

“We’re Just Better Together”: The Benefits and Challenges of a Campus-Wide Adoption of Appreciative Advising

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Abstract

Mountain West University has adopted Appreciative Advising campus-wide as a strategy to promote student success. Using the Diffusion of Innovations Theory as a theoretical framework, this study investigated the perceived benefits and challenges academic advisors associate with a cross-campus implementation of Appreciative Advising. Data collection included interviews with 10 academic advisors at Mountain West University, as well as MWU academic advisor training and development documents. Findings demonstrated that adopting Appreciative Advising college-wide benefits both the organization, including providing a common language and approach to interacting with students, and increasing alignment between advisors and faculty, as well as individual academic advisors, thereby improving advisors’ skills and sense of agency. The college-wide adoption also presented challenges. For instance, academic advisors already felt overloaded by their work responsibilities, and some noted it took time to build confidence in implementing their Appreciative Advising skills. The implications of this study include the importance of providing continuous professional development in Appreciative Advising, encompassing both internal and external offerings. Advising administrators may also consider not mandating advisors to adopt the approach and instead allow the framework to integrate into advising practices organically.

Keywords

Appreciative Advising, academic advising, case study, campus-wide implementation, diffusions of innovations theory

Appreciative Advising is a six-phase theory-to-practice framework developed by Bloom and colleagues (Bloom & Martin, 2002; Bloom et al., 2008). It is theoretically rooted in Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 1986) and is designed to facilitate interpersonal relationships and organizational culture. The Appreciative Mindset undergirds the six phases of Appreciative Advising and provides academic advisors with a theory-to-practice framework to guide their interactions with students (Bloom et al., 2008). Yet, despite the research that has demonstrated the positive impact that Appreciative Advising has on both students (Ajayi et al., 2023; Bowles & Taylor, 2024; Buchanan et al., 2022; Burks, 2022; Cox & Naylor, 2018; Hande et al., 2019; Hutson, 2010; Miller et al., 2019; Sanders & Hutson, 2012; Valentine & Price, 2023; Walters, 2015) and advisors (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016; Howell, 2010; Kaplan, 2020), few institutions have attempted a campus-wide adoption of the Appreciative Advising approach.

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Mountain West University (MWU) is one institution that has undertaken the challenge of encouraging the widespread adoption of Appreciative Advising. MWU is a pseudonym for a Research I institution with 28,000 students located in the Western United States. In 2016, MWU developed a plan to adopt Appreciative Advising initially within the Exploratory Advising Office. After assessment results indicated that Appreciative Advising had a positive impact on student success, it was then encouraged, but not mandated, to be adopted across the institution's colleges. The institution has a shared organizational model for delivering academic advising services between (a) the Exploratory Advising Center that advises incoming exploratory students and (b) professional and/or faculty advisors who advise students who have declared a major in the colleges where they are housed. The Office of University and Exploratory Advising provides both exploratory advising and onboarding, as well as professional development for advisors across campus. The Executive Director of University and Exploratory Advising is Kyla Rivera, who reports to Senior Vice Provost and Senior Associate Vice President Dr. Jaine West (note: we assigned pseudonyms). Since 2016, Kyla and Jaine have purposefully led a systematic process of encouraging academic advisors to adopt and implement the Appreciative Advising approach with their advisees at MWU.

Using the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962, 2003) as the theoretical framework, this article explores the lessons learned and what advisors perceived as the benefits and challenges associated with the campus-wide adoption of Appreciative Advising. First, having this information will help other higher education advising leaders who seek to adopt an approach to academic advising across their campus. The findings can be shared with advisors to discuss the potential advantages of adopting an advising approach, which can be explored at the early stages of the adoption process. Secondly, as the study addresses challenges associated with a campus-wide adoption of an advising approach, the study's data may provide proactive tools for advising leadership interested in creating an appreciative, cross-campus approach. Finally, centering this research on academic advisors and their stories amplifies the voices of academic advisors and the vital work they do every day.

Author Positionality

As researchers examining the adoption of Appreciative Advising at Mountain West University, we recognize and acknowledge our positionality and its potential influence on the study. Three members of the authorship team have professional relationships established with academic advisors and administrators at Mountain West University. This includes direct collaboration to provide professional development offerings related to Appreciative Advising, attendance by MWU academic advisors in our professional development offerings, and ongoing communication regarding advising practices. This close engagement has provided us with valuable insights into the institution's advising culture and the implementation process through various Office of Appreciative Education offerings. We understand that our familiarity may introduce certain biases. Specifically, our relationships may lead us to interpret data in a manner that favors the institution or reinforces positive perceptions of Appreciative Advising (affinity bias). Confirmation bias could also be an issue, as we may emphasize data that confirms our pre-existing expectations. To mitigate these biases, we included a fourth author who has no prior direct relationship with the institution and provided an external perspective. We also have employed rigorous qualitative data analysis techniques, including data triangulation and independent coding, to ensure productivity. We prioritized the voices of our participants and reflexivity throughout the process, striving to acknowledge and address our own assumptions. We also used member checking to validate our findings. We believe that acknowledging our positionality and

implementing the strategies outlined above provide a more nuanced and credible understanding of the institution's experience adopting Appreciative Advising.

Literature Review

In a post-pandemic era where student success and retention are critical for higher education institutions, Appreciative Advising has received attention as a significant framework that centers the relationship between advisors and students. Developed by Bloom and colleagues (Bloom & Martin, 2002; Bloom et al., 2008), Appreciative Advising operates on the premise that every student possesses strengths, dreams, and experiences academic advisors can discover and leverage to optimize the student's academic journey. Appreciative Advising is rooted in generative theoretical and conceptual theories that focus on eliciting the strengths in others. Namely, inspired by Appreciative Inquiry, an organizational development theory developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), Bloom and Martin (2002) contextualized Appreciative Inquiry in terms of how academic advisors can use the framework when working with their students. In their seminal article, Bloom & Martin (2002) outlined how Appreciative Inquiry can be used in advising spaces, specifically pointing to the use of positive, open-ended questions that situate students' experiences, dreams for their futures, and strategies on how the student can accomplish their dreams. From there, Bloom et al. (2008) expanded on the underpinnings of Appreciative Advising to include elements of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) positive psychology, Glasser's (1986) choice theory, and Dewey's (1916) social constructivist theory as ways to center Appreciative Advising in academic advising processes, contexts, and strategies (Bloom et al., 2008).

Since its inception, the literature on the use of the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework in higher education has burgeoned, and the framework's application has been demonstrated to positively impact student persistence and retention (Bloom et al., 2009). Early publications on Appreciative Advising highlight how the six phases were applied at a variety of campuses. For example, institutions like the University of North Carolina Greensboro, the University of South Carolina, and Eastern Illinois University (Bloom et al., 2009) utilized the framework to create and examine programmatic initiatives. Subsequently, additional practitioners have written about how they were using the Appreciative Advising framework in a variety of academic and student affairs areas (Bloom et al., 2015; Bloom et al., 2011; Buyarski et al., 2011; Fippinger, 2009; Grogan, 2011; Propst Cuevas et al., 2011; Robinson, 2015; Walters, 2015). Additional articles have been written about how to use the framework with a broad range of student subpopulations, including at-risk (Kamphoff et al., 2007), first-generation (Beer et al., 2011), graduate (Stanback & McEvoy, 2012), international (Elliott, 2012; Palmer, 2009), and student-athletes (Crisp, 2013; Lyons & Singleton Jackson, 2010), among others. Critelli et al. (2022) utilized the framework to develop the Appreciative Advising Success Inventory (AASI) instrument and explore the predictive validity between Appreciative Advising and selected student psychosocial factors, such as academic self-confidence, motivation, and persistence, which are correlated with student success.

Bloom et al. (2009) noted that the ongoing training advisors receive is paramount to successfully implementing Appreciative Advising. McLean (2019) explored the effects of advisors receiving training in Appreciative Advising on student advising satisfaction, highlighting the potential for campus-wide adoption to enhance student experiences significantly. This study also underscored the importance of offering professional development and training to professional and faculty advisors to foster positive relationships with their student advisees, especially in a decentralized system where students transition

from a centralized first-year advising space to major-specific college advising. In Kaplan's (2020) dissertation study on the impact of well-being on advisors attending the Appreciative Advising Institute, results showed that participants experienced an increase in their overall workplace well-being. Similarly, He et al. (2020) found that advisors who self-reported elevated levels of happiness in their workplace and overall well-being reported that they would stay in their current position. Institutions can create a more supportive and effective advising system by striving to create a positive work environment for advisors.

Despite the research about the benefits that accrue to advisors who adopt Appreciative Advising, there is no research on how academic advisors perceive the benefits of broad institutional-level adoption of Appreciative Advising. Therefore, this study fills the research gap and provides grounded evidence on the benefits and challenges of organizational change focused on the widespread adoption of Appreciative Advising.

Research Questions

This research aims to investigate the perceived benefits and challenges academic advisors associate with a cross-campus implementation of Appreciative Advising. Therefore, the two research questions guiding this study are:

1. What benefits do academic advisors attribute to the cross-campus adoption of the Appreciative Advising framework?
2. What challenges do academic advisors attribute to the cross-campus adoption of the Appreciative Advising framework?

Theoretical Framework

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962, 2003), a classic theory within the organizational change literature, serves as the theoretical framework for this study. This theoretical framework examines the factors that influence the adoption of innovations. Specifically, "diffusion involves an innovation that is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Dearing & Cox, 2018, pp. 183-184). The key components of this theory include innovation, communication channels, social system, time of adoption, and adopters (Rogers, 1962, 2003). In this study, the *innovation* refers to the adoption of the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework. *Communication channels* denote how information about Appreciative Advising was shared across the organization. The *social system* refers to MWU, including advisors, faculty, and the various departments throughout which Appreciative Advising is spreading and being adopted. The *time of adoption* began in 2016 when a formal plan was created for adopting Appreciative Advising within the Exploratory Advising Office. The *adopters* are advisors and other stakeholders within MWU who have implemented Appreciative Advising, whereas non-adopters are those who have opted not to do so.

Dearing & Cox (2018) explained that time-of-adoption commonly occurs in "an S-shaped curve...with an initial slow rate of adoption giving way to a rapidly accelerating rate, which then slows as fewer nonadopters remain within the social system" (p. 184). These scholars denoted that what accelerates the rate of diffusion is when "influential members of the social system making the decision to adopt and their decision being communicated to others, who then follow their lead" (p. 184). Over time, such adoption often leads to wide systemic organizational change. One of the variables that explains diffusion is the "set of pros and cons" (Dearing & Cox, 2018, p. 185) associated with the innovation (Dearing & Cox, 2018), which will be the focus of this article, as it explores the benefits and challenges of a campus-wide adoption of Appreciative Advising.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate academic advisors' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with the cross-campus implementation of Appreciative Advising at MWU. A qualitative case study is a methodology used to examine a phenomenon in its bounded context (Yin, 2018). The research team first determined the case(s) that met the inclusion criteria, which for this study were institutions that had adopted the Appreciative Advising framework across multiple university advising offices and used the framework to hire and train academic advisors. MWU met the inclusion criteria for this study and was selected as the site. The artifacts analyzed for this case included MWU training and professional development documents provided by the Executive Director of the University and Exploratory Advising, as well as 10 interview transcripts to investigate the perceived benefits and challenges academic advisors associated with a cross-campus implementation of Appreciative Advising.

Sample Criteria and Recruitment

The research team employed purposeful sampling to identify participants for interviews at MWU. The interview sample criteria for participation in this study were that they had to have worked at MWU as an academic advisor for at least a year, have attended MWU-sponsored professional development on Appreciative Advising, and have a working knowledge of Appreciative Education, Appreciative Advising, or Appreciative Inquiry. The Executive Director of University and Exploratory Advising at MWU assisted in identifying potential participants for the interview.

Data Collection

The researchers in this study collected data over a three-month period; interviews and transcript analysis were divided evenly among three members of the research team. Thirteen participants met the sample criteria for the interviews, and 10 agreed to participate in the study. Table 1 provides the background information for all participants who agreed to participate in this study. Study participants each engaged in one 30-minute semi-structured Zoom interview, which was audio-transcribed and checked for accuracy.

The Executive Director shared documents pertaining to the academic advisor professional training and development program with the research team. These documents, which included the history of academic advising at MWU, training materials provided to current and incoming academic advisors about their roles, academic advisor job responsibilities, and reports on the impact of academic advising on students, were collected and reviewed by the research team. The collected documents assisted in corroborating interview information and findings (Yin, 2018).

Table 1*Participant Profiles*

Participant	Gender	Current Position	Experience	University College or Department
Ethan	Male	(Senior) Academic Advisor	6 Years	College of Education and Human Services
Clara	Female	Academic Advisor	26 Years	College of Education and Human Services
Willow	Female	Academic Advisor	6 Years *	College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences
Ava	Female	Academic Advisor and Completion Coordinator	4 Years	Statewide Campuses
Evelyn	Female	Student Success Advisor	2 Years	Student Success
Maya	Female	Academic Advisor	2 Years	University and Exploratory Advising
Fiona	Female	Academic Advisor Supervisor	6 Years	University and Exploratory Advising
Iris	Female	Academic Advisor	3 Years	College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences
Nadia	Female	Director and Academic Advisor	17 Years	College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences
Sarah	Female	Senior Director of Student Orientation and Transition Services	15 Years *	Office of the Executive Vice President

Data Analysis

To enhance the credibility of the findings, researchers used data triangulation, a technique that utilizes multiple data sources to situate findings (Yin, 2018). The research team reviewed related MWU academic advisor training and development documents and divided the interview transcripts among members, who individually read and coded the assigned data. While reading, each researcher independently used thematic analysis with inductive coding and created initial themes with supporting data (direct transcript quotes; Saldaña, 2016) on a secure Word document. Inductive coding, also known as in vivo coding, involves using words or short phrases from participants' responses to categorize data (Saldaña, 2016). After individually reading and coding, the research team compared the themes. The research team found congruence between the themes each had collected separately. One researcher then combined the themes and supporting data into one master theme document, which was reviewed by the research team. During this process of integrating themes, all participant information was de-identified, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identity. The individual review and comparison of themes yielded

triangulated themes, which contributed to the study's reliability. The themes were then organized and condensed into the following findings.

Findings

As with the adoption of any new initiative or approach, there are both benefits (pros) and challenges (cons). The first section explores the findings related to what MWU academic advisor participants associate with the benefits of a campus-wide adoption of Appreciative Advising at both the organizational and individual levels. The second section shares the findings related to what advisors perceive as the challenges associated with the campus-wide adoption of Appreciative Advising.

Finding 1: Benefits of Adopting Appreciative Advising

The participants described many benefits associated with MWU's adoption of Appreciative Advising at the organizational and individual academic advisor levels. The organizational benefits include the value of a common framework, language, and approach, which increases alignment between faculty and staff, clarifies faculty perceptions of academic advisors, and has a trickle-down effect on Appreciative Advising. At the individual level, advisors noted that their skill sets improved, and they had an increased sense of agency.

Organizational Benefits

At the organizational level, the benefits include providing the campus with a common framework, language, and approach to working with students; increasing the alignment between faculty and staff; clarifying faculty perceptions of the role of academic advisors; and observing the trickle-down effect of Appreciative Advising. Each will be explored in the subsequent sections.

Providing the Campus with a Common Framework, Language, and Approach to Working with Students

Adopting Appreciative Advising has provided the institution with a common framework, language, and approach to working with students, as well as a more unified community of academic advisors. According to the 2023 New Advisor Training presentation collected as part of this study, new advisor hires learned about the history of academic advising at MWU, including Appreciative Advising and how it is infused into everyday advising practices. The importance of a more unified community of academic advisors is particularly notable given the institution's shared advising structure. Iris mentioned that as Appreciative Advising started gaining traction, "it was pretty widespread, and most of the colleges were adapting to that, where we are a decentralized advising system." However, individual colleges and departments were allowed to choose whether to adopt the framework. Although Iris' college did not adopt Appreciative Advising as "a core component within our advising unit," she took the initiative and:

approached my director and asked if I could take the certification courses to be able to dig into that more, and I feel like at this point most of the advisors have that as a common language, and because we have that as a common language when we go to our other department meetings and other campus meetings, we tend to use certain words and terminology that's just normal to us from that appreciative framework.

Iris noted that having the shared language of Appreciative Advising allowed academic advisors across campus to learn from each other:

And so then, like some of our other higher education, cohorts will be like, ‘Oh, wait! What did you just say? And how does that apply to that? Or tell me more about that’ and so it’s been able to bring about more of those campus conversations to be like, yeah, anyone really can have these appreciative conversations with students to help to engage them with questions help them to look at their bigger wide how are we helping them as a university to get them to that and have it to feel more like a collaborative university process.

Sarah noted that the shared approach to working with students has also resulted in “more coherence and consistency around their policies, even though this isn’t like a policy framework.” Ava reflected that part of the reason why the Appreciative Advising framework has spread throughout the institution is that:

It makes sense. It just defines things. The framework defines things for us a little bit better, and so we can refer back to it to make sure we’re giving a good comprehensive advising program for our students here...It’s natural, organic, for the most part. I think it just requires persistence, just the desire to have a good relationship.

Having a theory-to-practice framework with a common language and approach has benefited the institution by making it easier for advisors to communicate with students and each other.

Increasing the Alignment Between Faculty and Staff

Willow addressed how the adoption of Appreciative Advising has increased alignment between academic advisors and faculty members by helping each other to recognize the important roles each group contributes to advising on campus:

I know that our office, our academic unit, I should put it that way, has also used it to help...the whole unit, right? So, cohesion between staff and faculty. That’s really what I’m trying to get at. I know a lot of universities and institutions there’s a pretty hard and fast line, right? Faculty does one thing, staff does another, and they don’t always come together real great, real nicely. And so, I know they’ve used principles from Appreciative Advising to try to build that bridge to work more closely together as well as educate both sides as to what the other is doing and why they’re doing the things that they’re doing.

Willow continued:

They’re trying to do a better job of using Appreciative Education and doing some professional development with our faculty, and trying to get us all a little bit more aligned, using similar questions as well as vocabulary, things like that.

In summarizing her thoughts about the role Appreciative Advising and Appreciative Education have played at MWU in bringing together faculty and academic advisors, Willow noted, “we’re just better together.” Willow perceived that the Appreciative approach had helped bring advisors and faculty together, which made both parties better. Although she observed that faculty members’ exposure to the framework has resulted in advisors feeling “closer with faculty than what we were,” she also acknowledged, “there’s still room for improvement for growth.”

Willow felt that part of the reason Appreciative Advising spurred increased alignment between faculty members and academic advisors is that the exposure faculty members have had to the framework has helped them realize “advising is more than just [scheduling] classes.” She further elaborated on how she perceived that faculty members benefited directly from having academic advisors use the Appreciative Advising framework:

And so, I think that was one way to really help faculty see and understand at least one part of advising was through this framework and to help build that bridge of the advisors are here to help you and if we can help students identify if the programs are good fit, then the students in your class, you're going to enjoy having them there more because they're going to be more successful.

Observing the “Trickle-down Effect” of Appreciative Advising

Participants noted another benefit of the Appreciative Advising professional development training provided to academic advisors, which resulted in what Ava termed a “trickle-down effect” across campus units. She noted that beyond academic advisors and faculty, a variety of campus constituents, including peer advisors and student affairs professionals, received training on Appreciative Advising.

Willow stated that initially, peer advisors did not receive much professional development training on Appreciative Advising, but when a new supervisor for peer advisors was appointed, processes shifted:

that supervisor said it's time to train those peer advisors on this model as well so that students get consistent service from our unit regardless of who they meet with, and so that's like I said from the bottom looking up I feel like administration has really helped with this and they have taken the feedback they've gotten from students on campus as well as research that's being done and they've gotten on board. They've said this proven. We see the positive results of this and we wanna make sure our students are having the best experience, so we're doing this.

Peer advisors campus-wide at MWU deliver advising services, such as navigating course registration systems and exploring majors for specific colleges and departments. This hierarchical structure enables academic advisors who would not usually be supervisors to share the knowledge and skills they have learned during Appreciative Advising training with student leaders, who provide an additional level of support to the entire MWU student population. Ava noted that she supervises an assigned peer advisor and that she provides:

some guidance, they are relatively fresh with the whole framework of Appreciative Advising, so we just help to kind of guide them on all of those phases and answer any questions they might have, so that they can find success in what they're doing and working with students.

Furthermore, the Centralized Advising Office intentionally invited student affairs professionals, including those from the Career Center, to participate in their Appreciative Advising professional development offerings. Ethan mentioned seeing the career coaches “participate a lot more in Appreciative Advising sessions.” Clara stated that there has been:

an effort to not just include advisors in these kinds of trainings, but people that are working in our career services, people that are working in student affairs in different areas. So, you know, I feel like it is slowly spreading out its tentacles into different areas, and I don't see any reason why it would stop. So, I feel like it's still going to keep, just, you know, working its way out to the different areas of campus.

Ethan also commented about how the Executive Director of University and Exploratory Advising has used Appreciative Advising to spur collaboration on campus more broadly:

And so I've been observing that a lot more, you know, she's been able to collaborate a lot more with other departments with the academic departments, you know, and then

student affairs and the provost's office, and that's been something that I feel like has been very helpful in that approach is just...is her approach of collaborating now.

Notably, Evelyn commented that Appreciative Advising is being adopted beyond the main campus through MWU's state-wide campuses:

So, I think when I was there early on, it was really focused in our [main] campus, just because it's easier to do this [on] main campus. I think our state-wide campuses were getting a little bit of it, but we just didn't have that unified approach throughout the State, which I've seen be a huge change recently.

In summary, academic advisors believe that adopting Appreciative Advising has resulted in various benefits to MWU as an organization. Appreciative Advising has provided a common framework, language, and approach to working with students, resulting in enhanced collaboration with faculty members. Faculty members now have a clearer idea of the roles that academic advisors play. Notably, other units and professionals have also increasingly sought professional development opportunities in Appreciative Advising, which has ignited a trickle-down effect of Appreciative Advising beyond academic advising.

Individual Level Benefits

In addition to organizational benefits highlighted in the previous section, academic advisor participants noted how they benefited from attending Appreciative Advising professional development sessions. This section will highlight advisors' perceptions of how professional development on Appreciative Advising has improved their advising skills and increased their sense of agency.

Improving Advisors' Advising Skills

Academic advisors at MWU shared how the Appreciative Advising professional development they received helped them improve their day-to-day written and oral communication skills. Evelyn captured how Appreciative Advising has helped her to sharpen her advising skills, including owning mistakes and building relationships in a short amount of time:

I had so many awesome opportunities to improve my advising practices. And I started looking at like the easy, the simplest things, like sending an email. I started looking at those through the Appreciative Advising lens that we always talk about and, but I started being more intentional with the words that I used. I learned how to apologize if I didn't use a good word, and I fix it. I learned how to build relationships with my students in 30 minutes, which is always one of those things that is scary and seems impossible, but absolutely possible. And I think for me, having like they have this fun little coaster having the phases in my brain are somewhere around me, just helps me. These are the things that my students need, and I can achieve them through these different phases.

Evelyn further elaborated on the value of the six phases of Appreciative Advising as well as the practical resources she received from FAU's Office of Appreciative Education (OAE). MWU began sending academic advisors through both the Appreciative Advising Institute and the Appreciative Advising online course. Subsequently, they also sent select graduates of the Institute and online course through the more advanced level Appreciative Advising Academy, which was focused on supporting students on academic probation. In addition, many MWU academic advisors attended the OAE's free Appreciative Education in Action webinar series. Evelyn noted:

Having those steps is really helpful for a brain like mine. But just the resources that we get from Appreciative Advising and the Appreciative Advising Academy were super helpful for me. I used the deliverables that we did in that class all the time I use them here. I print them out, and I tell people about them just because they are real life, tangible things that influenced my practice.

Ethan also commented about the practical resources obtained through participation in FAU Office of Appreciative Education professional development offerings, “It’s good to be able to also have resources that I can refer back to about Appreciative Advising [from the] Institute...It’s good to have those resources.” He noted that the Appreciative Advising framework and resources can be helpful to new academic advisors, “I think it would be hard if I came into a new profession, not knowing how to interact with students or kind of trying to figure it on my own.”

Improving Advisors’ Sense of Agency

MWU academic advisor participants expressed gratitude for the framework, which has given them the freedom to choose how they integrate it into their interactions with students. For example, Ethan mentioned, “I feel like the teaching and the implementation of what Appreciative Advising is about right now has really been up to the advisors on how to use it, and if they want to use it, which I feel like has been really good.” Additionally, training on Appreciative Advising typically focuses on affirming how academic advisors are already incorporating the strategies and questions outlined in the six phases of Appreciative Advising. As a result, Clara said, “So for me, it’s more of a confirming of yeah, yes, I like this. And this is what I’m already doing. It gives a name to something I’m already doing.”

Both Ava and Evelyn mentioned how both advisors and students have benefited from advisors using the Appreciative Advising framework. Ava noted, “And, I really see students benefitting and also our advisors benefitting with satisfaction in their advising practice.” Evelyn felt that students deserve to be served by advisors trained in Appreciative Advising, “I think for us with this decentralized system that we have...All of our students to have the baseline care and support...I think one is something that comes naturally to a lot of people who enter this profession, and it’s very holistic.” She followed up by saying, “[student] success, and meeting the students where they are at is why we adopted Appreciative Advising.”

Finding 2: Challenges Associated with Adopting Appreciative Advising

Where there are benefits, there are also challenges to adopting the framework. The challenges that will be shared in this section include academic advisors feeling overloaded and overwhelmed by their workload, the length of time it has taken to implement the Appreciative Advising model, the need to correct misperceptions of what Appreciative Advising is among various constituents, and the complexities associated with engaging more experienced academic advisors on board with the framework.

Advisor Overload

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many academic advisors felt overwhelmed by large student advising caseloads, the expectation to take on additional non-student advising-related responsibilities, and the need to stay updated with new courses, policies, and procedures. Willow mentioned hearing concerns from fellow academic advisors about the initial implementation of Appreciative Advising:

Some of the resistance that I hear is from people who feel it’s just one more thing. . . . I’m sure this is not new, but advisors often feel inundated with changes, whether it’s

changes in technology or changes in curriculum, changes in policy. There's always something new to learn...I feel like some of the resistance that I've heard is that's just one more thing that I have to do?

Given their workload and responsibilities, it is understandable that academic advisors might feel apprehensive about what might be considered the new "flavor of the day" in terms of change initiatives being pushed by the institution.

Another factor that contributed to advisor overload was when Kyla, the Executive Director of University and Exploratory Advising, and Jaine, the Senior Vice Provost and Senior Associate Vice President, initially introduced Appreciative Advising to the MWU academic advisors and attempted to mandate its adoption. Clara explained:

...when Jaine came in and was going to change and fix, advising, and those of us who had been here for a long time, there were already a lot of really good advisors doing a great job, and they came in like the first meeting was this is a mandatory, advising meeting. You must be here to keep your job, and we're all like, wait a minute. You're not our supervisor.

Ethan similarly reflected Clara's concern about how Kyla and Jaine initially approached sharing the Appreciative Advising framework and how it made advisors feel:

Everybody thought it was just another, I guess I don't wanna say mandate, but it was just something that everybody felt like you know...What am I doing wrong in my practice, you know, and...Is that not good enough kind of a thing? ...I felt like there was a lot of people just didn't feel like they need to use Appreciative Advising.

Clara acknowledged that they quickly shifted their implementation strategy to one in which academic advisors were invited to learn about Appreciative Advising and how to implement the framework in their interactions:

We need to share this instead of push it. I would say that's when I started feeling a little more like, okay, this isn't being shoved down my throat. This is being offered to me as a tool to use. I think it's all more in the presentation of, "Hey, this is a good idea that you might want to try, and this is the best practice thing" instead of a "This is the way we do things at MWU. You will do it this way, you know." So, really, more of just suggesting it nicely instead of overloading us with it.

Takes Time to Implement

In the benefits section of this article, some academic advisors noted that they felt the adoption of Appreciative Advising had improved their advising skills and increased their sense of self-efficacy. However, one advisor mentioned it took some time for her to build her confidence in implementing Appreciative Advising with her students:

At least for me, Appreciative Advising was not something that I just really clicked and got right off the bat. It makes sense, I understood it, but the implementation has taken a little while to feel like I'm doing it. Okay. Does that make sense? Like, there's just so many pieces to it and changes that I had to make personally in how I communicate with students that it just took a little while to feel comfortable with it.

However, the advisor further elaborated that once she began using the framework, it became easier:

But as I've grown more comfortable, I feel like it's helped with a lot of the things that they're worried about. Right? Being able to visit with students and communicate in a way that I can really hear what they're saying, even when they're not actually saying

it? They're not explicitly stating some things. I think it's helped with the big picture side of things.

Clara also noted that it has taken time for Appreciative Advising to be implemented more broadly across the institution:

Then they kind of introduce it in, and I think that is a much more effective introduction into things by alluding to how like, we know, this wasn't overnight thing that it didn't shift overnight. It's taken years to get advising to where it is at Mountain West.

At both the individual and institution levels, participants noted that it takes time to adopt a new approach to advising.

Correcting Misperceptions of Appreciative Advising

Another challenge that academic advisors encountered during the implementation of Appreciative Advising was the need to spend time correcting some of the misperceptions among academic advisors. One such misperception that Ethan noted that he heard from other advisors is that the six phases of Appreciative Advising meant that advisors needed to follow them in a lock-step fashion every time they met with students:

And then, I didn't understand this until now, but at the time, I was like... you don't have to use it [Appreciative Advising], step by step, right? You don't have to go down, Disarm and then Discover you don't have to do that in every appointment with your student, but no, it's a framework.

Ethan further stated that over time, a growing number of academic advisors are using the Appreciative Advising framework and report how helpful the framework is for new advisors:

A lot of people, that are a lot of advisors, just didn't really understand what it was. But now know, looking back then to now, it has evolved to where a lot of advisors at [Mountain West] really appreciate. You know what Appreciative Advising is? It's a very well accepted... you still kinda have the old timers here just like no. I know what I need to do as an advisor, but I think for the new, you know the new advisors who are coming in are really appreciative that there's a philosophy that there's a framework that they can go off of.

Another early misperception from the pilot initiative of the Office of Exploratory Advising, adopting the Appreciative Advising framework before rolling it out to the broader college-based advisors, was that Appreciative Advising involved coddling students. Evelyn elaborated:

We had students who were undeclared or unsure, and so [we had] this handoff that we had to other departments. Sometimes, these other departments thought we were handholders to hands-off: set up your schedule, but I'm not gonna tell you about deadlines. I won't ask you about your personal life. I'm not gonna ask you about your social life, right? We're just doing academics and so I also think that those other departments were not used to worrying about social, emotional well-being and not sure how to, one, handle those conversations, and then to handle those conversations in your scope.

Similarly, Clara noted that when Appreciative Advising was more broadly rolled out across the campus that some of the longer-standing employees were resistant:

I honestly think we've had a lot of retirees...had their way of doing things, and they've kind of moved along through the years, and as they bring in new advisors, I feel like they're starting from the beginning of saying this is how we do things in this job. And be. I think it's a younger mindset coming in with those advisors. Gen. X. Gen. Z. And they are. Gosh! How do I describe it? More? Nurturing, or they want it to be a nicer, touchy-feely experience, whereas maybe old school was you're here to get an education and we're gonna get that done. And you know, let's just keep it to business versus this. The newer younger advisors wanting to have more relationships with it. And that's not everybody I mean, I've been here a long time, and I think the relationships are important.

These findings highlight what MWU academic advisor participants associate with the benefits and challenges of a campus-wide adoption of Appreciative Advising at both the organizational and individual levels.

Implications for Practice and Discussion

Several implications for practice emerge from the findings. First, the importance of providing comprehensive professional development from the University and Exploratory Advising Office on an ongoing basis has been the key to the eventual widespread adoption of the Appreciative Advising framework at MWU. The intentional and purposeful approach Kyla and Jaine took to infuse training on Appreciative Advising began with a deep dive into Appreciative Advising during the mandatory new advisor onboarding training. They reinforced the initial training by providing both in-house professional development offerings and sponsoring academic advisors to attend the professional development offerings offered through FAU's Office of Appreciative Education. These efforts have been instrumental in the sustained use of the framework. By taking this course of action, Kyla and Jaine, as change agents and "influential member[s] of the social system" (Dearing & Cox, 2018, p. 184), spurred the acceleration rate of diffusing Appreciative Advising across MWU.

Second, the intentional mix of both internal and external professional development opportunities reinforces what is learned and helps spur the evolution of cultural change within academic advising and the institution more broadly. Through external development opportunities, such as participating in the FAU's Office of Appreciative Education Appreciative Advising Institute, participants can gain experience and learn from other practitioners across the U.S. who are also adopting Appreciative Advising, bringing back valuable knowledge and insights to enhance their roles at MWU. Furthermore, MWU advisors are often invited to serve as facilitators or facilitator assistants at an Appreciative Advising Institute (AAI) and learn the content more deeply as they facilitate others' learning. This deeper learning bolsters and reinforces how Appreciative Advising is implemented at MWU, as these advisors reflect on their own experiences, learn new tips and techniques, and teach and instruct others on the Appreciative Advising framework through their AAI facilitator roles. Notably, such opportunities serve as a form of "social contagion" (Dearing & Cox, 2018, p. 186) that not only accelerates adoption of an innovation, but also ensures fidelity, that is, "the extent to which others implement an innovation in the way intended by its developers" (p. 187).

Third, academic advisors noted that early in the campus process of adopting Appreciative Advising, the Executive Director of University and Exploratory Advising attempted to mandate that academic advisors officially adopt the framework. However, the Executive Director quickly realized that academic advisors heavily resisted the mandated use of the framework. When she shifted her language to reflect Appreciative Inquiry's principle of free choice (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003) and began inviting academic advisors to

participate in training focused on Appreciative Advising, that is when advisors became more open and curious about the framework. The non-mandated approach empowers units and/or advisors to adopt the framework at their own pace. Although some have decided against publicly adopting it, the majority of units have embraced it. Notably, the Appreciative Advising framework is now being used to train a variety of campus audiences beyond academic advisors, including faculty, peer advisors, and student affairs professionals. Additionally, all new academic advisors participate in Appreciative Advising training during new employee training. As Ethan shared, “the new advisors who are coming are really appreciative that there’s a philosophy, that there’s a framework that they can go off of.” Given the infusion of Appreciative Advising throughout the new advisor onboarding training, new employees are beginning to use the Appreciative Advising framework to guide their academic advising process from their earliest days on the job. This previously described phenomenon reflects a common occurrence within the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Dearing & Cox, 2018; Rogers, 1962, 2003): although non-adopters may slow the diffusion process, diffusion can still effectively spread throughout the organization when strong synergy sustains the rate of diffusion, as demonstrated at MWU.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This section outlines the study's limitations and provides recommendations for future research. The first limitation is that this study focused on only one 4-year public research institution in the Western United States. Although case study research does not emphasize generalizability, future research could be conducted to detail any changes in academic advisors' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of implementing Appreciative Advising campus-wide over an extended period. A longitudinal mixed-methods study could deepen and expand the findings of this study. Research also needs to be conducted on what administrators perceive as the benefits and challenges associated with adopting Appreciative Advising at an institutional level.

Another limitation of this study is the shared advising model MWU utilizes to deliver advising services. Future research should be conducted to understand advisor perceptions of implementing Appreciative Advising campus-wide at higher education institutions that use centralized or decentralized advising organizational models. A final limitation of this study is that interview participants were limited to academic advisors, who comprise only a portion of MWU's student success support staff. Future research on the perceptions and experiences of other higher education professionals, including faculty and student affairs personnel, should be conducted to expand the understanding of what other areas of higher education perceive as the benefits and challenges of adopting Appreciative Advising. Future studies may also consider employing other organizational change models to more thoroughly investigate the symbiotic relationship that occurs at both organizational and individual levels in the adoption and implementation of innovative change.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perceived benefits and challenges MWU academic advisors associate with a cross-campus implementation of Appreciative Advising. Findings from this case highlighted that academic advisors believe that the adoption of Appreciative Advising campus-wide provided the institution with a common approach to working with students, aligned faculty and staff in academic advising initiatives, and increased advisors' advising skills and sense of agency. They found that the approach “trickled down” into other campus offices, allowing for expansion into other areas of the campus. Although adopting any academic advising approach can be challenging, the advisors noted that the benefits of broadly implementing Appreciative Advising as a framework of choice outweigh the

challenges. Given the challenges facing higher education institutions today, faculty, staff, and administrators need to come together to co-create plans for addressing these challenges. As Willow noted about the value of the Appreciative Advising framework, “We’re just better together.”

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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