



Honoring Goals and Dreams: A Holistic Approach to Academic Success, Coaching, and Advising

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Abstract

In the current context of higher education, a holistic approach to support and development can also go beyond the conventional academic framework. This paper highlights the need for a strong partnership between success coaching and advising by calling for a more holistic approach that encompasses students' academic, psychological, social, and physical aspects. It is possible to do this while looking beyond the classroom, as it will help institutions create a culture that changes students' mindsets, beliefs, and personal concepts of success. Applying a holistic approach enables institutions to acknowledge each student's unique goals and dreams and the role of institutional collaboration in their achievement. Through observed case studies, this integrated approach reviews how it can change the students' perception, which should encourage the stakeholders to shift to a structured, student-focused approach for the benefit of each student—serving as a call to action for stakeholders to adopt an intentional, student-centered model that allows every student to reach their fullest potential and flourish.

Keywords: academic coaching, student retention, higher education, academic flourishing, partnership, case management, student support, transformational advising

Introduction

Research on academic coaching's impact highlights the growing need for best practices that boost engagement and retention for both traditional and nontraditional students, whether online or on campus—encouraging Christ-centered higher education institutions to adopt proactive, coaching-based advising. Conventional measures of success often focus solely on academic achievement (Steinmayr et al., 2014), overlooking

essential aspects of student well-being. As students' needs evolve (Tinto, 2012; Zhao, 2024), so should institutional strategies to support them, with faculty and staff taking on shared accountability for students' goals.

Today's students face diverse challenges, being first-generation students, managing perfectionism, family expectations, time, anxiety, stress (Zhao, 2024), mental health (Patel & Lewis, 2023), and individual learning styles (Pashler et al., 2009); and navigating an unpredictable job market (Boulton et al., 2019). Poor academic performance is a symptom of something deeper that requires a complex solution focusing on the student's academic and non-academic needs, going beyond the academic environment (Alzen et al., 2021). In this regard, a close association between advising and coaching helps the student to be more involved, remain in the institution, and be more determined (Singhani et al., nd).

Institutions embracing a comprehensive approach where students feel heard and valued create a supportive climate for thriving (Carlson, 2020). This article advocates a student-centered strategy emphasizing attentive listening, customized goal setting, and institutional commitment. Academic advising guides students through academic pathways (Assiri et al., 2020; Burton & Wellington, 1998), while coaching addresses individual challenges and goals (Howlett et al., 2021), forming a proactive, high-touch support network.

The following sections contain specific recommendations for the integrated approach supported by the Bible and studies with different outcomes to show how it can be improved. Given the retention, graduation rates, and student satisfaction, this study highlights the need for a drastic change in how students are handled in the current system to develop a more holistic and student-focused approach to thrive.

Foundations of Student Engagement and Well-Being

Understanding students' academic and personal needs is the first step to creating a holistic support model, which begins with understanding what students need to do academically and personally. Student engagement is increasingly recognized as a vital indicator of institutional success and quality, affecting learning, development, and retention (Laranjeira & Teixeira, 2024). Engagement is the student's involvement in academic activities and how organizations can engage resources to facilitate the students' experiences (Wenger et al., 2024). Family influence, campus culture, and faculty support are some factors that affect students' engagement levels, hence underlining the need for a strong supportive system.

According to the studies, higher engagement is linked with better well-being, thus creating (Boulton et al., 2019). cycle, where students are fluid and do dynamic well, which in turn influences their academics by having students' better communication well-being (Boulton with their academic and social context). Addressing underperformance begins with enhancing conditions that foster student engagement.

Evolving Academic Coaching and Advising

Institutions must integrate academic and personal support into a well-oiled machine, efficient, timely, and tailored process to make a sustainable and transformative change. A mission-centered, student-centered approach supports students' success and perpetuates the gains made. Clough (2016) suggests that academic coaching is a proactive, student-centered approach to fostering meaningful, lasting change. However, students often need help to ask for help, especially those who feel overwhelmed or uncertain about their capabilities. Alzen et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of a strong student–advisor relationship to support academic and personal goals.

The O'Banion (1972) advising model challenges traditional, transactional advising by emphasizing life goals, vocational goals, program choices, and other personal elements. This model has evolved to accommodate today's diverse student body, which includes more adult learners, first-generation students, and individuals facing financial or family responsibilities (Burton & Wellington, 1998). Modern advising has evolved from the provision of generalized advice to provide students with tailored information and support to make the advisor the heart of student retention and success. Thus, the concept of advising as a process that encompasses both the functional, which involves transactional activities, and the developmental, which involves transformational activities, can help students find their way in their academic and career journeys.

Transformational advising goes beyond administrative tasks, fostering student innovation and leadership (Nandedkar et al., 2020).

Enrollment in higher education is expected to rise, but graduation rates only sometimes keep pace, often due to under-preparedness (Tinto, 2012). Advisors can use a case management model to ask probing questions that reveal students' concerns while building trust and enabling growth (Larson et al., 2018).

Studies have proven coaching to impact retention significantly. Coached students are more likely to demonstrate resilience, persist, and succeed long-term (Bettinger & Baker, 2011, 2014). This highlights the need for an interventive approach to supporting students from their first year to graduation. Practitioners Bettinger and Baker (2011) conducted a study using data from InsideTrack, a coaching firm that provides student

coaching at various public, private, and proprietary colleges. The company's model focuses on partnering with universities to deliver its mentoring program. In institutions, InsideTrack included all the students who met the criteria and then assigned these students to two equal parts of the population. Then, the respective institution decided which of the two groups would be supported. These pseudo-groups enable them to compare the students who got the coaching with those who did not get any coaching and thus enable the formation of a robust estimate of the effects of the services. The outcomes determined that the coached group's retention and completion rates were more significant. These results remained consistent for every length of time following enrollment. After 6 months, students in the coached group were 5.2% more likely to persist than those in the noncoached group. Moreover, these students experienced a meaningful, lasting impact of coaching and endured for at least one more year after coaching had concluded.

Biblical Perspective for Holistic Student Care and Coaching

Although the Bible does not state any explicit guidelines for educators, it offers some general guidelines that are compatible with the role of students. In the same way that the Bible teaches us to serve others with love, support the growth of others, and teach others the word of God (Prov. 4:7; Gal. 5:13), Clough (2016) states that coaching is a process which is initiated by the student, facilitated by the coach and supplemented by the Holy Spirit which ensures that there is trust between the two. This foundation aligns with an integrated approach through which faculty and staff can accompany the students in their spiritual, academic, and social lives.

Tailoring Support for Individual Student Needs

In higher education, support must be adaptable to students' varied backgrounds, goals, and challenges. Data-driven insights allow institutions to identify and assist struggling students early. Holistic coaching addresses academic, personal, and career aspirations, while flexible, culturally responsive services accommodate diverse student needs, including first-generation and minority students. Wellness initiatives and career guidance integrated with advising help students maintain resilience and achieve their aspirations.

Evaluating the Impact of Academic Success Coaching: Case Studies in Student Resilience and Accountability

In 2022, the Student Achievement Partner program was launched as a pilot to support at-risk students. Approximately 18 students participated, including athletes and those readmitted after academic dismissal. The following case studies reviewed the efficacy of

mandatory coaching, the role of family support, and mindset coaching in developing concepts of resilience, accountability, and sustainability.

Table 1: Case Study for Student A

Variable	Data
Background	20-year-old female, a sophomore pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English
Challenges	Significant academic challenges early in her college career, leading to academic suspension
	Their initial GPA was 0.00, reflecting substantial academic struggles
Support and strategies implemented.	Various personal and academic difficulties
	Health and emotional challenges
	History of academic setbacks, including fulfilling an incomplete grade from a previous semester. These challenges compounded her lack of motivation, and she frequently felt unheard and unsupported in her academic environment.
Outcomes and results	Established a structured weekly schedule by previewing upcoming assignments and dedicating specific time blocks to study; she enhanced her focus and reduce academic stress.
	Developed time-chunking techniques to manage tasks effectively, maintaining momentum even when motivation waned
	Parental involvement also played a critical role in her success. Regular, open communication with her mother provided emotional and motivational support, bolstering her commitment to her academic goals.
Outcomes and results	The combined effects of structured scheduling, time chunking, and strengthened family support improved Student A’s academic performance. Her GPA increased from 0.00 to 2.78, and she returned to good academic standing.
	Implemented strategies empowered her to build resilience and self-advocacy skills, helping her address the personal and academic challenges that had previously impeded her progress.
	Student A’s case demonstrates the impact of personalized academic coaching and structured support strategies on student success, particularly for students facing complex challenges.

Variable	Data
	Student A overcame her initial academic setbacks by consistently planning, fostering communication, and building family support, creating a foundation for future academic and personal growth.

Table 2: Case Study for Student B

Variable	Data
Background	<p>41-year-old male undergraduate senior pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems</p> <p>Navy veteran</p> <p>12 years of experience in IT</p> <p>Works as a civilian systems engineer for the Navy</p> <p>First-generation college student</p> <p>Multiple personal and academic challenges that impacted his progress, leading to academic probation and academic dismissal</p> <p>At the program's start, his GPA was 1.91; despite interventions, it dropped to 1.81 by the end.</p>
Challenges	<p>He encountered significant personal obstacles, including financial strain due to a recent divorce, the responsibility of being the sole caregiver for his mother, and mental health struggles related to major depressive disorder and anxiety.</p> <p>Faced with the recent loss of a family pet</p> <p>Navigating the complexities of a new relationship</p> <p>Self-identified as a “people pleaser”</p> <p>Student B frequently took on more than he could manage, leading to feeling overwhelmed and unable to complete tasks under stress.</p> <p>Struggled with core curriculum elements such as reading comprehension, interpretation, exam preparation, and effective notetaking</p>
Support and Strategies Implemented	<p>The academic support team provided several resources to assist Student B.</p> <p>Some of the measures that were put in place include individualized study plans developed to meet the student's needs and SMART goals,</p>

Variable	Data
Outcomes and Analysis	<p>which were used to define tasks into smaller steps. To avoid problems with time management and to reduce the interference of environmental factors, efforts were made to foster the accountability and task prioritization mindset.</p> <p>Since the student tended to get overwhelmed easily, Student B was also advised on the importance of mental health and the need to take breaks and practice self-care.</p> <p>Despite all the efforts to develop individual study plans and set SMART goals to improve the student's focus, he needed help to sustain applying these strategies, leading to his academic dismissal.</p> <p>He also stated that more than his approach of task scheduling based on due dates and the time it would take to complete the tasks was needed to handle the load of academics and other activities in his life.</p> <p>The combination of his personal and academic problems affected his ability to stay focused and accountable, leading to his academic dismissal.</p> <p>This case shows that even though mindset coaching plays a role in enhancing accountability, student engagement is a key factor in academic success. Resources and support can assist students, but the students themselves have to be ready to embrace the opportunities that are offered and be accountable for their own learning.</p> <p>This is the case of Student B, which depicts the various issues that nontraditional students go through in their personal and academic lives.</p>

For at-risk students, success depends on the presence of resources and the development of a growth mindset and active engagement. Accountability is a crucial aspect as well. Although it is important to note that support systems and coaching provide the framework, the student must accept the help and put into practice the action plans that have been developed for his or her success. These case studies show how a comprehensive, individualized coaching model can help students become agents of change in their lives, academically and personally. By fostering resilience, accountability, and a proactive mindset, we equip students to overcome challenges and thrive.

Conclusion

For higher education to stay at the forefront of improvement and innovation, it must be student-focused. Utilizing data from online educational platforms and gathering student input can increase persistence and retention. Professional development and cross-functional teamwork equip faculty and staff to lead modernization and pilot projects, such as the Student Achievement Partner, that start small and will allow them to experiment before global scaling. Adopting emerging technologies, examining curricula frequently, and comparing notes keep institutions on par with current industry standards and advancing student needs. Setting up structures cycled with foundational coaching principles encourages process-oriented continuous review and an open culture that values innovation and fosters deliberate risk and flexibility. All these strategies create an environment that is dynamic enough to respond to the needs of students as they evolve.

About the Author

Dr. Shoneen N. Brown is experienced in leadership coaching, training, and development. She believes establishing a coaching culture in organizations decreases self-limiting thoughts and beliefs while increasing self-awareness, conflict management and resolution, work performance, relationships, and effective communication. In 2015, Dr. Brown joined Enrollment Management at Regent University, where she served in various leadership roles throughout her career. She now serves as the Sr. Associate Director of Student Support, overseeing programs, initiatives, and coaching services designed to assist students academically, emotionally, and socially, fostering student success and well-being.

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