Establishing a Faculty-Driven, College-Wide Appreciative Education Committee

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Abstract

This article details the mission, vision, goals, and timeline for establishing a college-wide Appreciative Education Committee at a community college experiencing rapid growth and change. The drive stemmed from a need to unify the plethora of disconnected Appreciative Advising initiatives being supported by the college along with the need to further support faculty in the implementation of these strategies and techniques in teaching and learning. It was imperative that the faculty initiating this committee work in unison with other faculty, staff, and administrators to link these meaningful activities to build an institutional culture of Appreciative Education that supports student success. Although faculty have numerous opportunities to engage in various committees, establishing a grassroots Appreciative Education Committee that was inclusive of all stakeholders and the various initiatives already in place required a strategic plan, holistic engagement, and positive relationships.

Keywords

faculty, multi-campus community college, appreciative education framework

There is no question that any institutional programmatic effort requires a strategic, organizational plan that engages all individuals. In a community college with nearly 60,000 students, five campuses, five centers, and thousands of faculty and staff, initiating a college-wide Appreciative Education Committee was no small feat. It required the ability to identify the strengths, needs, and opportunities of the various Appreciative Advising college-wide initiatives that were already in place. The committee recognized how the Appreciative Education (AE) framework could help faculty, staff, and administrators to accomplish co-created goals to optimize performance and deliver a high-quality education on both an individual and organizational level (Bloom et al, 2013).

At this college, the Academic Planning Coach Program was at the center of the Appreciative Advising initiatives. This program is designed to provide additional assistance to first-time-in-college students who desire extra support and mentoring from a faculty member. The program is critical in assisting students to formulate strategies for overcoming challenges in course planning and selection, registration, and navigation of the college environment. Although academic advisors and faculty are both key players in the program, the majority of the participants are faculty. Thus, one of the major foci of this faculty-driven committee is leveraging the AE resources to support faculty to be on par with the level of support academic advisors are receiving.

Identifying the gaps and the needs of the Appreciative Advising initiatives was essential in setting up a starting point to scale up the activities and resources needed to reach faculty beyond the Academic Planning Coach Program. It was also necessary to recognize and differentiate between programmatic activities that had matured and those that were under development or still needed to be developed so that the committee could have a better grasp

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of their chief focus. For instance, the coordination of workshop schedules is considered a matured activity because it has proven to be successful in reaching staff, faculty, and advisors at various times of the day and week; however, the format delivery of the workshops is an activity that is still under development because only face-to-face formats have been programmed and offered thus far. Webinars and online workshops have not been embraced as much as face-to-face workshops; nonetheless, recent changes, mandates, and guidelines in group gatherings have placed online learning at the forefront, thus online and virtual workshops have become a priority of the committee.

Moreover, it will continue to be crucial for the committee to pause, reflect, and loop back to assess how these operational activities are being implemented, and more importantly, how they are being perceived by those directly involved. Fundamentally, any grassroots effort should consider all who will be impacted directly or indirectly. For this reason, the Appreciative Education Committee currently includes faculty, staff, administrators, and students. To unify all of these stakeholders, it was vital to establish committee roles and responsibilities based on actions that exhibit behaviors of an Appreciative Mindset (Bloom et al, 2013). Through collective dialogue and learning, the vision is to create an institutional AE culture that supports students from admission to completion through theory-to-practice appreciative teaching and learning strategies, activities, and techniques, which are built on the phases of Appreciative Advising.

College Strategic Goals and Initiatives

The college's strategic goal to create an increasingly welcoming environment for students, community members, faculty, and staff combined with the college's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) have led to the creation and development of numerous programs and initiatives. The QEP is a requirement for accreditation and its focus at the college is to shift the culture of advising. One major initiative of the college's QEP is the Academic Planning Coach Program. Although the college has a centralized Academic Advising office at each of its campuses, and students may meet and work with any of the academic advisors, the Academic Planning Coach Program was designed to provide additional support to interested students. Faculty and students participate in the program voluntarily. Although academic advisors are appointed to the program, other interested academic advisors can participate as well. Table 1 displays the program's outreach and participation activities.

To provide a holistic and comprehensive academic planning support system for students, faculty coaches are paired with an academic advisor. Faculty coaches and academic advisors work collaboratively to help their assigned students articulate their goals and take tangible steps toward completing them. While academic advisors engage students in strategic course planning and schedule forecasting and ensure that students understand academic policies and procedures, faculty coaches help students to explore possible career paths and degree plans, direct them to the numerous student resources available on campus, and provide them with guidance on how to complete their degree efficiently at the college or transfer to a university. Figure 1 displays the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors and academic planning faculty coaches.

This unique partnership has been essential to shifting the culture of advising. The opportunity to work jointly has not only enhanced the knowledge and awareness academic advisors and faculty coaches roles in students' academic planning experiences, but also and equally importantly, it has overall strengthened the relationship between the offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The relationships have proven to be fruitful as they have overall increased students' satisfaction with advising.

Nonetheless, the rapid growth and changes the college has experienced since the implementation of the Academic Planning Coach Program have unquestionably impacted programmatic efforts. In the past five years, the program has grown from 60 faculty members to over 137 and the number of academic advisors and administrators involved as well as the number of students participating in the program has doubled.
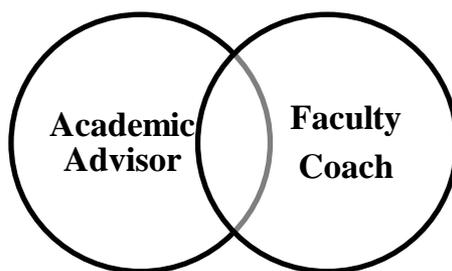
Table 1. Academic Planning Coach Program Outreach and Participation

Students	• Students learn about the academic planning coach program at student orientation, from academic advisors, faculty coaches, other coaching students, friends, and email outreach blasts. • Interested students voluntarily sign up for the program and complete the enrollment form. • Students are matched with faculty coaches based on campus, interests, and academic and career goals. • Students are also matched to the academic advisor assigned to their faculty coach.
Faculty Coaches	• Faculty coaches learn about the academic planning coach program from their deans and other faculty coaches, and at new faculty orientation. • Interested faculty coaches voluntarily sign up to work with students they feel most prepared to support. • Deans receive a list of prospective faculty coaches for approval. • Faculty coaches select students based on the interests and the academic and career goals students have identified. • Faculty coaches are also matched to an academic advisor at their campus.
Academic Advisors	• Supervisors or deans appoint academic advisors to assist with the program; interested academic advisors may also request approval from their supervisor or dean to assist with the program. • Academic advisors are matched with faculty coaches based on campus location and number of faculty to ensure even distribution.

Although the Academic Planning Coach Program is just one of the five QEP initiatives focused on increasing students' completion rates and satisfaction with advising, it has been essential in helping to increase students' awareness of the other QEP initiatives. Faculty coaches and academic advisors have been instrumental in communicating, exposing, and facilitating all the resources that have been developed as a result of the other QEP initiatives such as the redesign of the advising office space, a new academic planning syllabus, new degree audit tool, and the redesign of the website, which directs students to admission, registration, and financial resources. The QEP initiatives have enhanced the culture of advising and impacted the college's environment by increasing students' overall satisfaction with advising and completion rates.

In short, this fast evolution of the program has not only significantly increased faculty and student participation, but more importantly, it has also increased the focus of the program's goal and outcome, which is to create a long-term, sustainable culture of advising that is consistent and contextual to the diverse needs of the populations each campus serves.

Figure 1. Academic Advisors and Academic Planning Faculty Coaches Roles and Responsibilities

Academic Advisors	Faculty Coaches
• Assist new and undecided students select a field of study. • Provide information about classes and programs, sequencing, and prerequisites. • Provide recommendations for registration. • Provide information about academic requirements and policies. • Provide information on procedures for dropping a class, appealing grades, and registration. • Assist students in establishing a degree plan and running degree audits. • Provide transfer information for those planning to attend a four-year institution.	• Assist in establishing academic goals. • Refer students to appropriate academic support services. • Discuss strategies to manage homework and class schedule. • Prepare students for the registration process. • Provide guidance on Add/Drop Form for Early Registration. • Work with students on career options for the program or major of their choice. • Provide guidance on transfer information to four-year institutions.

Identifying the Need to Develop a More Intentional Plan

To sustain this joint commitment, faculty, staff, and administrators knew that a strategic plan that went beyond the 'in-house' developed workshops was critical and timely. To improve the professional development opportunities for faculty, advisors, and administrators, the college made available conference scholarships that allowed them to attend state and national conferences focused on academic advising and mentorship. Although the knowledge and skills these colleagues were bringing to the college were well received and the engagement of faculty and staff was sustained, there was little to no follow-up on the level of implementation of what was being learned. Without an intentional, constructive plan for implementing strategies and techniques learned, it was difficult to determine the level of fidelity in which these strategies and techniques were being implemented. The plan also lacked a support strategy for faculty and academic advisors who needed assistance to implement these strategies and techniques. What the team of faculty, advisors, and administrators leading this effort realized is that the 'in-house' professional development was not sufficient. What was needed was a structured approach guided by evidence-based practices.

Initial Steps for Integrating the Appreciative Education Framework

Although there had been some level of exposure to Appreciative Advising through the various workshops held at the college, faculty, advisors, and administrators did not have a deep grasp on how the Appreciative Advising model could assist the program team's efforts. A comprehensive list of practices, strategies, and techniques is what the team felt was needed to strengthen and sustain the culture of advising throughout the college. During the summer of that year, with the approval of administrators at the college, the QEP director secured funding to send a team of six, which included faculty, advisors, and an administrator to the Appreciative Advising Institute at Florida Atlantic University. Upon their return, administrative leadership asked the team to form an Appreciative Advising Task Force. The purpose of the task force was to advise leadership on how to effectively implement the various evidence-based practices of the model.

The task force first developed and administered a survey to faculty and staff to identify strengths, needs, and areas targeted for improvement. Survey data showed that the majority of faculty and staff wanted to learn more about Appreciative Advising and would be interested in participating in future professional development specific to the model. Next, the task force planned a year-long professional development series that included a one-day conference with guest speakers and experts on Appreciative Advising along with a variety of workshops that were offered throughout the academic year. Workshop content centered on each of the phases of the model. Both the conference and workshops were a huge success. The conference attendance was at maximum capacity. Administrators in Student Affairs coordinated work schedules so that all academic advisors attended the conference and as many workshops as possible. The task force ensured that the workshops were offered multiple and at varied times to provide more options for faculty, staff, and administrators. Feedback collected from participants revealed that the workshops were positively impacting their knowledge and skills. For example, when asked about the best part of the workshop, one administrator stated, "The insight of what my new role is and how I will be able to help and understand students." An academic advisor also stated that "the most beneficial part of the workshop was the discussion of the six phases of appreciative advising." Moreover, a faculty member shared the following comment, "While I feel I've always naturally leaned towards an appreciative advising-style of service, this helped me pinpoint it and gave me more direct goals to work towards." This feedback energized the task force members to continue to strengthen the implementation of the model and launched a marketing campaign. This campaign included magnets with the Appreciative Advising model, posters, and banners. Although the marketing campaign was designed to be inclusive of all faculty and staff, it was more feasible to engage advisors than faculty in these efforts due to the smaller proportion of faculty who were exposed to the model compared to advisors.

Recognizing the Need for Faculty Support

After three consecutive years of sending faculty, advisors, and administrators to attend the Appreciative Advising Institute, there was no shortage of creative ideas on how to continue to engage faculty in learning about the model, and equally important, on how to implement it with consistency. Still, faculty felt that not enough resources and support were being made available to assist them in the implementation of the model. They expressed a need for strategies and techniques that they could use in their classrooms and during one-on-one meetings with students. With the majority of conference and workshop participants being faculty, two faculty members who had attended the Appreciative Advising Institute felt the need to do something different and more robust. Working cooperatively with the existing members of the Appreciative Advising task force as well as other faculty, advisors, and

administrators, they researched, planned, and executed a proposal to establish a college-wide committee focused on Appreciative Education. Figure 2 displays the timeline of institutional efforts leading to the formation of the Appreciative Education Committee.

Figure 2. Timeline of the Formation of the Appreciative Education Committee

2016
Faculty, advisors, and administrators attend Appreciative Advising Institute

2016-2019
Appreciative Advising workshops are offered at the college

2019-2020
Appreciative Education Committee is formed and proposed

2016
Appreciative Advising task force is formed

2019
Appreciative Advising task force members join faculty to propose a district-wide committee

2020
Appreciative Education Committee is established

Forming the Appreciative Education Committee from the Ground Up

To bring the existing initiatives under one structure and to provide a more systemic support for all stakeholders, two faculty members proposed to form a college-wide Appreciative Education Committee. Faculty initiated the process by bringing members of the task force and other faculty, advisors, and administrators together to build a committee centered on strengthening the institutional culture of Appreciative Education to support student success and enhance programmatic practices.

Although faculty members engage in numerous committees and activities, establishing an Appreciative Education Committee from the ground up that was inclusive of all stakeholders required not only a strategic design and holistic engagement, but also collaborative relationships. Several planning meetings were held to reflect on what initiatives and activities had already been successfully implemented, what was still being developed, or what still needed to be developed to further support the faculty. The thought and goal behind every effort was to utilize the AE framework to raise the internal bar for student support among faculty, advisors, and administrators to optimize the educational experiences of our students. Guided by the AE framework, the committee designed a mission and a vision statement. Designing the mission and vision statements for the committee was a collaborative and inclusive process that involved collecting input from the stakeholders at all campuses, reflecting on that input, and narrowing the focus. Finalizing the mission and vision statements required several drafts and revisions to ensure the alignment of committee goals with the college's mission, core values, and strategic plan (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mission and Vision Statement

Appreciative Education Committee Mission Statement	To motivate leadership, faculty, and advisors to adopt an appreciative mindset that further empowers us to focus on students' strengths and holistic experiences.
Appreciative Education Committee Vision Statement	Our vision is to empower a growth mindset for students, faculty, and staff at the college using innovative Appreciative Education approaches.

The committee's mission and vision are tied to the college's strategic goal of maximizing the use of the college's unique resources and talents for the benefit of the students and the communities served. The proposal included an outline of the committee's purpose, participation guidelines, and an evaluation plan. The committee's goal is to promote a culture of AE by facilitating district-wide appreciative inquiry sessions, celebrating AE week, promoting professional development in AE, introducing AE in the new employee orientation, and developing AE guidelines for use by faculty and advisors.

Committee Participation and Member Expectations

To strengthen the commitment of all stakeholders, sustain the proposed activities, and ensure a continuous model of engagement in the implementation of AE, it was important that the committee established roles, responsibilities, and expectations. The Appreciative Education Committee includes faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Faculty and staff are recommended by their supervisors or deans to serve two-year rotating terms. Ex-officio administrators from the offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs are selected by their peers to serve two-year terms as liaisons for their areas. Students are nominated by student organization advisors and faculty coaches and serve one-year terms. Every two years the committee officers, which include a chair, co-chair, secretary, and treasurer, will be nominated by and voted on by the members of the committee. The co-chair/chair-elect will serve as "chair-in-training" during the two-year time frame. All officers will transition at the conclusion of the second-year term. The committee will hold eight meetings a year with the expectation that committee members will attend the majority of them either in person or virtually. Committee members are also expected to commit to the disarm phase by fostering collaboration, collegiality, respect, and trust among themselves; discover new ways to support each other and students; dream big by creating shared visions for student success; design measurable action plans to provide student support; deliver a commitment for maintaining a "students-first" attitude that supports and encourages students to achieve their goals; and commit to the don't settle phase by continually raising the internal bar for student support.

In addition to promoting the committee's vision and mission, the committee members are responsible for the following duties:

1) Familiarize new faculty with the AE framework by conducting an introductory AE presentation at the start of every semester.
2) Plan, develop, and propose a module on AE to be included in the college's New Employee Orientation.
3) Plan AE hands-on workshops for faculty who are already familiar with the AE framework but need guidance on its practical implementation.
4) Create and maintain an internal webpage containing links to existing AE framework resources so that they are easily accessible.
5) Plan and organize an Appreciative Education Week to promote and celebrate student success.
6) Most importantly, help faculty with the implementation of the AE framework by providing the following resources:
   a. a repository of appreciative inquiry questions to be used by faculty, advisors, and administrators in their interactions with students;
   b. a repository of best practices to implement the AE framework in the classroom, the advising area, and in administrative practice;
   c. a collection of Appreciative Education resources for the library; and
   d. a series of virtual book club and brown bag meetings to provide a common platform

for all the stakeholders to discuss books and articles on appreciative education, share their thoughts, and generate new ideas for student support and success.

Committee Evaluation

To measure the committee's progress and desired outcomes, the committee in conjunction with administrative leadership will create internal feedback surveys. To monitor the implementation of the AE framework, the committee officers will also conduct the following evaluation activities:

1) Track participation of faculty, advisors, administrators, and students at orientations, workshops, and Education Week activities, to name a few.
2) Administer surveys to workshop participants to collect feedback on knowledge and skills gained, along with recommendations for future presentations and topics.
3) Gather feedback on existing repositories and recommendations for continuous program improvements.
4) Measure the impact of AE on student learning outcomes (SLOs) and success markers.
   • SLO 1: Students work on developing a plan to achieve their academic goals.
   • SLO 2: Students are able to raise their own internal bar by setting their expectations, identifying strengths, and developing strategies for overcoming challenges.

In summary, the overarching goal of this committee is to add value to the various initiatives by bringing structure, commitment, and an overall plan for the long-term sustainability of the AE framework. The formation of this committee is unquestionably timely as students, faculty, advisors, and administrators are all navigating their way through uncharted waters. The traditional ways of providing student services and classroom teaching and learning have unexpectedly changed as a result of the global pandemic, and the creation of new ways to deliver this same quality of service and learning are crucial and imperative. The principles of AE can be the foundation that supports, shifts, and transitions fears of the unknown into proactive strategies and techniques that reframe problems and challenges into opportunities to explore and learn (Bloom et al., 2011). For these reasons, a major focus of this committee is to adapt the AE framework to current contexts to enhance both online student services and teaching and learning across the college.

Using the Appreciative Advising Framework to Enhance Teaching and Learning

Most community college students never earn a degree or complete a certificate (Bailey, 2017). Despite a wide array of student support services, we have observed that our students face a number of challenges that often impede their academic success such as a lack of a sense of belonging, unpreparedness for college-level work, poor course selection, financial and transportation issues, and work and family responsibilities.

In addition to institutional student support services, it is imperative that faculty members implement and/or maintain effective pedagogical practices to increase student retention and course completion. One of the main purposes of the Appreciative Education Committee is to build an institutional culture of AE and to provide faculty members a theory-to-practice framework by showing how the six phases of Appreciative Advising can be used as a guiding principle to help create an inclusive, supportive, and safe learning environment to enhance teaching and learning at the course level.

Appreciative Advising is "the intentional collaborative practice of asking generative, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials" (Appreciative Advising, n.d.). The Appreciative Advising

framework includes six phases: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle (Bloom et al., 2008). This model has been successfully used in numerous higher education areas other than academic advising such as: student conduct administration (Adams, 2018), leadership (Bloom & McClellan, 2016), orientation (Longshore & Stuessy, 2017), mentoring (McGill & Martinez, 2014), and the formation of a committee for the organization of a guest speaker event for at-risk students (Robinson, 2017).

Guided by the success these various settings have had in using the AE framework to improve programmatic practices, faculty members in the Appreciative Education Committee are working collaboratively to propose instructional practices that effectively incorporate the six phases of Appreciative Advising within the classroom (Bloom et al., 2011). As illustrated below, faculty have used the Disarm phase to create an example of how the techniques and strategies of this phase can be used to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. Examples incorporating each of the six phases are being created for all instructional modalities and learning environments amidst the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

Using the Disarm Phase in Teaching and Learning

The goal of the Disarm phase is to make a positive first impression, build rapport and trust, and create a welcoming and safe atmosphere (Bloom et al., 2008; 2011). The first day of class is the most important day for disarming students and making a good impression that will shape their opinions of the instructor, the course, and classmates for the rest of the semester. Thus, on the first day of class, faculty should focus on creating a warm and inviting learning environment instead of devoting the entire class period to reading and discussing the syllabus and explaining course policies. They need to carefully plan the activities and instructional practices for the first day of class to set a positive tone for the remainder of the semester as well as their expectations of student engagement and learning. Some strategies for the first day of class (Bloom et al., 2011; Gannon, 2016; Lang, 2019) that can effectively disarm students include the following:

- Greet students warmly, introduce yourself and ask students to introduce themselves to their classmates and to you, and try to start learning their names.
- Only discuss the main points of the syllabus and consider giving a syllabus quiz in a subsequent class meeting.
- Engage the students in some of the types of activities that will be a regular part of the course such as a small-group discussion or a minute paper, which will help to reduce students' anxiety about what will be expected of them in the course.
- Show your enthusiasm for the course and spark students' interest in the subject by briefly discussing a particularly interesting or intriguing aspect of the course material. Dispelling negative perceptions that students may have about the subject is particularly important if you teach a required general education course that students may not necessarily be interested in taking and thus, they may show resistance to learning.
- Give students the opportunity to interact individually with you and with their peers to foster a sense of community and belonging to mitigate the anxiety they may have about the course, particularly if you teach a subject that is perceived to be difficult.

One of the key features of the Disarm phase is self-disclosure, so another way for faculty to disarm the students on the first day of class is by briefly sharing some aspects of their academic journey (both triumphs and struggles), which humanizes them and builds trust and rapport with the students. It is up to each faculty to decide whether to share any

information about their academic life, but sharing their enthusiasm for and interest in their subject and its relevance to the students' personal, academic, and career interests can help to dispel misconceptions that the students may have about the course.

Another important factor faculty need to consider disarming students is the level of authority they would like to project. This consideration is particularly significant for women and minority faculty members, whose authority, competence, qualifications, and teaching effectiveness are more likely to be challenged by some students (Boring et al., 2016; Lang, 2019; Mitchell & Martin, 2018; Whitaker, 2017). Thus, some faculty members may consider a brief discussion of where they earned their graduate degree and how their scholarly and research interests and activities inform their teaching in general and their pedagogical reasons behind the course expectations and policies.

Besides disarming the students, faculty members need to disarm themselves by questioning their assumptions and becoming aware of their cultural knowledge limitations to ensure an inclusive environment for culturally and linguistically diverse students (He et al., 2014). For example, making an effort to correctly pronounce the names of students who have non-English names, conveys a message of inclusion and respect. Similarly, to establish a positive relationship with students it is equally important for faculty members to be mindful of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal behaviors (He et al., 2014). Faculty members also need to disarm themselves by not allowing their assumptions about students' abilities influence their teaching and their expectations about students' academic performance (Whitaker, 2017).

As mentioned above, committee members are creating instructional practices informed by the six phases of Appreciative Advising. These instructional practices will include examples of activities and strategies that can be adapted to all disciplines and instructional modalities. These practices incorporate cognitive, metacognitive, and affective features of Appreciative Education to improve student success. This framework, which encourages "educators to embrace positive mindsets, leverage learners' assets and strengths, and empower learners to take ownership of the learning process for their academic success" (He et al., 2014, p. 1), will serve as a shared evidence-based approach to guide and unite faculty in the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Although still in its initial stages, the Appreciative Education Committee, guided by the six phases of Appreciative Advising, has laid the foundation to serve as a forum and conduit for faculty, advisors, and administrators to work collaboratively to discuss and implement effective and evidence-based practices that improve teaching and learning, focus on students' strengths and holistic experiences, address challenges from a strength-based perspective, and support the College's mission of developing skills, strengthening character, and challenging the intellect.

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