Bridging Academic Advising and Career Education through Appreciative Advising and Design Thinking

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Abstract

Insights from the National Alumni Career Mobility survey revealed academic advisors as key resources for career advice, prompting strategic partnerships to expand the career ecosystem. Utah State University's Career Design Center and University Advising collaborate to bridge academic and career advising through Appreciative Advising and Design Thinking. The process began by aligning the Appreciative Advising and Life Design frameworks, ensuring that programming was anchored in the values, principles, and practices used by both teams. Career educators and advisors embraced Appreciative Advising and Life Design principles, expanding practices and fostering a unified partnership. This collaboration led to co-teaching career courses, sharing programming, enhancing advisor competencies, and scaling career initiatives. By integrating Appreciative Education and Design Thinking, USU exemplifies innovation in breaking silos, empowering students, and strengthening the advising-career connection.

Keywords

Appreciative Education Conference, career education, design thinking, professional development, Appreciative Campus

Academic advisors and career educators are well-positioned to help students maximize their opportunities to achieve their college goals and prepare for their future careers. As stated by Cuevas et al. (2021), "If academic advisers and career coaches are truly focused on meeting the holistic needs of students, their conversations with students will likely encompass elements of both academic and career development" (p. 11). Insights from the National Alumni Career Mobility Survey (Yousey-Elsner, 2024) revealed academic advisors as key resources for career advice, elevating the importance of strategic partnerships to expand the student's career ecosystem.

In addition, the increasing expectations that students secure high-quality jobs after college from society, families, and students themselves make it essential for advisors and career educators to leverage their expertise to support students' career exploration. The purpose of this article is to share our story of aligning academic advising and career education programs as a strategic opportunity to enhance student career development.

Integrating Life Design Mindsets with Appreciative Advising Phases

Appreciative Advising is a theory-to-practice framework designed to help students achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials (Bloom et al., 2008). The Appreciative Advising framework provides advisors with strategies for building rapport, asking open-ended questions to understand students' strengths, identifying hopes and dreams for the future,

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building an actionable plan, supporting students as they take action, and continuing to set internal bars of expectation high (Bloom et al., 2008, 2013).

Design thinking is a methodology traditionally used in product and service development. It has been creatively applied to personal and career development by Burnett & Evans (2018) in their book, *Designing Your Life*. The Life Design approach uses design principles to address ambiguous questions, such as "What do I want to be when I grow up?" By adopting a designer's mindset, individuals can creatively and systematically explore options, prototype multiple career paths, and generate new ideas informed by experience and feedback. The core principles of design thinking - empathy, ideation, prototyping, testing, and accepting - can be leveraged to help individuals build a meaningful and fulfilling life.

The process of Life Design encourages individuals to view their lives as evolving projects with multiple promising paths. This perspective shift moves the focus from finding the 'dream career path' to exploring multiple potential futures. Burnett & Evans (2018) emphasized mindsets such as curiosity, testing ideas, reframing problems, seeking help, recognizing that it's a process, and telling one's story. Through practical exercises, an individual can apply these principles to their 'wicked problem' and navigate life's uncertainties to build a life they love. Life Design has been integrated into career development initiatives for students in higher education (Kunac et al., 2019; Oishi, 2012).

The first mindset, ***be curious***, cultivates inquisitiveness (Burnett & Evans, 2016). Curiosity drives exploration and opens new possibilities, encouraging students to ask questions, seek new experiences, and foster a growth mindset. This aligns with the Disarm, Discover, and Dream phases of Appreciative Advising (Bloom et al., 2008). Advisors can be curious about students, asking open-ended questions to learn about their aspirations and encouraging exploration in education and career development. Curiosity helps students see opportunities everywhere.

The second mindset, ***trying stuff out***, prioritizes doing over thinking (Burnett & Evans, 2016). Instead of getting stuck on a thought, students can be encouraged to conduct small experiments and take steps forward. This proactive approach helps students learn, calibrate, and make progress. The Design and Deliver phases of Appreciative Advising (Bloom et al., 2008) encourage students to continually test out their ideas and adjust along the way.

The third mindset, ***reframing problems***, enables students to shift their perspective and view challenges as opportunities (Burnett & Evans, 2016). This shift can reveal solutions that may not be apparent at first glance, thereby encouraging creative problem-solving and resilience. The Design phase of Appreciative Advising (Bloom et al., 2008) aligns well with this mindset, helping students and advisors generate ideas and solutions to keep testing options.

The fourth mindset, ***knowing it's a process***, helps students understand that Life Design is an ongoing journey rather than a single moment (Burnett & Evans, 2016). Students can embrace the iterative process of career and life development, continually testing and refining ideas, becoming more adaptable, resilient, and patient. The Don't Settle phase of Appreciative Advising encourages students to be active participants in their college and career development, using learning experiences as opportunities to wayfind as they continue to set their internal standards of expectations high (Bloom et al., 2008).

The fifth mindset, ***asking for help***, encourages students to draw on the expertise of those around them, fostering a sense of community and generating powerful ideas for

prototyping (Burnett & Evans, 2018). Advisors can serve as members of students' design teams, providing diverse perspectives that strengthen the Life Design process.

The sixth and final mindset, ***storytelling***, empowers students to communicate their vision. Sharing their vision with others can help clarify it and generate more ideas to test, serving as a tool for self-reflection and opening doors. The Discover and Dream phases of Appreciative Advising connect well to storytelling, empowering students to learn more about themselves and how their values, goals, interests, skills, and strengths align with various career paths.

In our enactment of the frameworks, Appreciative Advising provides practices for leveraging the relationship between the student and advisor throughout their college journey. At the same time, Life Design offers tasks and activities that help students explore their strengths and goals.

Appreciative Advising Phases and Life Design Activities

In this section, we utilize the six phases of Appreciative Advising to explore Life Design activities aligned with each phase. Some Life Design activities are available on the Designing Your Life website (https://designingyour.life/worksheets-and-discussion-questions).

Disarm

The Appreciative Advising framework begins in the Disarm phase with building trust and rapport between students and advisors (Bloom et al., 2008). This phase involves the advisor engaging in appropriate self-disclosure, creating a safe and comfortable environment for the meeting, and utilizing appropriate non-verbal behavior (Bloom et al., 2008).

The Be Curious Life Design mindset is a way for advisors to live out the Appreciative Mindset by being insatiably curious about students' stories (Bloom et al., 2008). This step is established through the Disarm phase.

Discover

The Discover phase involves asking generative, open-ended questions to explore students' strengths, skills, and abilities (Bloom et al., 2013). By engaging students in conversations and activities to encourage reflection, advisors can get to know students and better individualize the advising experience for each student (Bloom et al., 2013, 2016).

Life Design provides the Good Time Journal Activity Log (Design Your Life, n.d.), a structured journal used to measure the activities a student engages in over a specified period. Students can document their level of engagement and energy during each activity. The first measure, engagement, is defined as "excited, focused, and having a good time" (Burnett & Evans, 2018, p. 48) with the task. The second measure, energy, or flow, is defined as "complete involvement in the activity, a sense of ecstasy or euphoria, great inner clarity, total calmness, or the notion that time is standing still" (Burnett & Evans, 2018, p. 48). Students rate each activity as high or low engagement and energy.

After completing the Good Time Journal Activity Log, students can engage in Energy Mapping by creating a list of activities with their corresponding levels of engagement and energy. By tracking daily activities and reflecting on levels of engagement and energy during those activities, students can identify patterns and understand what activities bring joy and fulfillment and which ones do not.

Using Discover practices alongside these activities can help students and advisors gain insights into what energizes and motivates them, thereby informing their plans and decisions. Open-ended questions facilitate this process, allowing students to recognize their potential and build on their positive experiences. Advisors can help students recognize patterns and move into the Dream phase, prepared to connect their strengths to their goals.

Another impactful activity an advisor can use with a student is Mind Mapping (Burnett & Evans, 2018). This activity is guided by free word association, enabling students to identify patterns and themes across their experiences. Students can begin with a career activity that interests them. Then, they spend time free-writing about the concept. Students can then add lines from the initial words they shared and document additional ideas that arise for each word. After reviewing the words, they can highlight or organize their thoughts visually to reveal patterns that might engage and energize them.

Life Design provides a structured approach to help students refine their values, beliefs, and motivations by examining their Workview and Lifeview (Burnett & Evans, 2016) and using Mind Mapping to make connections. By articulating each of these, the student can create a comprehensive picture of who they are and what they want to achieve. The open-ended questions help the student explore possibilities for aligning who they are with what they want to do.

Dream

In the Dream phase, advisors and students connect students' strengths with their hopes and dreams for the future (Bloom et al., 2008). Bloom et al. (2013) provided a deeper description of this concept, "'A dream is an inspiring picture of the future that energizes your mind, will, and emotions, empowering you to do everything you can to achieve it' (Maxwell, 2009, p. xiii), clearly helpful to students embarking on the college, and for many, the adult journey" (p. 86). Learning about students' dreams occurs in the conversations advisors initiate with students (Bloom et al., 2013).

Parallel planning is a dream practice Dr. Jenny Bloom introduced to the advising community (Streufert, 2019). Parallel planning can help students identify several paths for achieving their goals and identify the values that are important to their work life, managing anxiety and increasing resilience (Streufert, 2019). Life Design provides a structured approach to this exploration through Odyssey Planning.

Odyssey Planning (Burnett & Evans, 2018) is a strategy for envisioning multiple paths to achieving goals. By considering these options, students generate alternative pathways to navigate obstacles they may encounter. In Odyssey Planning, students develop a five-year plan for one or more potential career paths. Then, they evaluate the resources required to implement the plan, their confidence in their ability to execute it, its coherence with their values, and their satisfaction with the plan they created. This proactive approach encourages students to consider various futures for themselves and to prepare for a range of outcomes.

Design

In the Design phase, advisors and students co-create the actions students need to take to work toward their goals (Bloom et al., 2016). Co-creating a plan with students includes developing concrete, incremental, and achievable goals. The Design phase helps students move from envisioning their future to taking actionable steps to achieve their goals, which may involve identifying resources (Bloom et al., 2013), exploring people in the students'

lives who can help them achieve their goals (Bloom et al., 2013), and the advisor making effective referrals (He et al., 2014).

Brainstorming in Life Design involves collaborative idea generation and the creation of actionable plans in a judgment-free environment (Burnett & Evans, 2016). The focus can be on creativity and engaging many perspectives to solve problems and explore possibilities. Collaboration, creativity, and flexibility in planning are important features of brainstorming. This type of brainstorming can generate a range of potential opportunities for refinement. It can help a student explore a wide range of ideas and possibilities, leading to more innovative and personalized plans. Through brainstorming, an individualized plan that leverages the student's strengths and interests emerges.

Decision-making involves selecting among options that have been explored through brainstorming. Throughout the selection process, advisors and career educators emphasize the importance of creating a structured yet flexible plan. By focusing on flexibility and iteration, the student can adapt as they learn more about themselves and their options. Throughout the design process, students can rely on their advisors and career educators for collaboration and support.

Deliver

In the Deliver phase, advisors support students as they begin to implement the plan developed in the Design phase (Bloom et al., 2013). This step can involve creating follow-up plans (Bloom et al., 2013), identifying strategies to navigate obstacles (Bloom et al., 2016), and energizing students to be their best (Bloom et al., 2008).

Prototyping as a Life Design strategy involves "doing small experiments, meeting people, and exploring your options through hands-on experience" (Burnett & Evans, 2018, p. 98). Prototyping may involve interviewing someone in a career role of interest, shadowing, and exploring short- or long-term internships. As students engage in prototyping, they gather information about themselves and their options, thereby enabling informed decision-making. Students can align their actions with their aspirations, ensuring that they continue building on their experiences to make well-informed decisions for their futures.

Don't Settle

In the Don't Settle phase, advisors and students reflect on the student's accomplishments since the last meeting (Bloom et al., 2016). This phase is often initiated at the beginning of the next meeting and involves comparing the student's planned outcomes from the Deliver phase with the actual outcomes (Bloom et al., 2016). The Don't Settle phase is an opportunity to seek creative ways to accomplish goals (Bloom et al., 2013).

A key component of this phase is fostering a growth mindset. Advisors systematically analyze the challenges and setbacks students face and apply these insights to help them progress. It is important to commend the student for seeking help and to emphasize that they are not alone in their career development. Advisors provide students with connections and strategies and share resources, supporting and validating them as they encounter obstacles. Often, this step involves revisiting design mindsets to help students work through these obstacles.

The Failure Log is a Life Design activity that involves reflecting on an experience that did not go as planned and recording insights into the growth opportunity that emerged (Design Your Life, n.d.). Through this activity, students and advisors can learn from setbacks and continually strive to improve their solutions. Advisors can reframe failures as opportunities for growth and develop resilience by understanding that setbacks are a natural

part of the learning process. Notably, this part is not about lowering expectations; rather, it is about maintaining high expectations and encouraging students to continue moving toward their goals, even when obstacles arise. The Failure Log guided reflection can create space for students to learn from their experiences and recalibrate as they plan their next steps.

Table 1

Alignment of Appreciative Advising and Life Design Frameworks

Appreciative Advising (Bloom et al., 2008)	Life Design (Burnett & Evans, 2016)
Disarm: Make a positive first impression and build rapport to create a safe and welcoming space **Discover:** Ask generative open-ended questions to learn about the student's strengths, skills, and abilities **Dream:** Ask the student about their hopes and dreams for the future	**Be curious:** Be curious about the student. Ask open-ended questions to learn about the student's career ideas, strengths, interests, and abilities. Encourage the student to be curious and invite exploration surrounding their career development. Help the student see there are opportunities everywhere. **Activities:** Good Time Journal (Discover), Workview and Lifeview (Discover), Mind Mapping (Discover), Odyssey Planning (Dream)
Design: Integrate student and advisor knowledge to co-create a plan for making the student's dreams a reality	**Ask for help and reframe problems:** Appreciate the student for reaching out for help. Remind them of the resources available for their career development. Assist them in designing a plan to explore career opportunities. Help the student generate solutions and possibilities. **Activities:** Brainstorming
Deliver: Encourage and support the student as they take action on the co-created plan	**Try stuff:** Provide connections, strategies, and share resources. Support and validate the student as they encounter obstacles. Return to design elements to help them work through obstacles. Encourage the student to continually test out their ideas and adjust along the way. **Activity:** Prototyping
Don't Settle: Advisors and students set their own internal bars of expectations high	**Know it's a process:** Encourage the student to continue being active in iterating on their career development plans. Take experiences as learning opportunities to wayfind. Continue to use the Life Design Mindsets. **Activity:** Failure Log

Innovative Practice

By aligning the guiding frameworks, a solid foundation was established for integrating practices and programming. The purpose of this section is to describe our story of academic advisors and career educators learning about the frameworks of Appreciative Education and Life Design, how program outcomes were aligned, the process for creating a shared outcomes map, and the strategies utilized to maximize the capacity of student success programming.

Learning the Frameworks

We believe that practitioners working together benefit from sharing a common language and voice about their work, which aligns with Larson et al.'s (2018) findings in their analytic induction study on academic advising. The advisors and career educators committed to learning the frameworks used by each team. The academic advising team invited the career education team to present about Life Design at the institution's annual advising conference. Career educators explained the Life Design mindsets and ideated with advisors about how the Life Design concepts could be integrated into advising conversations.

The advising team was awarded a grant to provide Appreciative Advising training through the Appreciative Advising Institute at Florida Atlantic University. Career educators were invited to attend. The advising team created a workbook of Appreciative Advising resources for the career educator team, including seminal Appreciative Advising articles and additional articles on integrating career exploration through Appreciative Advising.

Not only did this learning enhance collaboration, but it also provided each attendee with an entry point into the other's professional communities. The advising team was better able to engage with the practices of career educators. The career education team gained a deeper understanding of advising practice and could more effectively communicate how academic advisors can support students in achieving their career goals. This partnership led to co-created presentations at conferences for career educators, advisors, and first-year experience.

Aligning Outcomes

Through a unit reorganization, the advising team developed outcomes for academic advising. The advising team started by examining the Desirable Student Learning and Development Outcomes articulated by the Frameworks for Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes (Strayhorn, 2006). The advising leadership team identified potential key learning outcomes of academic advising from this document. The advising team created a survey to elicit key stakeholders' views on the scope of academic advising within the broader institutional context.

To identify stakeholders, guiding questions provided by He and Hutson (2016) regarding an Appreciative approach to advising assessment were utilized:

- "Who are the upstream stakeholders, i.e., those who design, implement, manage, and make decisions regarding the advising practices?
- Who are the immediate recipients, i.e., those who participate directly in the advising practices?
- Who are the downstream impactees, i.e., those who are not direct participants but are impacted by the advising practices?" (p. 227).

The survey was sent to the upstream, immediate, and downstream stakeholders. After reviewing the results, the academic advising team discussed which outcomes were aligned with the role and scope of academic advising at the institution. The team identified strengths and interests, clarified values, explored career choices, and set personal and educational goals. Once the advising outcomes were determined, they were shared with divisional leadership, who agreed with the advising team's presentation.

During this period, the career educator team was engaged in a campus-wide project to determine institutional career-learning outcomes. The five institutional career learning outcomes selected were: explore and understand self; understand career pathways; engage in experiential learning; develop social capital; and design and launch career plans.

Creating a Shared Outcomes Map

After selecting the advising outcomes, the leadership team began aligning existing programming with them. First, the team brainstormed a list of all the programs, events, and activities of the advising and career programming. Second, each item was aligned with the learning outcome(s). Third, the advising team met with the career team to review the program map and identify areas for support from career educators in programming. When a new initiative was created, it was added to the shared outcomes map.

Maximizing Our Shared Capacity

With knowledge of each other's frameworks plus a shared program map, each person on the advising and career team was prepared to maximize opportunities for collaboration. For example, the career team designed a course to guide students through a structured process of exploring majors through Life Design activities. When the course became available to students, enrollments exceeded expectations. Because advisors understood the Life Design framework, they served as course facilitators. This helped with navigating scarce resources while supporting both teams in their goal of supporting students. Finally, academic advisors were better positioned to use the tools they needed to help students explore their career and major options.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the academic advising and career educator teams' strategic connections created programming designed for students to bridge their education to their careers and life paths. The shared language to support academic advising and career education across institutional units created an opportunity to have a greater impact on student development. Finally, this partnership created a community for academic advisors and career educators to continue building on the shared programming to continue moving toward unit and institutional goals.

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