NACADA REVIEW | Academic Advising Praxis & Perspectives

NACADA THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

Advising Alternatives: A Case Study

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Given a rapidly changing labor market, advisors use parallel planning and alternative advising to teach students adaptability. Whereas parallel planning proactively prepares students for future transitions through considering multiple pathways, alternative advising occurs after students fail to make degree progress or secure admission and, consequently, must change their goals. This article integrates research that can help frame an advising curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes as well as a case study that demonstrates such learning outcomes as coping with loss, managing anxiety, and restoring self-efficacy. Through the process described, students discover hope, resiliency, and a renewed focus on their goals.

[doi:10.12930/NACR-18-1011]

KEY WORDS: alternative advising, major change, goal disengagement, parallel plan, adaptive self-regulation

Unanticipated changes are a part of life. People's health, relationships, or finances shift unexpectedly. So do their careers. Given a rapidly changing labor market in which outsourcing, downsizing, automation, and temporary contracts have become common, individuals must cope with diminished job security and let go of the outdated expectation of a single occupation for life (Krumboltz, Foley, & Cotter, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009). In this changing landscape, advisors teach students how to manage unexpected transitions effectively and navigate a fluctuating workplace.

Adaptability is needed also as students persist toward a college degree and ultimately graduate. Many students arrive at college with a desired outcome in mind, yet as they progress in their studies, they may encounter insurmountable barriers, such as criminal charges or competitive educational programs. In these instances, students may no longer be permitted to pursue or advance in their chosen academic programs. In other cases, individuals are unexpectedly forced to engage in career exploration at the time of graduation when they fail to pass licensure exams or are denied admission into graduate school. As Leider and Webber (2013) pointed out, individuals who endure career changes can be "pushed by pain or pulled by possibility" (p. 8). The unique major-changers considered here, however, are not freely propelled by the positive promise of potentiality but instead plunged involuntarily into the pit of change.

These circumstances are some of the most difficult for students to navigate. Students may experience dynamic emotions that diminish their cognitive decision-making capacity (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991). Their ability to cope also may be limited by a lack of prior experience with loss, failure, or decision making (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Dann-Messier, Wu, & Greenburg, 2014).

Although this unique subset of major-changers is difficult to advise, it is highly likely that advisors will encounter this group. When one institution tracked the degree progress of its students, for example, advisors discovered that nearly one in four were not advancing and may need to change majors (Lawrence, Severy, & Slinger, 1996). This proportion may be especially high in selective programs such as nursing, education, engineering, and premedicine. Such students are more likely to cope effectively and graduate if they meet with an advisor and change paths (Bahr, 2008).

Although Gordon and Steele (2015) used the term *uptighters* (p. 114) to describe this subset of students, the label is unsuitable if viewed through other advising perspectives. Because careers are nonlinear and unfold chaotically (Beck, 1999), everyone encounters unanticipated obstacles and opportunities (Savickas et al., 2009). During these transitions, individuals ideally develop an ability to regulate their goals, cope with loss, and pivot to alternative possibilities (Anderson et al., 2012). They also must manage dynamic emotions while they restore their self-efficacy and agency. Others may not recognize such students' loss, and they

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often feel alienated from their institutions. As these students actively revise the dynamic narrative of their lives and publicly navigate unscripted transitions, however, they may discover that difficult endings can be beautiful beginnings (Savickas et al., 2009). Positive terminology celebrates this resiliency and normalizes change. For this reason, this article uses the word *adapters* in reference to this cohort.

Given the possibility that such transitions will happen during college and in the future, students' ability to regulate their goals is an essential component of the advising curriculum. Alternative advising and parallel planning are common pedagogies deployed by institutions to explore alternatives and teach goal regulation. Gordon and Polson (1985) coined the term *alternative advising* to describe the support available to students who may be or have been denied admission into their chosen academic program. Alternative advising is uniquely deployed after obstacles materialize and the need for alternatives is certain. Parallel planning, in contrast, is a primer for alternative advising (Jennifer Bloom, presentation at 2008 NACADA Region VII annual meeting, cited in Johnson, 2015). It occurs earlier to prepare students who may encounter unexpected transitions with the cognitive flexibility needed to identify environmental feedback and move toward alternatives on their own if needed (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2013; Robertson, Lewine, & Sommers, 2014). Advisors initiate alternative advising as a last resort, after they have worked diligently to address any barriers that exist (Gordon & Steele, 2015; Schulenberg, 2013). Other differences between alternative advising and parallel planning are shown in Table 1.

Since Gordon and Polson (1985) introduced the idea of alternative advising, researchers have described extensive techniques for it, particularly during and after official notification that the student is not progressing in the chosen major (Hammond, 2017; McKenzie, Tan, Fletcher, & Jackson-Williams, 2017). Some have shown evidence of its effectiveness (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2017; Pizzolato, 2007).

Despite this research, however, no case studies of alternative advising exist within the literature. In addition, previous publications have not integrated research from other disciplines, such as outplacement counseling and goal psychology. Finally, an updated analysis also serves to frame this unique form of advising as teaching.

The purpose of this article is to integrate the previously published theoretical research regarding alternative advising, particularly in light of adapters' unique need to modify their goals, cope with loss, and reintegrate into institutions. The article begins with the theory and pedagogy of alternative advising for adapters and then applies these themes to a case scenario. Advisors can use the synthesis of recommendations that follows the case study to inform their practice as well as future research. Notwithstanding the way the case scenario presents it, the dynamic learning process is not linear or singular. Advisors may introduce or initiate various techniques toward any of the learning outcomes at any point in the process.

The Pedagogy and Learning Outcomes of Alternative Advising

Throughout the literature, researchers from diverse theoretical perspectives have described an advising pedagogy for adapters. For instance, developmental theorists have responded to student-athletes who were coping with career-ending injuries and students who were unable to satisfy admission criteria (Jordan & Blevins, 2009; Menke, 2015). Hermeneutic and Socratic advisors have suggested meaningful questions and paraphrasing (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013; Spence & Scobie, 2013), and others have used self-authorship to help students reconstruct meaning after they failed premedicine courses or were denied admission to education programs (Pizzolato, 2007; Schulenberg, 2013). Other ways to support students unable to secure admission to desired programs have included a solution-focused approach, appreciative advising, and transition theory (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008; Mayhall & Burg, 2002; Steele & McDonald, 2008). Finally, scholars have applied goal theory with students who failed to persist in competitive programs or were denied admission (Ghassemi, Bernecker, Herrmann, & Brandstätter, 2017; Hu, Creed, & Hood, 2017; Wee, 2013).

Although dominant alternative advising theories represent a range of perspectives, they are complementary. Researchers agree that the primary meta-objectives of an alternative advising curriculum are *goal disengagement* and *goal reengagement*, which are distinct constructs. To disengage, students need to decrease their effort and cease their commitment to the goal or

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Table 1. Advising alternatives: Differences between parallel planning and alternative advising

Subtypes of Adaptable Advising	Parallel Planning	Alternative Advising
Timing of strategy	• Proactive intervention and introduction of adaptability for all • Before student pursues or applies to competitive program	• Postvention with adapters • After student is rescinded from program, found ineligible to apply (e.g., not permitted to repeat a course; does not satisfy grade point average requirement), or denied admission
Common emotions	• Ambivalence and anxiety	• Alienation, grief, helplessness, and anxiety
Meta-objectives	• Cognitive flexibility and adaptive goal regulation	• Goal disengagement and reengagement
Advising objectives	• Remove any barriers through accessibility accommodations, attribution retraining, learning strategies, tutoring, and so on • Manage anxiety • Describe the value of the curriculum as it relates to navigating change • Articulate a personal work-value system • Investigate one's options • Define specifically how and when one will implement alternative • Gather and evaluate feedback	• Express emotions and cope with loss • Activate support system • Reframe unhelpful perceptions • Restore self-efficacy • Define one's values • Investigate alternatives or revisit parallel path • Choose between attributes or conduct cost-benefit analysis • Reapply or recareer (ultimately reintegrating into an institution)
Where introduced	• Often occurs universally in group setting to avoid stereotype threat and implicit advisor bias as well as to prepare all graduates for future transitions; reinforced during individual sessions	• Often occurs individually, given student's unique situation; occasionally occurs in group setting
Role of work-based values	• A "sail" that casts a mind-set of openness and takes one to new adventures	• An "anchor" of hope during the storm of involuntary disengagement
Who introduces alternatives	• Advisor or student	• Student (to restore control)
Number of sessions	• May be finished during single session	• Often completed during multiple sessions or through campus referral

educational program (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). During goal reengagement, however, students commit to and act on new academic or vocational aspirations (Creed & Hood, 2014). To disengage, students need to stop valuing or expecting a positive outcome. Some may experience negative thoughts and feelings, which may result in impulsive decisions or avoidance. For example, individuals may fixate on past failures or potential negative consequences. If students' sense of threat or tendency to ruminate is diminished, however, they have greater cognitive capacity to process environmental feedback, initiate exploration, and invest time or resources in new goals (Jostmann & Koole, 2009).

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Both disengagement and reengagement are necessary to adapters' functioning. Although disengagement with the original goal is associated with greater well-being and higher work satisfaction, it needs to be coupled with reengagement (Wrosch et al., 2003). Researchers have discovered that individuals who do not reengage experience greater risk for suicide, long-term regrets, and diminished subjective well-being (Corder, 1982; Kunnen, Sappa, van Geert, & Bonica, 2008; O'Connor, O'Carroll, Ryan, & Smyth, 2012).

Life design theorists (Savickas et al., 2009) have suggested that, in addition to disengagement and reengagement, the following dimensions of adaptability result from advising: concern (planning optimistically for the future), control (decision making and agency), curiosity (exploring possible selves realistically), and confidence (problem solving). This educational process includes the advising learning outcomes and pedagogy depicted in Table 2.

Several of the core advising competencies promoted by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (2017) are necessary to achieve these outcomes. Relationally, advisors need active listening skills, empathy, and honesty to establish a strong working alliance with students (Barkemeyer, 2012; Hammond, 2017; Jordan, 2015; Reynolds, 2004). They also routinely need to use advanced communication skills (e.g., summarizing, paraphrasing, probing) to teach students to understand themselves and their options better. To manage unhelpful thoughts and anxiety, they break the problem into manageable tasks. They also need patience because "students achieve this cognizance at different rates, depending on their maturity, level of awareness, and capacity to accept responsibility" (Jordan, 2015, p. 219).

In addition to these relational skills, advisors need strong conceptual and informational competencies (NACADA, 2017). They possess a broad understanding of the world of work, degree requirements, values clarification, campus referral procedures, and admission appeal procedures at their institutions. Given the need to facilitate complex decision making, formal training in career development and career advising is also beneficial (Burton Nelson, 2015; Gordon, 2006; Mahoney, 2009). Advisors differentiate between positive and self-defeating persistence (Robertson et al., 2014). They also possess a strong cultural competency that tailors their approaches to the unique contextual factors or identities of students (NACADA, 2017).

Although advisors often administer the advising curriculum individually, alternative advising also can occur in a classroom, workshop, or residential setting (Farber & Kuchynka, 1990; Patrick, Furlow, & Donovan, 1988). In these settings, the curriculum cultivates adaptive self-regulation and the ability to cope effectively with life transitions (Wrosch et al., 2003) through the following learning outcomes:

- Cope with loss and transitions
- Manage one's anxiety
- Restore one's self-efficacy and agency
- Define and prioritize one's career anchors
- Investigate and evaluate alternatives
- Reframe transitions and choose an alternative
- Implement newly constructed goals

Learning Outcome: Cope With Loss and Transitions

Alternative advising begins at the moment a student is notified of an obstacle to academic progress. Scholars have recommended that if advisors are involved in notification within the structure of advising at their institutions, they notify students in person and privately, referring to them by name during the conversation. To reduce students' shock, advisors may begin by saying they have difficult news to share. The next step after notification is to assess students' current understanding, such as whether they can name the admission requirements or are aware of the purpose of the conversation (Hammond, 2017; Rodriguez & Kolls, 2010). To ensure accurate understanding, advisors avoid jargon and use relational competencies (e.g., reflection, reframing, probing, paraphrasing). They also clearly articulate the reasons for the adverse decision as well as any information related to reapplication or appeal (Neault & Piland, 2014).

Immediate outreach after notification is necessary to avoid rumination, which can hinder students' adaptive self-regulation and well-being (Carroll, Arkin, & Shade, 2011; Herrmann & Brandstätter, 2015). Students grieve the loss of the future career they anticipated in unique and dynamic ways, which may vary depending on their prior experience with loss and the amount of time they held the aspiration (Anderson et al., 2012; Barber, 2014; Taber & Blankemeyer,

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2015). Possible emotions include sadness, relief, and anger at themselves or the institution as well as emptiness, ambivalence, and unproductivity (Anderson et al., 2012; Jordan, 2015). Advisors continue to demonstrate relational competency (NACADA, 2017) by normalizing students' experience and permitting emotional expression, especially because their grief may be disenfranchised and unacknowledged by others (Doka, 1989). Advisors may use metaphors to spark emotional connections and cognitive reframing (Anderson et al., 2012). To advance students' coping, advisors help students enlist support and rehearse the ways they will share the news with friends or family (Reynolds, 2004; Salinas & Ross, 2015).

Learning Outcome: Manage Anxiety

Individuals who involuntarily change career paths report more anxiety than other exploring students (Chartrand et al., 1994). Although such students may struggle to communicate their implicit thoughts, emotions, or goals, if unregulated, these responses can intrusively influence their decision making and diminish goal disengagement (Baumann, Kaschel, & Kuhl, 2005; Van Randenborgh, Hüffmeier, LeMoult, & Joormann, 2010).

To reduce such risks, advisors address and activate a conceptual competency called *implicit processing,* imperative because if students' original goals remain in a subconscious state, they could be reactivated automatically. Advisors disable implicit sustained goals by teaching students to manage intrusive thoughts through practicing mindfulness, naming their emotions, and thinking aloud (Jostman & Koole, 2009; Salinas & Ross, 2015). A thought log also may identify latent regrets, intrusive thoughts, or self-blame. Worden (2008) suggested, if regrets exist, that individuals describe their activities to acknowledge that they did all they could. If students continue to express shame, depression, or anxiety, advisors may refer them to mental health counselors (Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006; Steele & McDonald, 2008).

Advisors also identify triggers in the environment—associations and cues—that implicitly activate or rebound individuals' previous goals, making goal disengagement more difficult (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009). For example, a student who aspired to major in music but has withdrawn from music theory multiple times may be unconsciously reminded of the former goal during weekly band practice or private instrument lessons. Advisors teach students to modify these environments or manage the emotions associated with them.

Learning Outcome: Affirm Self-Efficacy and Agency

Students who disengage involuntarily experience—in addition to anxiety—doubt, discouragement, or feelings of incompetence or inferiority (Cunningham & Smothers, 2010; Neault & Piland, 2014). These emotions only exacerbate their anxiety or diminish future interests (Lent & Brown, 2013). In response, advisors ask students to describe previous accomplishments or instances when they did not achieve their goals and consider the growth they experienced as a result of these transitions (Bloom et al., 2008; Salinas & Ross, 2015). This exercise may renew a sense of competence and resiliency, which also activates episodic memories that are associated with positive emotions and the benefits of change (Levine et al., 2004; Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996).

Students who experience an unanticipated obstacle also may lose a sense of self-authorship (Pizzolato, 2007; Schulenberg, 2013). To renew students' sense of control or to prevent them from feeling pressure to choose a different major too quickly, advisors may ask for permission to talk about reapplying or disengaging or wait for students to initiate these topics (Freedman, 2017; Spence & Scobie, 2013).

Learning Outcome: Define and Prioritize One's Career Anchors

Theorists universally agree that it is beneficial to identify the aspects of their chosen major or career that students find most appealing (Jordan & Blevins, 2009; Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009; Schlossberg, 2008). Naming these attributes, known in the job loss literature as *career anchors* (Harrick, Hansel, & Schutzius, 1982, p. 80), demonstrates to students that multiple means exist to achieve the goals or attributes they set out to obtain (Martin & Tesser, 2009). An alternative occupation is no longer a substitute or consolation prize but begins to be viewed as an equal option that can result in a meaningful career or major. Advisors convey this equifinality by using neutral language to describe the new option instead of secondary terminology that minimizes it, such as "plan B," "contingency plan," or "safety net."

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Table 2. Learning outcomes, pedagogy, and competencies of alternative advising

Student Learning Outcome	Advising Pedagogy	Advising Competencies
Cope with loss and transitions	• Acknowledge the loss • Permit emotional expression by normalizing typical reactions and using metaphors • Identify support systems • Rehearse ways to share the news with others	• Create an empathetic and inclusive environment • Communicate institutional data and behaviors that point to necessary change • Paraphrase students' perspectives and check for understanding
Manage anxiety	• Listen for and reframe negative thoughts • Practice relaxation or mindfulness techniques to enhance cognitive capacity • Identify environmental cues that remind students of their former goals • Refer students in significant distress to a mental health counselor	• Maintain a caring relationship • Diminish the sense of threat and communicate the benefits of change • Identify and confront reluctance, discrepancies, or unhelpful thoughts • Pace the session and break problems into manageable parts • Assess students' risk for maladjustment and need for referral
Affirm self-efficacy and agency	• Celebrate strengths; invite students to describe past achievements or successful transitions • Permit students to introduce the topic of alternatives	• Understand and apply appreciative and strength-based advising techniques • Exhibit patience and respect students' self-authorship • Evaluate past transitions in light of current one
Define and prioritize career anchors	• Use neutral language to avoid implicit suggestion that alternatives are unequal • Ask students to describe the attributes they find appealing about their initial chosen major or career • Carefully define these aspects so students can measure their ideal and tolerable presence later in new alternatives • Prioritize these career anchors based on their saliency	• Reflect ways students broadly aspire to construct a meaningful life • Summarize students' values • Communicate the equifinality of equally satisfying possibilities
Investigate and evaluate alternatives based on their congruency	• Brainstorm possible paths that have preferred career anchors • Evaluate and review quality career information together to better understand the options • Share institutional information about reapplying and the relevancy of earned credits to other degree programs • Revisit parallel plans if created earlier • Compare and contrast the presence of preferred aspects between the alternatives being considered	• Carefully construct and frame choices • Cultivate openness by conveying coherence and application of curriculum to innumerable occupations • Share information related to educational programs, institutional policies, and occupations • Encourage use of technology to explore oneself and one's options

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Table 2. Learning outcomes, pedagogy, and competencies of alternative advising (cont.)

Student Learning Outcome	Advising Pedagogy	Advising Competencies
Reframe transitions and choose an alternative	• Explore the positive attributes gained by pursuing a new endeavor; encourage students to conduct a cost-benefit analysis or keep a gratitude journal if needed • Examine lingering emotions by writing a letter to one's future self or saying good-bye to lost attributes	• Exhibit inclusivity by inviting students to evaluate options using their cultural standards • Identify and negotiate conflicts between values • Recognize impulsive or avoidant decision making • Reframe loss as an opportunity
Implement newly constructed goals and selves	• Connect students to role models • Rehearse the way students will present their choice to continue to restore their confidence and make meaning • Arrange for students to test reality and preview their profession through experiential learning • Invite students to regulate their new goal based on their future degree progress	• Summarize and synthesize learning with students • Activate community partnerships or refer to career services • Document and evaluate outcomes of alternative advising curriculum • Follow up

Advisors also teach students to prioritize and define the anchors or aspects they identified so as to understand their ideal and tolerable levels (Gati & Asher, 2001). This activity is enhanced by values clarification questions (e.g., What fundamentally needs to be present for you to experience meaning or satisfaction?) and activities (e.g., future fantasies, card sorts; Carlstrom & Hughey, 2014; Patrick et al., 1988). Later, students use the definitions as benchmarks when they gather information about their options.

Learning Outcome: Investigate and Evaluate Alternatives

Advisors teach students to make informed decisions, counteracting their tendency to isolate their search by researching only a single option (Gottfredson, 2005). Students also tend to gather information primarily from conveniently accessible information sources, such as friends and family, even if they believe they may not be the best resources (Corder, 1982; Vertsberger & Gati, 2015).

As an alternative, advisors model strong informational competency (NACADA, 2017). They educate students on quality career information sources and share information about reapplying, alternative degree programs, or application of existing credits. They enhance students' ability to navigate the academic curriculum at their institutions through meta-majors, grids, or visual aids (Barkemeyer, 2012; Bures & Sudja, 2015; McKenzie et al., 2017). They also may remind students of and revisit parallel plans that may have been developed earlier, especially if they included timelines and implementation intentions (Robertson et al., 2014).

Once students have gathered information about themselves and their options, advisors teach them the skill of *strategic compromise*, which "may be defined as the readiness to consider an occupational alternative despite its inferiority in certain aspects relative to another alternative" (Gati, 1993, p. 417). Compromise also may respond to a gap between reality and one's aspirations (Wee, 2013).

Researchers have discovered that individuals are more receptive to compromise if they are presented with a comparison of the options' characteristics rather than a direct comparison of the options themselves (Gati, Houminer, & Aviram, 1998). For example, rather than framing the choice occupationally (e.g., "It sounds like you are choosing between being a school counselor and an elementary teacher"), advisors may point out the attributes students are choosing between (e.g., "It sounds like two ingredients are important to you: immediately entering the

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workforce after graduation and helping the vulnerable").

Students' willingness to compromise varies based on their preferences within attributes and between alternatives (Gati, 1993). For this reason, they need to compare and contrast the presence of their preferred attributes or anchors for each alternative, benchmarking them against their ideal level (e.g., no travel) and a tolerable level (e.g., traveling 20% of the time).

Learning Outcome: Reframe Transitions and Choose an Alternative

Individuals have a tendency to overestimate the potential impacts of negative events and catastrophize the impact of changing their goals, which in reality may not be as difficult as they imagine (Gilbert, 2005). These inclinations may result in avoidance instead of active problem solving (Van Vianen, Klehe, Koen, & Dries, 2012).

Given their understanding of the ways in which students process adverse events, advisors reframe students' perceptions by reminding them to focus on the positive attributes they are moving toward instead of fixating on those they are leaving behind (Gati, 1993; Wee, 2013; Wrosch et al., 2003). Because individuals are more likely to be satisfied with a change if the new goal is desirable and attainable, or if the benefits outweigh the costs, a cost-benefit analysis or balance sheet can help to overcome the bias that tends to minimize the benefits of change; likewise, a gratitude journal can help students celebrate the blessings that remain (Creed & Hood, 2014; Lent, 2005; Schlossberg, 2008). Grief counselors use a similar technique that asks individuals to name what is lost, left, and possible, acknowledging both loss and hope as they cope with nonevents (Schneider, 2011). Activities such as these also create continuity between a student's previous and future self (Blustein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013).

Learning Outcome: Implement Newly Constructed Goals

Advisors educate students on ways to identify gaps in their progress or performance, called *goal discrepancies* (Creed & Hood, 2015, p. 308). By routinely inviting students to make sense of feedback (Ghassemi et al., 2017) or compare their desired and present behavior, advisors help students gauge their academic progress and the suitability of their newly chosen endeavors. For example, the question "What do you think of the progress you are making toward your degree?" invites students to reflect on and regulate their goals.

Finally, students need to gain early experiential learning (e.g., service, shadowing, internships) to shift their mental energy to new endeavors, reflect on the suitability of their goals, and connect with role models who provide feedback or ideas for overcoming barriers (Rothman & Sisman, 2016). Such experiences create positive outcome expectations and opportunities to learn more about oneself or one's options (Krumboltz et al., 2013). As students pursue these opportunities, advisors help them understand their transferable skills and teach them ways to frame their transition by writing a resume or rehearsing interview responses (Anderson et al., 2012; Barber, 2014; Menke, 2015).

Case Scenario

Advisors can use this integration of theory and research to conceptualize their conversations with adapters. I describe one such application in the following case scenario. This case scenario is only an example and is not universally descriptive. The strategies take different forms, depending on students' backgrounds. For example, some students come from cultures that value the input of family members. Others may want to explore the ways in which their faith informs their decisions (Astin & Astin, 2003). Underserved students may recognize barriers earlier and therefore lower their aspirations unnecessarily. Adapters also benefit from access to mentors (Boateng & Thomas, 2009). Individuals without the financial resources to extend their graduation date may need advisors to connect them to additional scholarships.

Some students may be less responsive to alternatives due to individual variables. For example, students are more adaptable if they possess an internal locus of control, independence, and optimism (Foster, 2017; Gadassi, Gati, & Wagman-Rolnick, 2013). Students in career foreclosure (Marcia, 1966) exhibit greater uncertainty about their abilities, less concern about the future, and more wishful thinking or avoidant behaviors, all of which may increase their risk for negative reactions (Boyd, Hunt, Kandell, & Lucas, 2003; Kunnen, 2010; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015).

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First Session

Krystal, a primary exploring advisor, first met Erica immediately after a nursing professor notified Erica that she was unable to participate in the degree program. Erica was a transfer student who had recently finished her third semester in college, her first semester at Krystal's institution. After failing human anatomy at her previous institution, she received her grades for the Fall semester the day before the advising conversation. Although she earned a D, the repeated grade was still not high enough. The nursing program permitted students to repeat a course only once, and a C minus or better in human anatomy was required to apply. Consequently, Erica was unable to enroll in the program. A faculty member notified her of this policy and referred her to Krystal.

Krystal began by asking if Erica was aware of the reason her professor referred her for advising. Erica acknowledged that she understood she was no longer permitted to apply for the nursing program and, consequently, needed to modify her class schedule for the Spring term.

To acknowledge the nonevent and her loss, Krystal replied, "I am very sorry to hear you are unable to pursue nursing at this institution." Erica began to cry. Krystal sat quietly with her for a moment. After Erica reached for a tissue, Krystal acknowledged that news of this nature is difficult for everyone.

After wiping her tears, Erica asked, "What am I going to do if I can't be a nurse? I don't want to hate my job for the rest of my life. If I change classes, will I even graduate on time?" Krystal affirmed that it sounded like Erica was feeling overwhelmed and worried about her future.

Having sensed her anxiety, Krystal asked Erica to take a few deep breaths and wondered aloud if it might be beneficial to address one concern at a time. Krystal asked if they could use the next 45 min to better understand Erica's options and then meet again the following week to formulate next steps. Erica liked the idea.

Krystal asked Erica to think of another time when she had experienced loss or did not achieve her goals. Erica described being cut from the volleyball team as a freshman in high school. Although she was initially devastated and lost touch with her former teammates, she went on to participate in theater and volunteer at a local nursing home.

To teach her ways to manage her anxiety, Krystal asked her to describe the growth she had experienced during the volleyball transition. For the first time, Krystal saw Erica smile. After listening to her describe new friendships, Krystal affirmed that she had coped effectively and then asked if there were ways she might respond similarly to her present situation.

Erica acknowledged she had been wondering for a while if she should change majors, given her midterm grades. Wanting Erica to start from a position of confidence, Krystal asked her about her accomplishments in her other courses. Erica described an aging studies course she had recently excelled in and enjoyed. Halfway through the course, she had spoken with the professor and declared aging studies as a minor.

Krystal reflected the enthusiasm she sensed when Erica described the course. She then asked Erica how long she had aspired to be a nurse and her reasons for selecting that career initially. Erica talked about the joy she had experienced as a volunteer at the nursing home and, more recently, the relationships she had developed in her part-time job as a certified nursing assistant.

Krystal connected these positions to her positive experience in the aging studies course and affirmed her desire to work with this population. Erica went on to share that another reason nursing was appealing to her was the security it offered, given its salary and occupational outlook.

Krystal celebrated that Erica was focusing on the appealing attributes that nursing provided; she wondered aloud if they could replicate these attributes in other occupations or majors. Erica responded positively. Krystal emphasized that the attributes Erica valued most might serve as anchors to help her hold firm while she felt adrift at sea. This metaphor introduced the possibility of alternative careers.

To clarify her values, Krystal asked Erica to imagine herself at her retirement party: How might she measure the success of her life? Erica responded that when she looked back, she wanted to know she had helped people and spent quality time with her family. Next, they defined Erica's tolerable levels of these aspects. For example, although her ideal was never to work after 5 p.m. so she could be with her family, she could tolerate doing so one day a week. When they prioritized her preferred attributes, Erica put this one highest on the list.

Knowing that the session would be ending soon, Krystal wondered if Erica might be willing to research occupations that involve working with

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older individuals. They reviewed a list together, and Erica selected nursing home administration and social work because these aligned with her chosen aspects better than the others.

Krystal encouraged Erica to gather information on a large Venn diagram she provided, emphasizing, "While you are broadly choosing between social work and health care administration, you will obtain some of the same attributes regardless." She pointed to the center of the diagram, where the circles overlapped. "For example, you mentioned that both work in a health care setting with older adults. Our next step is to list the differences between these occupations so you better understand your choices."

Erica agreed to gather this information. Together they accessed and reviewed high-quality sources, such as O*NET OnLine (http://online.onetcenter.org) and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (https://www.bls.gov/ooh/). Krystal reminded Erica that her goal was not to select an occupation (because she still might transfer and be a nurse or she might not). Instead, her task was simply to gather information about her prospects so she could assess the ways in which they might align with who she was and what she hoped for in the future. Krystal then articulated ways in which Erica could align her existing credits with both social work and health care administration. She concluded by asking Erica if she was ready to notify friends and family that she was not able to enroll in the nursing program. Together, they rehearsed these conversations and talked about activating her support system.

Second Session

Erica returned to the advising office the next week with her Venn diagram completed. Krystal began by asking her to name what was most helpful about their previous conversation. Erica shared that she appreciated being reminded that she had successfully survived not making the volleyball team. Krystal affirmed this mind-set of active problem solving to renew their working alliance.

To operationally understand possible compromises and advance her investigation of careers, Krystal shared that because a perfect option did not exist, the objective for this session was to prioritize her preferred attributes. It would be difficult, but not impossible, to choose between noble, competing endeavors (i.e., health care administration, social work, and nursing). Erica had played the game "Would You Rather," which Krystal used as a metaphor to explain the process. Using the Venn diagram she had created, Erica paired differing attributes found in each of the occupations and selected between the two. For instance, she was able to choose immediately direct contact with patients (an attribute of social work) over earning more money (an attribute of health care administration). Through this comparison process, Erica tentatively selected social work as a possible focal point for her studies.

To spark divergent thinking, the advisor wondered aloud if Erica might be able to major in social work and minor in business, in case she wanted to pursue administration later. Mapping out a remaining plan of study, they discovered that Erica had enough capacity to finish both without extending her graduation date. They then selected a course that was required for social work, as well as some general education requirements, for the Spring term. Krystal offered to introduce Erica to faculty and alumni in both social work and health care administration so she could confirm the plan of study they had tentatively drafted and learn more about each profession. Erica was excited to hear that such conversations were possible.

Wanting to teach her ways to reframe her perspective, Krystal next gave Erica a sheet of paper divided into three equal parts labeled *Lost*, *Left*, and *Possible*. She invited Erica to compare and contrast social work and nursing to confirm her decision not to pursue a nursing career at another institution. Erica acknowledged the lost attributes that were unique to nursing. For example, she would no longer be able to provide physical care to patients and was less likely to work compressed work weeks, but she no longer had to worry about hurting someone if she administered the wrong dose of a medication. Attributes found in both professions, however, remained (e.g., the ability to work in diverse settings). Finally, they discussed new possibilities that social work opened up. For example, she would be able to provide psychosocial support to individuals and their families. When they finished, Erica shared that it was affirming to acknowledge that the work characteristics she valued most remained.

Erica also said she was now less excited about nursing, given all that she had learned about herself and her new options. Krystal encouraged her to continue to reflect on these feelings by writing a letter to her future self to say good-bye

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to the profession. This would give her another opportunity to clarify the reasons she wanted to move away from nursing and affirm the benefits of moving toward a new adventure.

Ongoing Support

Krystal stayed in touch with Erica throughout the following semester to teach her ways to confirm her goals. Erica contacted Krystal after she met with professors and alumni in the field to share that the conversations confirmed her desire to pursue social work. Later, Krystal helped Erica secure meaningful summer employment as an activities assistant at a senior living center and a Fall internship at a local hospital. During her senior year, Erica met with Krystal to review her personal statement as she applied for master's degree programs in social work. Erica was able to describe her interest in the field effectively in the essay because of her thoughtful reflection, research, and reality testing.

Limitations and Future Research

Future research is needed to test this theoretical integration empirically, particularly because many of the articles reviewed were descriptive. Experimental evidence is needed to measure the effectiveness of these strategies and the learning outcomes of alternative advising. For example, do students demonstrate diminished anxiety or increased self-efficacy on standardized pre- and post-assessments after engaging in alternative advising? Which of different hypothetical techniques for notification of admission denial would students select as the most encouraging? In addition, replicating the 1985 survey by Gordon and Polson would help quantify the frequency of involuntary academic transitions and the use of alternative advising strategies today.

Researchers need to examine further the influence of diversity, given the complexity of identity reconstruction and the lower persistence rates of underserved students in programs with higher rates of alternative advising (Barr, Gonzalez, & Wanat, 2008). Few authors (Archambault, 2016) described the influence of diversity in alternative advising. How does alternative advising differ based on students' backgrounds? How can advisors structure alternative advising to prevent underserved students from perceiving stereotype threats (Steele, 1997)? How does alternative advising vary if students are coping with external barriers, such as discrimination or a difficult labor market?

Finally, although this article has focused on ways to support students who have already endured involuntary academic transitions, the better question may relate to ways in which institutions can avoid such transitions in the first place. Such a shift in focus would move advisors from being exclusively catalysts of courageous conversations to also being creators of inclusive campus communities. What barriers or resources exist within the infrastructure of higher education that influence students and advising alternatives? How do advisors' personalities, backgrounds, and implicit biases influence their choice to initiate alternative advising? How does alternative advising differ for individuals who have less social capital or education? Without these conversations, those who practice alternative advising may be viewed as cooling agents who avert litigation or administer an elite curriculum that perpetuates the status quo (Clark, 1960; O'Connell, McNeely, & Hall, 2008).

Summary

Individuals adapt as they construct their careers. A central learning outcome of an advising curriculum is the ability to anticipate obstacles, cope with unexpected transitions, and engage in new goals. Adapters are a unique subset of major-changers who pursue these learning outcomes. Advisors facilitate emotional expression to acknowledge loss, manage anxiety, and activate students' support systems as well as to help students gather information about themselves and their options. They also teach students to identify and prioritize their preferred occupational attributes. The presence of these features in alternative careers fosters a feeling of hope as well as a sense of continuity between students' previous and future selves. Similarly, narrative techniques or resume writing may renew students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

Multiple sessions or referrals may be necessary, depending on students' needs and the complexity of the decision. Advisors and students together set the pace to restore students' sense of control. Although it requires advanced advising competencies and is challenging, reengagement is also rewarding. Through this process, students acquire a deeper understanding of their identity and reasons for pursuing an education. The sense of hope that comes from this understanding

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permits students to transcend the transition so that "they have not lost a dream after all, but recaptured its very essence" (Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996, p. 26).

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Author's Note

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