Peer Advising:
Supporting the Murky Middle using Proactive Interventions

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Proactive Advising

Peer Advising

The Murky Middle
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The Murky Middle refers to a particular population of students who are at risk for not completing their degree despite having achieved a GPA between 2.0 and 3.0 in their first year of study.

The Key Drivers

There are many drivers of student behaviour across their whole experience; below are some we saw most often, and which appear to impact behaviour and decision-making the most.

Flexible & opportunistic
- Look for opportunities
- Risk takers, improvisers
- Present-focused
- ‘Big picture’ thinkers

Confident & worldly
- Take things in their stride
- Typically more mature
- Stronger spoken English
- More extraverted

Want to be here
- Proactive decision to study here
- Excited, enthusiastic
- Keen to explore college experience

Engaged with college journey
- Call on support structures available
- Wide friendship group
- Feel indebted to college
- Likely to volunteer at college

Fixed & focused
- Want certainty to reach goals
- Analytical, planners
- Future-focused
- Detail-oriented

Unconfident & naïve
- Sweat the small stuff
- Typically less mature
- Weaker spoken English
- More introverted

Have to be here
- Passive or forced decision
- Paying my dues mentality
- College as a means to an end

Disengaged/indifferent to college journey
- Rarely reach out for support
- Closed friend group
- Transactional relationship w/ college
- Never thought to volunteer

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The Personas

INVOLVED MAXIMISERS

Engaged with college journey

DRIVEN CLIMBERS

Fixed & focussed

This isn’t the ideal situation, but now that I’m here, I’ll get involved and make sure I get into university.

Flexible & opportunistic

This is my springboard to the education I want/need. I’m giving this my all.

This isn’t the ideal situation, but now that I’m here, I’ll get involved and make sure I get into university.

I’m focused on my studies and don’t want anything to compromise getting into university.

I’ve ended up at college, but I’m not really sure if I’m getting what I need out of the experience.

Disengaged/indifferent to college journey

I’m not sure this is for me. Perhaps this time will help me make up my mind/gather strength to challenge my family.

HALF-HEARTED PATH FOLLOWERS

COMPLACENT COASTERS

quiet achievers
Proactive Advising Model

• Proactive advising combines advising and counseling into one discipline.

• The idea behind this model is to provide students with information before they requested it.

• Proactive advising is about getting to the root of the concern and developing interventions to mediate the challenges.

• Research has shown Proactive advising to be an effective model with International students (Girish, 2016)

• The model is an action-oriented approach to motivating students to seek support (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013)


Proactive Advising: Practical Outreach

- **Approaching student before situations develop:**
  - Attendance outreach
  - Instructor concerns
  - Guardianship
  - Medical insurance

- **Advisors will follow up with a variety of personal concerns including:**
  - Transition issues
  - Housing issues
  - Financial challenges
  - Mental health
  - Interpersonal conflict

- **Advisors will follow up with a variety of academic concerns including:**
  - Classroom adaptation
  - Academic expectations
  - Program exploration
  - Course planning
Proactive Advising: Relationship Building

- **Using strategies to show interest and involvement:**
  - Engagement activities
  - Workshops
  - Spending time in student areas
  - Supporting students on Academic Probation
  - Face to face interactions/personal invitations

- **Purposeful interactions to increase student motivation and the probability for student success:**
  1. Does the student have a safe place to live?
  2. Does the student have access to food?
  3. Does the student have a social support network?
**Holistic Advising**
- Personal and social challenges
- Success strategies (goal setting, time management)
- Campus referrals
- Course and major exploration

**Follow-Up Communication**
- Consistent communication
- Important reminders
- Promote events and activities on campus
- Outreach to connect

**Targeted Interventions**
- Early intervention
- Attendance follow-up
- Policy navigation
- Leadership development
Peer Advising at FIC

**Commitment**
- 1 year or 3 semesters
- 2 hours/week advising
- Enrolment, Orientation, Weeks of Welcome

**Training**
- Student Leadership Training & program specific training
- 2 hours/month development training
- Continual feedback from tracking

**Skills**
- Mental health support & response/referral skills
- Asking powerful questions
- Program and course planning knowledge

**Trust**
- Escalating urgent cases
- Maintaining confidentiality and professionalism
- Creating safe and inclusive spaces for students
Peer Advising Benefits

**Student**
- Additional entry point for students to access support
- Alternative resource for students who are apprehensive
- Relatable student perspective

**Peer Advisor**
- Building critical thinking, problem solving, and interpersonal skills
- Community building
- Supporting the institution in a meaningful way

**Institutional**
- Alumni engagement
- Identifying at-risk students
- Maintaining strong retention
Connecting with students, will make them more comfortable to come with questions in the future. We want to create a relationship, rather than answering questions in a transactional manner.

Approach the student - don’t wait for them to approach you. Chat with them in the hallway, atrium, student lounges, and speak to them first. Be welcoming and friendly!

Try to engage the student in the community! Learn about their interests and connect them to leadership programs, upcoming events, personal or academic support resources. Encourage them to get involved!

Find something that can help ‘connect’ or ‘bond’ you and the student. This can be anything from studying the same program, experience living in residence, what foods you like to eat, hobbies, sports, or travel.
The Peer Advisor

“Joining the Guidance Advising Program has been an enriching and valuable experience. From continuously advancing my skill set, to supporting a college community, to getting myself ready for a career in an office setting, this program has been a decisive milestone. I got to be mentored and coached by a team consisting of extremely supportive advisors. The role definitely instilled in me a passion for working with international students and for assisting them on their path towards academic success.”

- Vidyesh Gopy (Guidance Advisor Alumni)
Go to www.menti.com and use the code 29 31 48

What are some of the greatest SUCCESSES you've accomplished in your peer advising program?
Peer Advising by the Numbers
January 2016 - August 2019

- 2034 total Advising Appointments
  - 1640 unique interactions
  - 394 recurrent visits
- 52% of all students advised ended with a GPA between 2.0 - 3.0.
- 29 Peer Advisors from Jan 2018-Present
  - 23 have completed the program
  - 6 are currently active
- 31% of Peer Advisors extended
  - 86% became part-time paid Alumni Advisors
- 38% of Alumni Advisors have been employed part-time for over 1 year
- 85% retention to graduation rate
Summary

• Peer advisors have developed transferable skills and can play a valuable role in succession planning

• They believe, articulate, and champion our goals and mission through their understanding of our theoretical advising model

• Students have found a deep sense of connectedness through supporting the institution in a meaningful way

• The amount of time and energy invested into the personal and professional development of peer advisors will be reflected in their growth and commitment

• Peer advisors are in a unique situation to make a significant difference by supporting both students and staff through open communication, trust, and coaching and mentorship.
References


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