

Appreciative Academic Coaching: Academic Coaching Through the Lens of Appreciative Education

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Abstract

Academic coaching programs are becoming increasingly common across the country due to the recognition that many college-bound and current students need assistance transitioning to college life and the accompanying increased academic rigor (Barkley, 2011). While there are many different coaching models being used across the country, the University of Kentucky has chosen to adapt the 6D's of Appreciative Advising and Education as their coaching framework, naming this adaptation Appreciative Academic Coaching. While many coaching frameworks focus strictly on the in-session coaching-steps, Appreciative Academic Coaching takes both pre- and post- appointments into consideration, setting it apart from other coaching models.

Keywords

appreciative academic coaching, academic coaching, success coach, appreciative advising, appreciative education, 3:1 supports

Academic coaching programs are becoming increasingly common across the country due to the recognition that many college-bound and current students need assistance transitioning to college life and the accompanying increased academic rigor (Barkley, 2011). While there are many different coaching models being used across the country, the University of Kentucky has adapted the 6D's of Appreciative Advising and Education as their coaching framework, named Appreciative Academic Coaching. While many coaching frameworks focus strictly on the in-session coaching-steps, Appreciative Academic Coaching takes both pre- and post-appointments into consideration, setting it apart from other coaching models.

The Appreciative Education Framework

Appreciative Education (and the appreciative mindset) frames the Appreciative Academic Coaching Program at UK with the notion that “knowledge is constructed through collaboration” (Bloom, Hutson, He, & Konkle, 2013, p. 6; Hutson & Bloom, 2007). It focuses on the students’ strengths and “embraces ongoing learning, change, and improvement” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 5; Hutson & Bloom, 2007; Truschel, 2008). Taking into consideration Critical Race Theory (CRT) by viewing every student’s culture as a strength, UK’s Appreciative Academic Coaches help students discover and develop their strengths from the first appointment. Coaches assist students to leverage their strengths into action steps to achieve goals (Yosso, 2005).

Within the framework of Appreciative Advising, there are 6 phases, known as the 6 D's (see Figure 1). In order, they are Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle. Rather than a sequential order of steps, they serve as guiding principles (Bloom et al., 2013).

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Figure 1. Appreciative Advising (retrieved from: <http://www.appreciativeadvising.net>)

Overview of the 6 Ds of Appreciative Academic Coaching

The Disarm phase focuses on breaking down power differentials between the coach and the student so that each party feels safe and comfortable. Coaches focus on Albert Mehrabian's "principle of immediacy", which states "people are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian & Diamond, 1971, p. 1). With this in mind, coaches "set the stage," ensuring that all the environments with which the student may come in contact are welcoming. This process includes particular attention to web-presence, the waiting room, and office spaces. Coaches also use immediacy behaviors, such as greeting the student by name in the lobby and walking them to the appointment, smiling, using inclusive pronouns, and engaging in warm small talk to demonstrate investment and caring toward the student (Mehrabian & Diamond, 1971).

The Discover phase emphasizes the use of positive, open-ended questions to guide both the coach and the student to identify the students' strengths. This phase helps to further build the connection between student and coach, with the coach assisting the student in identifying how their current and future skill sets are valued by themselves, others, and the University. The coach, by asking curious, nonjudgmental, open-ended questions, demonstrates to the student that they matter.

During the Dream phase, the student voices their personal goals and visions within their academic careers and beyond. This stage is designed to help students connect long-term goals to the smaller steps that are needed to achieve said goals. Leadership and coaching expert, Dr. John Maxwell, teaches 10 well-designed questions to "unpack" an individual's dream. Together with their coach, each student challenges themselves to answer questions such as, "How do I see my dream clearly?", "What am I willing to sacrifice for my dream?" and "How do my values align with my dream?" (Maxwell, 2011, xxi). By answering these types of curious, open-ended questions, the coach assists the student to gain clarity of their long-term goals. Together, with this "big picture" in mind, the student and coach can engage in the next phase, Design, to develop action-steps to reach this goal.

Figure 2. Setting the Agenda (T.I.M.E.)

T	What is the topic?
I	What is the importance of this topic?
M	How will we measure success?
E	Echo/Establish the Partnership

The fourth phase, Design, is where the student and the coach work together to establish an agenda for the session and develop an action plan that students embark upon to achieve their goals. It should be noted that the 6D's is not a rigid framework, the Design phase occurs in most sessions. At the start of the design phase, coaches use the acronym T.I.M.E. for setting the agenda, shown in Figure 2.

Each action plan is developed through asking powerful nonjudgmental questions to build a working partnership between the coach and student which is tailored to the student's individual needs. Components of an action plan may include: developing detailed time management and planner systems in conjunction with the Study Cycle, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound) goals with action steps, exercises to increase motivation and decrease procrastination, techniques to increase growth mindset, strategies to improve networking, study, and note-taking skills, ways to get involved on campus, and how to build a 3:1 Support System. The session ends with coaches using the W.R.A.P.P. acronym to ensure that the session's goals were met as established at the beginning of the session as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Ending the Session (W.R.A.P.P.)

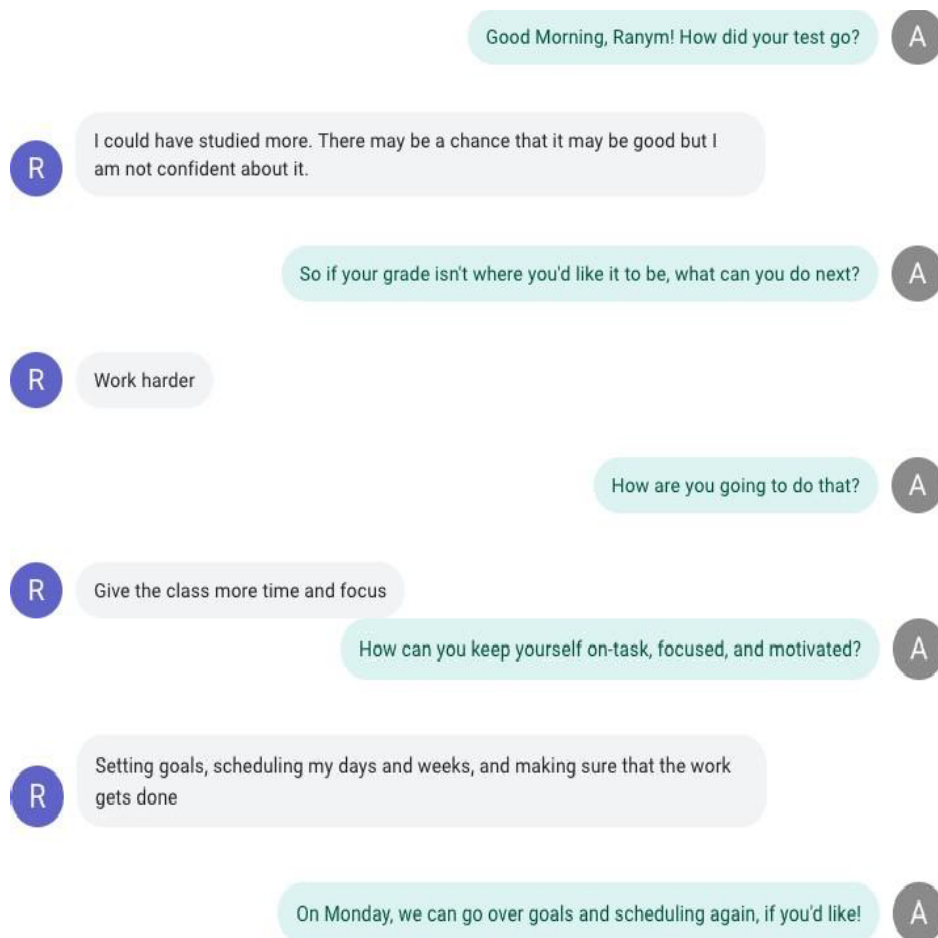
W Wrap-up	"At the beginning of the session, you said you wanted to work on _____. <u>How</u> did we do?"
R Review	"How will completing this goal impact your life?"
A Action	What is the first thing you will do when you leave here today?"
PP Partner & Positive	"I am proud of you!" "How <u>would</u> like to be held accountable?"

The next phase, Deliver, takes place outside of the face-to-face coaching session. During the Deliver phase, students carry out the steps outlined in their action plan and overcome obstacles along the way. With Snyder's (2002) Academic Hope Model in mind, coaches check in through texting, email, video conferencing, and/or additional meetings to engender the student's academic hope (Snyder et al., 2002). During this phase, coaches engage students in growth mindset thinking and statements (Dweck, 2016) by encouraging the students, celebrating successes, and reframing failures as a learning and growth opportunities. Through these ongoing exchanges, the coach and student continue to build their coaching relationship. Students are much more likely to text coaches about their successes and setbacks - allowing the coach to respond quickly. An example of a common text exchange can be found in Figure 4.

The final phase, Don't Settle, encompasses the growth aspect of this framework where students are encouraged to reflect on their challenges and successes in order to improve and move forward, which can happen both face-to-face and through other forms of communication, such as texting (Bloom et al., 2013; Truschel, 2008). During this phase, coaches frame setbacks as a learning process, encourage each student to rise to high rigor, and help hold the student accountable and focused while maintaining positive momentum toward goals. Students begin the Don't Settle process with their coach, but ultimately, students are coached to become self-regulated learners in both college and beyond.

Through this learning process, students are empowered to continuously improve, even when they encounter setbacks or obstacles along the path to achieving their goals.

Figure 4. Text message exchange between a student and their Appreciative Academic Coach



Building Self-Regulated Learners

One of the fundamental tenets of the Appreciative Academic Coaching Program is to encourage self-regulation within students throughout each step of the Appreciative Academic Coaching process. The interactions between the Appreciative Academic Coaches and students are typically positive and action-oriented—this is to ensure that the relationship between coach and student is a working partnership in which both parties are equally invested in the outcomes (Truschel, 2008). By using the 6 D's as a framework for these interactions, the Appreciative Academic Coaching Program helps students view each success, no matter how small, as an integral part of their growth and maturation as students and individuals.

Coaches encourage and empower students to continuously evaluate their own progress throughout their studying, rather than waiting for examinations to evaluate them. This self-monitoring enables students to take control of their own studying and helps them uncover the best methods of studying for their various classes. This, in turn, aids students in managing their time more effectively as it cuts down on inadequate or insufficient study strategies (Cohen, 2012).

The process of self-regulation is “cyclical in that the feedback from prior performances is used to adjust one’s current approach” (Cohen, 2012, p. 892). This takes place in three separate steps: forethought, performance/volitional control, and self-reflection. The first phase, forethought, “precedes action, and includes components such as goal setting and motivational beliefs” (Cohen, 2012, p. 893). The Appreciative Academic Coaching Program utilizes the first steps, Disarm, Dream, and Discover, in order to discern the students’ strengths and areas of interest. The coach guides the student into reflecting upon their past academic experiences—the student begins to think about what might and might not have worked in the past to formulate a plan for the future. With guidance from the coach, they are then able to set specific goals and develop techniques to achieve them.

The second phase of self-regulation, performance/volitional control, “includes the efforts to sustain attention and action” (Cohen, 2012, p. 893). During meetings with the Appreciative Academic Coach, students create an action plan wherein the steps to achieve their goal are laid out. They also are prompted to reflect on different obstacles they may face while working on their action plan. This allows students to give thought on how to overcome obstacles before they arise. Students are accountable for following through on their action plan, but they have the advantage of already having considered complications beforehand so that they are prepared to face them during the semester. The coaches stay in contact with students to keep track of their progress—they might also step in to offer their observations if the student requires it.

Self-reflection, the final phase, “involves the appraisals of one’s performance” (Cohen, 2012, p.893). Many study strategies coaches give to students include some form of self-monitoring and engagement in self-regulated learning. Coaches partner with students to regularly evaluate themselves and their progress to determine whether their study habits are enabling them to learn material—it is through this process that students are able to identify their best study strategies for various types of content matter. It also allows students to become active participants in their own learning, whether inside or outside the classroom.

Further, engaging in self-regulation guides students toward personal self-discovery (Truschel, 2008). When students first begin working with a coach, they are likely to be dependent on the perceived expertise of the coach to give them their tools and lay out a strategy for success. However, by encouraging students to explore their strengths and find ways to utilize them for academic success, coaches can use self-regulation to steer students toward self-authorship and defining themselves. After these initial interactions to build up students’ confidence, the coach can begin to move the sense of control back to the student and empower them to create their own goals and plan how to achieve them (Truschel, 2008). By giving the student a sense of control, the coach enables them to trust their own instincts and that they know what is best for themselves. This helps students to define themselves in the context of academics and to identify who they are at UK (Baxter Magolda, 2014).

All of the efforts on the part of the Appreciative Academic Coaching Program at UK are aimed towards supporting students to become independent, lifelong learners. Coaching at the beginning is usually more frequent as students are less experienced in the college environment. Students are then empowered to take charge of their educational experiences. To create an attitude of lifelong learning, students are taught to monitor their own learning and evaluate themselves proactively, rather than wait for an examination that is much more high stakes. The skills students learn can also be applied outside of the classroom and the educational environment (e.g., self-reflection and identifying support systems) in order to provide a pathway to becoming more well-rounded and address the needs of the “whole student”.

Future Steps

As the “non-traditional” student transforms into the “traditional” student (Nadworny & Depenbrock, 2018), universities are challenged to meet students where they are. The University of Kentucky Appreciative Academic Coaching Program, through the framework of Appreciative Education is poised to meet all students where they are and empower them to be successful in college and beyond. First, coaching will continue to increase the coaching presence across the university. Second, coaching will increase collaborations within the campus community and community-at-large through partnerships and grants. This will include establishing an Integrated Coaching Model (cross-training our professional coaches across the dimensions of career, academics, financial, leadership, identity and wellness). As an effort to create a coaching culture across our campus, the coaching program will also provide training to all members of the campus community on foundational coaching and referral skills. The UK Appreciative Academic Coaching Program will publish and develop materials to set benchmarks in the Academic Coaching profession and pursue Approved Coach Specific Training Hours (ACSTH) accreditation from the International Coach Federation.

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