at management, that would be totally up to the student and the faculty advisor to look at those aspirations beyond initial employment. You know, with a lot of graduate students they might already be in the field in which they are, you know, furthering their skills or they might be jumping into a whole new field altogether, so it does make sense that they're aligning that career development plan and having conversations all along the way with their faculty advisor.

So absolutely one good thing, though, when working with the graduate population the graduate students typically have a more refined career outlook, meaning when you compare the undergraduate students they typically do have no clue of all the opportunities that are out there related to one specific discipline and moving into a career they also don't typically understand that there's usually more than one path to

get to the same end result. Just because you want to work in business doesn't mean you have to necessarily earn a degree from a business school, you could choose a major in some other area, but graduate students typically have had that undergraduate experience, number one, but number two, they've typically had some work experience as well that helps them to have a much more refined perspective.

Where some of the challenges I have seen with graduate students, it involves the idea that many faculty advisors assume that students are coming to graduate school to pursue faculty or teaching jobs and so a lot of faculty advisors, I would say, feel least comfortable in helping their students transition into careers that are outside of academia and so if there are any professional development opportunities I would suggest they might want to center around that specific population. Faculty can also connect students to people who are already out there in the field, connecting those relationships for them.

Kathryn Harth:

Yes, so last question for the interview today. You've given us so much to think about. If advisors and students take just one thing away from today's interview from all this really great information, what do you want that one thing to be? What's the most critical for students?

Kimberly Smith:

I would say the most critical is to take charge of your own career development. I think a lot of times students, particularly when they're just starting out on their educational path, assume that certain experiences are going to be built-in, assume that someone is going to help them transition immediately to their next career, but ultimately that responsibility really should be the students and so don't be afraid to take charge by asking questions, by asking for advice about participation in certain experiences, faculty advisors will be almost expecting that to come from the student.

On the other hand, for my faculty advisor colleagues, the one piece of advice that I would hope you understand or take away from this experience is the need to provide proactive and intentional experiences that are going to engage the student in the career exploration process; meaning a lot of times, or sometimes, there are faculty who assume that this is happening elsewhere but if we don't build it into a set curriculum that students engage in this career exploration that could be done within the curricular, or it could be done by encouraging students to engage in particular co-curricular opportunities, but it's very important that faculty not make the assumption that that's being taken care of somewhere else, but to ensure that students are meeting certain outcomes and developing certain skills to be best prepared, to transition into their career well.

Kathryn Harth:

That is a great note to end on, students advocate for yourself, faculty you can do it in the curriculum and outside the curriculum and don't make assumptions that it's already provided. Thanks for helping us understand what online students can expect from faculty advisors when it comes to career advising.

Kimberly Smith:

It's been my pleasure.

Kathryn Harth:

That was Kimberly Smith from Virginia Tech University talking with us about how academic advisors can be career influencers. She recommended we all brush up on our career development knowledge and sited several resources. We've added links to those resources on our website.

While this episode of *Get Online* is all about academic advising, we know that there are other types of advising in the world. One of those is policy advising. To hear more about this we talked to Dam Pomeroy, the executive director of the Scientific Citizenship Initiative at Harvard Medical School. Previously, Dan was a senior policy advisor at MIT. Dan...

Dan Pomeroy:

Hi, my name is Dan Pomeroy and I advise academics on how to engage with public policy-makers. Often, scientists who want to inform policy think about this type of engagement as a one-way street with scientists taking their research and repackaging it for policy-makers; however, to really be effective in this space requires building relationships and two-way dialogues with policy audiences. These relationships help to identify research questions that are not only academically interesting, but that are also relevant to the issues of policy-makers grappling with them.

Therefore, when advising scientists, I help them to first identify the relevant stakeholders and whatever issue they're working on, then prioritize which are the most important to reach out to, and finally help connect them directly with the audience that they hope to talk to.

Rachel Ohmes:

This is Rachel Ohmes with great Plains IDEA and if you're hearing my voice that means you've made it to the end of our podcast. At the end of every episode we provide our listeners with a giveaway and today's freebie is a fantastic resource that will help students develop their resume. Our Developing Your Resume Packet includes

worksheets and resources that will help students connect their academic, professional, and life experiences as they seek new employment or promotions. The packet can be used during advising sessions or independently and can be a powerful resource to identify skills and opportunities for career placement and advancement. To get yours go to www.gpidea.org/podcast.

Kathryn Harth:

That's it for this week's show. Special thanks to our guests Just Ask George Steele, our student and faculty voices, and our guest expert, Kimberly Smith.

Also, a big thanks to the Great Plains IDEA team. This show would not be possible without them – Chelsea Barbercheck, Amanda Burris, Amanda Gnad, Rachel Ohmes, and Stephanie Stewart.

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I'm your host Kathryn Harth and until next time, Get Online.