

About Me

I matriculated to UC Davis after graduating from a public high school ranked among the top 10 in California and top 100 nationwide. With access to a wide variety of Advanced Placement courses, I began college with nearly 50 units of credit. I also had the full financial support of two college-educated parents, which allowed me to focus entirely on my academics. These structural privileges gave me significant educational capital and positioned me to thrive in college—a reality I now recognize is far from common in higher education.

For over seven years now, I have worked in the intersections of academic advising, student leadership development, teaching, and program management. Whether advising a student, mentoring a colleague, managing an event, or launching a new initiative, I lead with care and clarity. I believe personalized, compassionate advising can remove institutional barriers and create a scaffold of support for student success. I am privileged to serve in a role where students engage in “ongoing, one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution” (Habley, 1994). In my advising philosophy, I value servant leadership, psychological safety, clarity, curiosity, and collaboration.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Robert Greenleaf describes servant leadership as putting the well-being of others first (Greenleaf, 1977). For academic advisors, this means centering the needs of our students in every interaction. When advising, I strive to be fully present and attentive, discerning the specific needs and challenges a student may be facing. When working with student leaders or staff, I model the values, behaviors, and attitudes I hope to see in them. When managing programs or events, no task is too menial. Servant leadership is about moving toward the need—taking action to meet it, even when it requires personal sacrifice. While some pursue power or titles in university politics, anyone can choose to serve and work for the welfare of those around them.

Yet service alone is not enough; it must occur in an environment where students feel secure to take risks and be honest about their challenges.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Psychological safety is the belief that one can take risks, speak up with ideas or concerns, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences. Only in a psychologically safe space can students garner the courage to persevere, learn, and grow. To foster psychological safety, I use a strengths-based approach that builds self-efficacy and reframes what students often label as “failure.” I remind them that their worth is not defined by academic performance. I work to create a physical and emotional environment where students feel comfortable sharing experiences and challenges, and I “sit in the mess” alongside them. As students navigate the vectors of development in Chickering’s model, I embrace my role in both challenging and supporting them, consistent with Sanford’s Challenge and Support Theory.

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I am mindful of my choice of words, tone, and emotional field. While it is true and expected that we as higher education professionals are here to model professionalism to students, overly professionalized rhetoric hinders connection and may create emotionally unsafe environments. Professionalism privileges a form of elitism that reinforces unconscious biases about who belongs and can alienate underrepresented students, leaving them uncertain and disempowered (Tyler, 2001). I strive to use language that is positive, psychologically attuned, and strengths-oriented (rather than punishing or deficit-based). As Maya Angelou says, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

When safety and trust are established, I strive to remove ambiguity so students can confidently navigate their academic paths.

CLARITY

Clarity in advising means more than simply giving information as a transaction—it’s about removing ambiguity so students can make informed, confident decisions. Universities are complex systems with policies and procedures that can feel overwhelming, especially to those who are first-generation or from underrepresented backgrounds. I help students navigate this bureaucracy and demystify the hidden curriculum. I strive to translate institutional language into accessible terms without diluting accuracy. I approach this work as a partnership, rooted in shared responsibility. I am transparent about what is possible, what is not, and the steps needed to reach a goal. In doing so, I equip students to make informed, intentional decisions in their academic journey.

Clarity answers questions, and curiosity helps build relational trust with students that enables deeper conversations beyond academics.

CURIOSITY

I care for students beyond their academic identity, practicing intentional curiosity about their stories, motivations, and sources of joy. I value the integration of a student’s values, interests, and goals into academic planning. I strive to remember personal details and follow up when possible, knowing that outreach and continuity can remove institutional barriers and create a scaffold of support. While individualized attention requires time and effort, it is essential for providing holistic support and addressing each student’s unique needs, strengths, and challenges.

I recognize that approaching the institution I represent can feel intimidating. By making at least one personal connection in each advising session, I hope students remember that interaction as a point of trust, making them more likely to seek support in the future. My goal is for students to leave feeling heard, valued, and supported, remembering that they have an advocate within the university. Through open-ended questions and genuine interest, I build rapport that, over time, cultivates trust. With trust, I can encourage students to envision a future beyond graduation by exploring meaningful experiences and community during their college years.

This work of casting vision is most powerful when done in collaboration with both the student and the broader campus community.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration—with both students and campus partners—is essential to effective advising. To make accurate and meaningful referrals, I actively connect with advising practitioners and campus partners to learn about their programs, resources, and experiential learning opportunities. I acknowledge that I do not have all the answers, and I commit to advocating for students by working alongside others to address their individual needs.

I believe higher education's purpose extends beyond degree completion to preparing students for life after graduation. Experiential learning outside the classroom is critical for building transferable skills and achieving post-graduation success. I create space for students to envision their academic and professional futures, encouraging them to see every class, internship, project, and undergraduate job as a skill-building opportunity. Within a coaching framework, I use open-ended questions to help students turn aspirations into actionable next steps.

Conclusion

My advising is rooted in servant leadership, founded in psychological safety, guided by clarity, enriched by curiosity, and expanded through collaboration. These values work together to ensure that advising is not a transactional exchange but a transformative experience. The work of advising and retention is not solely about graduating students on a traditional four-year timeline. Ultimately, the work of advising and retention ought to focus on ensuring students leave with a strong network of connections, a range of transferable skills, and the confidence to navigate life after graduation.

Works Cited:

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