Building Academic Strengths:
Using BCSSE for Strengths-Based Advising
Building Academic Confidence

Characteristics of academic confidence:

• Student has control over their own learning
• Student has experienced success at difficult tasks
• Student can apply successful experiences to future challenges
• Student does not avoid challenging tasks
Basics of Strengths-Based Advising

Schreiner (2013):

• Deficit remediation vs. strengths development
• Focus on talents and personal assets
• Associated with engaged learning, higher grades, and overall satisfaction

Basics of Strengths-Based Advising

- Work with students to help recognize their own strengths
- Nurture intrinsic motivation by helping students to identify current strengths and ways they can enhance them → self-efficacy
- Strength-development motivates students to persevere and overcome obstacles → academic confidence

Leveraging Strengths

Advisors should help students “leverage talents to address obstacles that may emerge in the future” (Schreiner, 2013).

1. Goal is to identify and reinforce academic strengths that are specific and meaningful for that student
2. Identify academic challenges that indicate low confidence
3. Leverage academic strengths when addressing low confidence
Confidence in Context

Confidence is best understood when contextualized or “situated”.

For instance, understanding confidence specific to a major or a course is much more informative when considering how to help.
Strengths-based advising (SBA) and advising entering, first-year students

- Strengths are also best understood when contextualized or “situated”.
- Strengths can be *general* (e.g. spent a lot of hours studying), or *specific* to a task or situation (e.g., “I am a really good writer”)

BCSSE and SBA
BCSSE and SBA

Leveraging Academic Strengths
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Identifying Academic Strengths

Complete AP courses! Great. Indicates this student completed a challenging high school curriculum.

Studied a fair amount in HS, but really expects to increase studying in FY.

Student was using effective learning strategies. Very important for continued FY success.
Making friends (aka, “social integration”) is critical for a successful FY.

Group study, group projects, and other forms of peer collaboration are all part of good learning habits.

Support to help you succeed academically

This student also realizes that it is important that the institution provide support. Students that realize this will often be the ones to seek help when needed.
Student expects learning to be difficult. Remind student that they have successfully completed difficult courses in the past (e.g., AP courses).

This person is confident interacting with peers, but lacks confidence to ask for help from faculty. Develop plan for seeking help that builds on strengths.

This student may be better prepared than they realize. Help her connect with academic work in high school where these skills were needed.
Leveraging Academic Strengths in a Major
On your campus, the business program is writing intensive. What strengths is this studying entering with and what challenges can be anticipated?
Business Major and SBA

Identifying Academic Strengths

This student has completed several AP courses. After discussing these course with the student, you find that two were writing intensive.

| AP courses | 9-10 |

This student was challenged and successful. Discuss with the student their experiences with writing as part of this challenge. Knowing how to manage challenge is a definite strength.
Business Major and SBA

Identifying Low Confidence

This student does not feel very confident about his writing. Ask them to describe the successful writing strategies they used in high school that were successful.

First-year students are often intimidated by faculty. “Teach” them how to approach and communicate with faculty. Ask the student to consider how they approached high school teachers. Is it really that different?
The Role of Advising in SBA

Positive Feedback

- Emphasize to students the ability to be successful
- Positive reinforcement
The Role of Advising in SBA

Positive Feedback
- Emphasize to students the ability to be successful; positive reinforcement

Encourage Mastery
- Challenging activities promote cognitive development
- Success takes effort, but also a supportive environment; make sure they know how to find help
The Role of Advising in SBA

Positive Feedback
- Emphasize to students the ability to be successful; positive reinforcement

Encourage Mastery
- Challenging activities promote cognitive development; success takes effort and support

Define Success in Terms of Improvement
- Discourage comparing performance to others
- Do point out “good habits” of those that are successful
The Role of Advising in SBA

Positive Feedback
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Encourage Mastery
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Define Success in Terms of Improvement
- Discourage comparing performance to others; do point out “good habits” of those that are successful

Keep Challenges in Perspective
- Help students recognize when they are successful
- **Point out previous successes**
- Discuss reasons for past “failures”

Adapted from *Educational Psychology: Developing Learners* (Ormrod, 2013)
Students don’t need to feel like they are going it alone.
Advisors, faculty, and staff play a key role in helping students to gain the confidence to say, “I can do that”.