

What Does it Mean to Us? Discussions Towards a Definition of Academic Advising for South African Higher Education Contexts

Presenters

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Scholarly Area(s)

1. Student learning
4. Academic development
5. Decoloniality

Format

Open space methodology

Session Proposal

Academic Advising is a high-impact practice (Strydom & Loots, 2020) that can play an important role in the student life cycle, with the potential to contribute to student success in meaningful ways (Strydom & Loots, 2020, p. 30). However, Academic Advising for South African higher education (SA HE) contexts is still in its infancy, with the ambit of the profession and the work done by Academic Advisors as practitioners still quite poorly defined. Moreover, reliable literature about Academic Advising for SA HE contexts remain limited (Strydom, 2017, p. 104). In the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management (CLM) at a research-intensive public university in SA, the work of Academic Advisors encompasses a wide range of activities, from curriculum advising and academic excellence skills development, to assistance with psychosocial matters and personal support. Ultimately, CLM Academic Advisors work to support students from registration until they graduate. Importantly, these Academic Advisors serve as a key point of contact for students to interact with and connect to their institution (Hill, 1995; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004; Rendon, 1994), which plays an essential part in students' likelihood of succeeding at university (Karp, 2011; Lotkowski et al., 2004). Within a context of stark socioeconomic and educational inequalities, the support needs of each student can vary drastically. This means that the work of Academic Advisors in SA university contexts can be quite extensive, covering a number of different areas. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant shift to remote teaching and learning has further exacerbated existing inequalities and the difficulties that many students face, thus underscoring the need for responsiveness, adaptability, and innovation in meeting student needs.

Accordingly, Academic Advising has an important place in SA HE, yet remains without a distinct identity within the SA context. The approaches and models used for advising in the country tend to draw quite heavily on those from the global north and other developed countries, where social, historical, and economic contexts differ drastically from our own. As the field of Academic Advising grows, it is essential to work towards creating a definition of advising that captures the nature and unique essence of the profession for SA HE contexts. Moreover, it is essential to distinguish SA advising from those forms practiced elsewhere in the world. This could be a critical step towards more contextually relevant approaches, as well as models and theories for advising that can enable Academic Advisors working in SA, HE contexts to meet the needs of SA university students.

In embracing the (un)conferencing theme, this session seeks to engage with stakeholders who have a vested interest in Academic Advising for SA contexts, in a conversation that explores key themes around the field. Our approach will be underpinned by a critical and social realist perspective (Archer, 1995, 2000, 2005; Bhaskar, 1975), with the aim of delving deeper into the nuances of what Academic Advising entails, how it is enacted within the SA context, and what the purpose of advising is, all towards defining Academic Advising for SA HE. **[Words: 498]**.

Key words

Academic Advising | Higher Education | Responsiveness | South Africa | Student Success | Student Support

Questions for Further Discussion

1. What distinguishes South African Academic Advising from the advising practiced elsewhere around the globe?
2. How can we begin to move away from the reliance on international models and approaches to advising, and towards developing contextually relevant South African approaches?

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