Socratic Advising: an effective academic advising approach in leading students to student success

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Interests: Painting, writing, reading, spending time with family
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University of Louisville

• 23,000 students
• Urban, Research I Institution
Introductions

Find a partner…

– What is your partner’s name and where is he/she from?
– What does your partner do at his/her institution?
– What does your partner want to get out of today’s workshop?
At the conclusion of this workshop, you will have an understanding of how to use the Socratic advising approach in your advising practice.
What we will do today…
1. Background of Socratic Advising Approach
2. Socratic Advising Approach components
3. Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework
4. Assessing Student Thinking (Self Reflection; Rubric)
5. Socratic Questioning
6. Types of Socratic Dialog
7. Proactive Advising
8. Helping Techniques
9. Teaching and Learning in the Socratic Advising Approach
10. Application of the Approach
11. Pilot Study
12. An example of a Socratic dialog in an advising appointment
13. Case Studies
Background of Socratic Advising
The approach was created in 2010 by U of L Academic Advisors to help at-risk students on academic warning learn to “think things through” so that they could make informed decisions and move to good academic standing.
Karen: “I want to be a nurse because I like helping people. I have dreamed of this career since I was a child, but I hate my anatomy class and am on verge of failing it.”

Michael: “I picked up an extra shift at work; I really need the money. As long as I pass the tests it should be ok for me to miss a few weeks of classes, right?”

Jason: “My professor hates me! He failed me on my paper even though I turned it in on time. It isn’t my fault that he didn’t like what I wrote. It isn’t fair!”
U of L advisors decided to create an advising approach that would help “at-risk” students self reflect and improve their critical thinking skills to address challenges and create a plan for success.
What does Socrates have to do with this approach?
What is the Socratic Advising Approach?
Goal: To teach students to become self-aware thinkers who can analyze their own thought processes, beliefs and behaviors.

Outcome: Students become engaged learners who take responsibility for their own success.
Components

- Helping Techniques
- Assessment of Student Thinking
- Proactive Advising
- Teaching & Learning Approach
- Socratic Questioning
- Critical Thinking
Paul and Elder
Critical Thinking Framework
To become a self aware thinker, one must understand how the intellectual standards are applied to the elements of thought to develop intellectual traits.
Critical thinkers routinely apply intellectual standards to the elements of reasoning in order to develop intellectual traits.

**The Standards**
- Clarity
- Accuracy
- Relevance
- Logicalness
- Breadth
- Precision
- Significance
- Completeness
- Fairness
- Depth

**The Elements**
- Purposes
- Questions
- Points of view
- Information
- Inferences
- Concepts
- Implications
- Assumptions

**Intellectual Traits**
- Intellectual Humility
- Intellectual Autonomy
- Intellectual Integrity
- Intellectual Courage
- Intellectual Perseverance
- Confidence in Reason
- Intellectual Empathy
- Fairmindedness
Elements of Thought

Purpose
Question at issue
Information
Interpretation and inference
Concepts
Assumptions
Implications and consequences
Point of view
Intellectual Standards

Clarity
Accuracy
Relevance
Logicalness
Breadth
Precision
Significance
Completeness
Fairness
Depth
Intellectual Traits

- Humility (vs. Arrogance)
- Autonomy (vs. Conformity)
- Integrity (vs. Hypocrisy)
- Courage (vs. Cowardice)
- Perseverance (vs. Laziness)

Confidence in Reason (vs. Distrust of Reason and Evidence)

- Empathy (vs. Narrow-mindedness)
- Fairmindedness (vs. Unfairness)
Developing Intellectual Traits

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- Fairmindedness

As we learn to develop
How is the critical thinking framework used in the Socratic Advising Approach?
Types of Student Thinkers

- Naïve
- Externally-Focused
- Self-Aware
Naïve Student Thinker

- Unaware
- May go through their academic experience without understanding the ways institutional policies and resources affect them.
- Does not analyze information and often make assumptions without checking the facts.
Externally-Focused Student Thinker

- Expresses egotistical thought processes and adhere to an external focus.
- Uses language indicating a belief that poor outcomes happen “to” them.
- Does not take responsibility for their situations
- May blame others for negative consequences
Self-Aware Student Thinker

- Is fairminded and actively seeks to improve his ability to solve problems and make good decisions.

- She has given thought to her situation and takes responsibility for the outcomes.
Assessing Student Thinking

- Advisors conduct an assessment of the student’s levels of reasoning before they meet with the student.

- Students are asked to complete a self reflection.
Dear Student:

This information is necessary for your academic advisor to help you develop a plan to return to good academic standing. Please print neatly and be thoughtful in your answers. If you need more space you may write on the back or attach another piece of paper.
1. Full name and student id #: 

2. What is your current major? (if undecided are there any majors you would like to learn more about?)

3. As a student on academic warning, explain what you know about the university’s academic warning status.
4. What factors do you think led to your being placed on academic warning?

5. What are the strategies you intend to undertake to improve your grade point average so that you can return to good academic standing?

6. What are your expectations about your participation in the AIM program?
Through their interactions with students in the AIM program, advisors continually gauge students’ thinking by using a rubric.
The rubric helps advisors track students’ cognitive growth, acceptance of responsibility, engagement in academic life, and needed improvements.
The art of sound Socratic questioning is fundamental to the successful application of the approach.
Create a Socratic Questioning Toolbox
3 Kinds of Questions
One-System Question
No-System Question
Conflicting Systems Question
Socratic Questioning

One-System Question Example:

“What is the minimum grade-point average required for your major?”
No-System Question Example

“Why did you decide to major in nursing?”
Conflicting Systems Question Example

“What are the main factors that led to your being placed on academic warning?”
Socratic Questioning

Spontaneous or Unplanned Dialog

Exploratory Dialog

Focused Dialog
What is Proactive Advising?
• Jennifer Varney’s definition:

“Proactive advising involves intentional institutional contact with students such that personnel and students develop a caring relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence.”

Helping Techniques

Listening
Paraphrasing
Clarifying
Summarizing
Information-Sharing
Silence
To learn more about Helping Techniques:

- Corey and Corey (2007), *Becoming a Helper* (5th ed.)


- Okun and Kantrowiz (2008), *Effective Helping* (7th ed.)
Curriculum:

- Student success strategies
- Student development theories
- Institutional policies and procedures
- Degree program requirements
- Paul and Elder’s Elements of Thought
Pedagogy:
• Socratic questioning
• Proactive advising
• Helping techniques
• Paul and Elder’s Intellectual Standards
Learning Outcomes:

• Growth among Paul and Elder’s Intellectual Traits
• Ability to engage in contemplative self-reflection
• Competency in making informed decisions
See Socratic Advising Process Handout
Application

• Exploratory Students
• First-Year Students
• Transfer Students
• At-Risk Students
The AIM pilot program (Academic Improvement Model) in 2012 was created by UofL academic advisors in order to improve student persistence by using the Socratic Advising approach with students on academic warning.
For the students who participated in AIM, 59% returned to good standing one year later compared to 35% of the students in the control group.
An example: Using the Socratic advising approach in an advising appointment
What type of student thinker was the student in this example?

Why?
What did the advisor do to help the student use his critical thinking skills to solve his dilemma?
Case Studies
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