

Appreciative Advising and New Student Orientation

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Every summer nearly 2,000 new students, along with their families, attend New Student Orientation (NSO) at South Dakota State University (SDSU) in Brookings, South Dakota. NSO is filled with excitement, anxiety, and an awkwardness that all blend together over a two-day period allowing students to develop initial friendships, explore their majors, learn about SDSU, and register for classes. In the summer of 2015, SDSU implemented Appreciative Advising practices (Bloom, J. L., Hutson, B.L., & He, Y, 2008) in each orientation session. SDSU again incorporated appreciative advising into the 2016 NSO sessions and will continue to use these ideas in 2017. In this article, I provided a brief context of SDSU, described how Appreciative Advising was integrated into the NSO process, and reported preliminary findings regarding the impact of such integration.

Institution Context

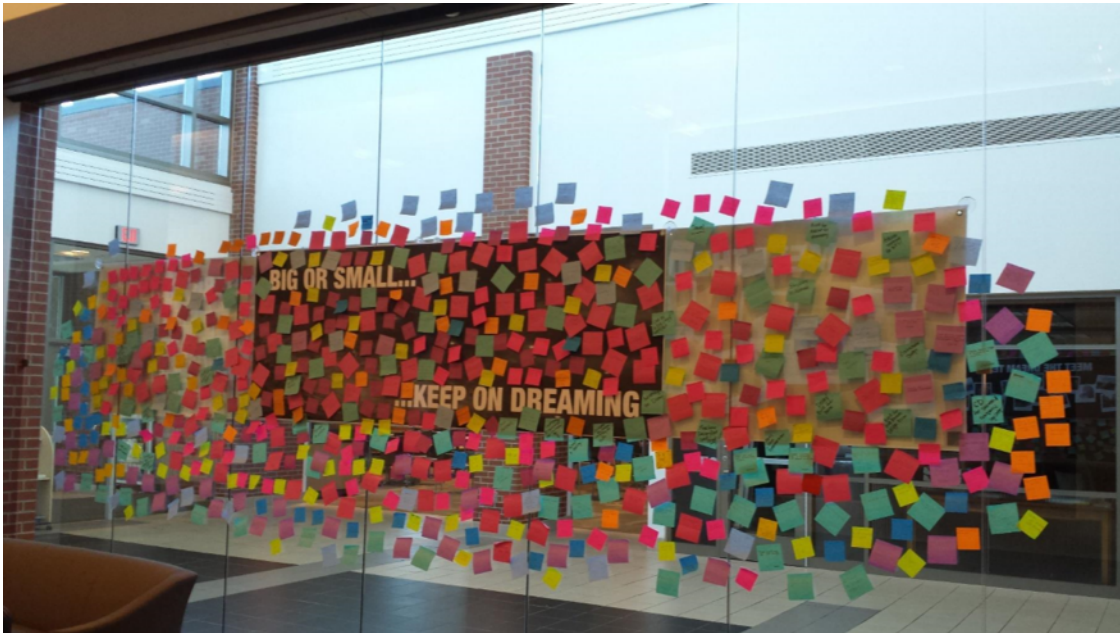
SDSU, a land-grant university that was established in 1881, is home to seven academic colleges, which are *Arts and Sciences*, *Agriculture and Biological Sciences*, *Engineering*, *Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions*, *Nursing*, *Education and Human Sciences*, and *University College* (Facts). These colleges are home to more than 12,500 students (SDBOR Fall Enrollment Dashboard) who come from a variety of backgrounds, including very small towns of fewer than 250 people to large metropolitan areas such as Minneapolis and Chicago.

Orientation at SDSU primarily takes place in June and July. Each session welcomes about 250 students to campus with 80 percent of those students bringing family along. Dozens of information sessions, booths, and presentations take place throughout the two-day event. The sessions are hosted by 25 Orientation Leaders who are current students. They are assisted by professional orientation staff, campus administration, and professional and faculty advisors. There are lots of moving pieces that work together to ensure successful orientation sessions throughout the summer.

Integration of Appreciative Advising

Appreciative Advising is not new to the SDSU campus. The First Year Advising Center and other professional advisors have been working with Appreciative Advising since the 2013-2014 academic school year. However, 2015 was the first summer when Appreciative Advising was integrated as part of NSO. That spring, two professional advisors, who had previously attended the Appreciative Advising Institute, visited an orientation leader training and presented on appreciative advising. The presentation focused on *Disarming*, *Discovering*, and *Dreaming*. The Orientation Leaders completed the "Daring Dreams Delivered" activity and discussed their dreams in small groups. The responses from the Orientation Leaders were mostly positive, but we also faced some skepticism considering the application of the theory. The main concern was: Would the students attending orientation think the exercise was pointless and a waste of time? It was ultimately decided, however, to incorporate Appreciative Advising into NSO as much as possible.

Once the Orientation Leaders made the decision to integrate Appreciative Advising, the creative ideas and energy surged. Buttons that read "Ask Me About My Dream" were created for the Orientation Leaders to wear. A "Dream Wall" was created where student-attendees wrote their dream on a sticky note and posted it on the wall for everyone to see. This all created a culture that allowed new students to imagine the possibilities right at the beginning of their academic career at SDSU.



Aside from all the creative activities, NSO attendees completed the "Daring Dreams Delivered" activity (See Appendix), on the first day of Orientation with their Orientation Leaders. The "Daring Dreams Delivered" activity was an activity that we borrowed from the Appreciative Advising Institute which our advisors had previously attended. The worksheet is based on Shoes Johnson's Dream Activity as well as John Maxwell's "Passion Scale." Once each college room was turned over to the professional and faculty advisors, the discussion focused on "Discovering, Dreaming, and Designing." Each college implemented it differently. The *College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences* talked about different paths their alumni have taken to reach their career goals and activities they participated in to help position themselves in their current career. *University College* had students explore their passions and identify campus resources that would support them. The other five academic colleges also had unique activities and discussions in their respective rooms. Though each academic college was different, the point was still made clear: This was each student's opportunity to dream and design for their future, and the faculty and staff of SDSU were there to help along the way. Overall, most students participated in these activities. No student was forced to participate and there was reinforcement that it was okay if a student did not recognize his or her dreams right in the moment. However, meaningful conversations took place, majors were changed, and minors were explored to better craft a more personalized experience that helped students ultimately reach their goals and dreams.

Preliminary Findings

The data from the initial graduating class of 2019 was impressive. SDSU’s freshman to sophomore retention jumped from 76.1 percent for the 2014-2015 academic year to 78.6 percent for 2015-2016. We are excited about this trend as we strive to reach our goal of 80 percent retention that was outlined in the IMPACT 2018 campus strategic plan. NSO also requests that students complete a survey on Survey Monkey after they attend Orientation. A question that has consistently been asked through the years is: “After attending Orientation, I’m satisfied SDSU is the best place for me.” From 2013-2016, NSO experienced a nearly a 2 percent gain in satisfaction (see Table 1).

Table 1. After attending Orientation, I’m satisfied SDSU is the best place for me.

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Strongly Agree	63.33%	65.31%	67.18%	69.85%
Agree	29.09%	27.70%	26.36%	24.53%
Total	92.42%	93.01%	93.54%	94.38%

Incorporating Appreciative Advising into NSO was one of several interventions introduced during this time frame. Retention can never be attributed to just one factor as there are many different interventions, conversations, and situations that can affect a student’s decision to persist or depart, but the fact that student satisfaction with SDSU and the year one to year two retention rate both increased after incorporating Appreciative Advising strategies into the NSO program suggests that the Appreciative Advising activities contributed to these positive student outcomes.

Discussion and Implications

Since the 2015 NSO, there have been ongoing discussions about the next step in continuing to incorporate Appreciative Advising into NSO. It has been recommended that more explanation and coaching be provided for the families of the student attendees. In 2015, families were asked during the family social to write their dreams for their students on a flip chart. Not many parents participated in this. It was recommended that there be a “parent dream wall” similar to the one that was created for the students. Families also need to hear that their dream for their student may be different than the dream the student has for themselves. We work to reinforce that this is okay and normal. Parents could be provided with ideas about how they can best support their student and bridge the gap between their dreams. Additionally, faculty advisors have requested more guidance on how to incorporate this. Many professional advisors on campus have attended the Appreciative Advising Institute, but only one faculty advisor has attended. This faculty advisor has been a great resource as we strive to better educate other faculty advisors on campus.

One positive development since the initial launch in 2015 include the decision to display the dream wall sticky notes that the students created at their NSO session. The notes were kept and will be placed on the dream wall during corresponding future graduation ceremonies. Students will have an opportunity to look through the notes to find their own and reflect on how they have changed or grown in their four years at SDSU. In addition, a Students’ Association senator introduced a resolution calling for Appreciative Advising to be incorporated into all faculty and professional advising across campus. The resolution unanimously passed in the Students’ Association and was heard at Faculty Senate. This has created great curiosity and interest about Appreciative Advising across campus. In fact, SDSU hired a new president in May 2016 who believes in the power of imagining. His first year was marked with the phrase “Imagine if I...” This is a beautiful tie-in to the Appreciative Advising model and has really spurred our students, as

well as faculty and staff, to dream big when thinking about their contributions to their community and the greater world.

These ideas can easily be replicated on other campuses. Doing this does require collaboration between departments and academic colleges across campus. Additionally, buy-in from the student Orientation Leaders is key as they are the first impression for incoming students. If the Orientation Leaders don't think "*Discovering, Dreaming, and Designing*" are relevant, neither will the students. Faculty advisors and professional advisors must also be willing to really listen to the students they are working with at orientation. This can be challenging in the fast-paced world of orientation, but it is a huge benefit to both students and advisors if the necessary care is taken.


Conclusion

Incorporating Appreciative Advising into New Student Orientation at South Dakota State University has been a success. There are still opportunities for growth and improvement and there are some colleges that can still do more. However, integrating Appreciative Advising into the student's first experience with advisors and faculty has been beneficial for the student experience. We are excited to see where future partnerships can be developed and what our graduation rates will look like for the class of 2019 versus our past graduation numbers. Does the integration of Appreciative Advising into NSO have an impact that lasts longer than the first year of college? How can we more accurately measure the effects of Appreciative Advising over an academic career? These are questions that we look forward to studying further as we continue incorporating appreciative strategies into advising across campus and New Student Orientation.

References

- Bloom, J. L., Hutson, B.L., & He, Y. (2008). *The appreciative advising revolution*. Champaign, IL: Stipes Pub.
- Facts. (n.d.). Retrieved June 08, 2017, from <https://www.sdstate.edu/about-us/facts>
- SDBOR Fall Enrollment Dashboard. (n.d.). Retrieved June 08, 2017, from <https://www.sdbor.edu/dashboards/Pages/Fall-Enrollment-Dashboard.aspx>

Appendix



**SDSU New Student Orientation
Dreaming Activity Page in
Orientation Guide Booklet**

Now is the time to Dream Big. We mean really big. Maybe you already have a plan in place for college and beyond. Maybe not. Either way, we dare you to think about it more – in a bigger way. Take on the barriers that sometimes make our dreams seem unattainable and ask – what if I had all the money and time I needed; what if my dream was fully supported by those around me; what if I could be anything, see anything and do anything I wanted? Dreaming’s fun, right? Dreaming without limitations is even better. **At SDSU it’s also valued and encouraged.** Why not give it a try? The rules of dreaming big are simple. Don’t get caught up in the impossibilities of your big dreams. Focus on the possibilities instead.

I DARE TO DREAM.

- What are the wildest and craziest dreams you have for your future? _____

- Choose just one of your dreams. Write it here in just one sentence. _____

MY DREAM CHECKLIST. Ask yourself:

3. Is this dream really mine?	YES! ___ NO ___ MAYBE ___	
4. Does my dream impact others?	YES! ___ NO ___ MAYBE ___	
5. How passionate am I about this dream? (choose one)		
10 – My passion is so hot that it sets other people on fire		5 – I can take it or leave it
9 – I cannot imagine my life without my dream		4 – I prefer not to think about it
8 – I willingly sacrifice other important things for my dream		3 – I go out of my way to avoid it
7 – I am fired up by it and often preoccupied with my dream		2 – It’s one of my least favorite things
6 – It’s more like a hobby I enjoy in my spare time		1 – I would choose a root canal over my dream

WHO IS IN MY DREAM CORNER?

- List two people who could help make your dream possible.

MY DREAM ROADBLOCKS.

- What are two potential challenges you expect to face while working toward your dream?
 (a) _____
 (b) _____
- What strategies can you use to manage these challenges?
 (a) _____
 (b) _____

REALIZING MY DREAM.

- What is one thing you can do next semester to get one step closer to your dream? In the next four years at SDSU?

- How will you know when your dream has become your reality?

Based on Shoes Johnson’s Dream Activity as well as Maxwell, J.C. (2009). Put your dreams to the test. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. The Passion Scale is quoted directly from p. 84 of Maxwell’s book.