



JOURNAL OF  
**ACADEMIC ADVISING**

Issue 2  
Winter 2020

IN THIS  
EDITION:

**JOURNEY BEFORE DESTINATION:  
PATHWAYS IN ACADEMIC ADVISING**

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Indiana University

Herman B Wells Library, 002

1320 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street

Bloomington, IN 47405

Phone: (812) 855-6768

E-mail: [jaadiv@indiana.edu](mailto:jaadiv@indiana.edu)

Website: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/jaa/index>

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## From the Editors-in-Chief

**Mathew Bumbalough & Adrienne Sewell**

The *Journal of Academic Advising* (JAA) is a peer-reviewed and open access publication that provides a forum for academic advisors and advising directors to publish and highlight their research in all facets of academic advising. We want to specifically say thank you for the work that our editorial team has put into making this issue a possibility, and for all of the submissions we received from our authors. Without them, this would not be possible. We also had many more reviewers for this issue, making all of our tasks much more manageable.

In this issue, we put out a specific call for papers, focused on the possibility of critical advising. So often as advisors it becomes easy to focus solely on the institutional policies and become gatekeepers of arcane rules and regulations. How then do we liberate ourselves from these roles and moving toward critical examination and reflection? That is to say, how so we as advisors view ourselves and our students as humans pursuing our freedom? Examining this notion through critical advising, our authors in this issue seek to be both reflexive and emancipatory in applying criticality to our profession and interaction with students in the pursuit of becoming critical advisors.

We are excited to publish two articles that best exemplify what the pursuit of democratic outcomes may look like, *Entering Academic Advising: Theorizing Professional Socialization* which focuses

on advisors in particular, and *Advising Pre-Dead Students: The Task of Critical Advising Today*, which focuses more on advisors relationships with students.

The first article, *Entering Academic Advising: Theorizing Professional Socialization*, authored by a team of advisors; Craig McGill, Mark Duslak, and Andrew Puroway, focuses on a reflexive ethnographic analysis of how an advisor 'becomes' and advisor. Their thematic analysis gathered by an auto-ethnographic study provides food for thought in what our profession is becoming, and suggests that the way forward may become less ambiguous as advisors start to draw from standardized initiatives in the profession.

The title of the next article, *Advising Pre-Dead Students: The Task of Critical Advising Today*, may seem a bit macabre on the surface, but is a succinct analysis on the state of advising students with a single-minded approach to college due to outside pressures. Ilya Winham defines critical advising in this case as engaging the student to be more self-reflexive and embrace the existential to find meaning in life (before it is gone).

As we continue our efforts at the *Journal of Academic Advising*, we hope that all readers of this journal will join us in reading and reflecting critically on these articles as we find our way toward what it means to be a critical advisor.

# Entering Academic Advising: Theorizing Professional Socialization

Craig M. McGill, Ed.D.  
Post-doctoral Research Fellow  
University of South Dakota  
Email: [craig.mcgill@usd.edu](mailto:craig.mcgill@usd.edu)

Mark Duslak, M.Ed.  
Associate Dean of Students  
Lake-Sumter State College  
Email: [Duslakm@lssc.edu](mailto:Duslakm@lssc.edu)

Andrew Puroway, Ed.D.  
Associate Director of Academic Counseling  
University of St. Thomas  
Email: [dwpuroway@stthomas.edu](mailto:dwpuroway@stthomas.edu)

*Abstract—Primary-role academic advisors come to the field from a wide variety of social, academic, and vocational backgrounds. There are likely a wide variety of ways these advisors are socialized for the work of academic advising and in the larger community of practice of advising. We present an analysis of our reflections on becoming primary-role advisors through a collaborative autoethnographic study of advisor professional identity. This analysis produced nine interconnecting themes in an emerging substantive theory of advisor professional socialization. Though it is not generalizable, our model is a proposal on which future research can be built.*

**Keywords:** advising profession, professional socialization, collaborative autoethnography, reflective practice, personal component.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional socialization of three academic advisors. Academic advising does not occur in a vacuum; an advisor's backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, knowledge, skills, and dispositions influences their advising practices. Experiences shape practice, which in turn, shape future experiences. Professional socialization describes a process "whereby persons internalize behavioral norms and standards

and form a sense of identity and commitment to a professional field" (Weidman et al. 6). Understanding the professional socialization of academic advisors affords an opportunity to identify components of a process that ultimately shapes the work and effectiveness of academic advisors.

Primary-role academic advisors come from a wide variety of social, academic, and vocational backgrounds. It is not unusual to come to the field mid-career, having never recognizing advising as a viable career option. For advisors, socialization occurs through the influence of immediate colleagues on the local level, the direct student interaction of advising, and in the larger community of practice of academic advising. Given the current status of the field and the predominance of training on campus or departmental levels, there are obvious questions that scholarship in the field must begin to address: How do academic advisors become socialized to the field? What draws them to the field? What processes shape how they develop and commit to the field?

The status of academic advising as a bona-fide profession continues to be debated (Aiken-Wisniewski et al.; McGill "Leaders"; McGill "The Professionalization"). There is much to be unpacked about the use of the word "profession," but in our view, academic advising is an emerging profession. Despite advisor professional socialization being a



critical issue for the field, it has not been the subject of much scholarship. Our study contributes to the understanding of advising as an emerging profession by exploring the formative period of three advisors as they entered the field. Research has delineated values advisors should have, but there has been considerably less emphasis on understanding how life (and professional) experiences shape professional identity, which influences an advisor's work ethic, motivation for learning and continued professional development. In our review of the literature, most of the published scholarship does not explore the personal and professional selves of advisors. We aspire to close this knowledge gap through the use of a collaborative autoethnography (CAE), a research method which, "enables researchers to use data from their own life stories as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of self" (Chang et al. 18). Unlike quantitative or other forms of qualitative inquiry, CAE affords an opportunity to generate a rich autoethnographic record while providing the checks and balances that occur in a collaborative environment. This leads to the generation of data that not only represents the experiences of the individual participant-researcher, but also the collective critical analysis of these individual experiences. Qualitative research is particularly well suited to understanding the professional socialization of academic advisors because there is limited established theory from which other formats of inquiry could be grounded, thereby leading to a necessity for a descriptive, in-depth understanding of the topic.

In this article, we explore our experiences of socialization to the field of academic advising. Understanding professional socialization of advisors informs advisor training and development, ensures that the espoused values for academic advisors are translating in the formative period of their professional career, and can shed light on challenges in the field which have not yet been addressed.

## METHODS

CAE builds on autoethnography, in which a person explores their own unique experiences in the context of their environment (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). As a research method, autoethnography emerged from ethnography, the study of people part of a cultural group. While ethnographers seek to understand the "other," autoethnography acknowledges the role of the self within the environmental context. Autoethnography, therefore, is the study "of

one's own culture and oneself as a part of that culture" (Patton 102). The focus on the self is obviously a feature of biography, but autoethnography is distinguished from autobiography because the study of the self is oftentimes connected to the social science literature.

Autoethnographers use personal stories as windows to the world, through which they interpret how their selves are connected to their sociocultural contexts and how the contexts give meanings to their experiences and perspectives. Intentional and systematic consideration of various autobiographical data give rise to autoethnographic interpretation that transcends mere narration of their past to help researchers reach explanations of the sociocultural phenomena connected to the personal. (Chang et al. 18)

CAE is like other forms of qualitative research involving self-exploration, allowing unique access to internal mental events with the added layers of collaborative critical questioning and support. Thus, because the researcher is also the subject/participant of the study, it is important to position ourselves as participant-researchers. All three of us are white, cisgender, temporarily able-bodied men who began this project as primary-role academic advisors working in higher education institutions. See Table 1.

Table 1 – PARTICIPANT-RESEARCHER CHARACTERISTICS

	Craig (37)	Mark (36)	Drew (39)
States lived in	Nebraska, Florida, South Dakota	Illinois, Wisconsin, Florida	Minnesota, Wisconsin, Colorado, New Hampshire
Additional salient identity characteristics	Single, gay, feminist, orphan, uncle, musician, scholar, qualitative researcher	Married, father, heterosexual, liberal, atheist	Middle class, father, musician, Lutheran-ish,
Education: Bachelor's (B) Master's (M) Doctorate, (D)	B: Music; English; Communication; Film Studies M: Music Theory; Academic Advising D: Adult Education & Human Resource Development	B: Psychology; Social Welfare M: School Counseling; Educational Leadership D: Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (expected: 2021)	B: Music Education M: Student Affairs in Higher Education D: Educational Leadership

This study involved four processes of reciprocal data collection and analysis. Initially, we answered a series of 25 questions. Process two brought us together to discuss the convergences and divergences of our writing. This allowed us to critically question and examine our responses, using the conversations themselves as further data. In the third process, we coded the written data while drawing

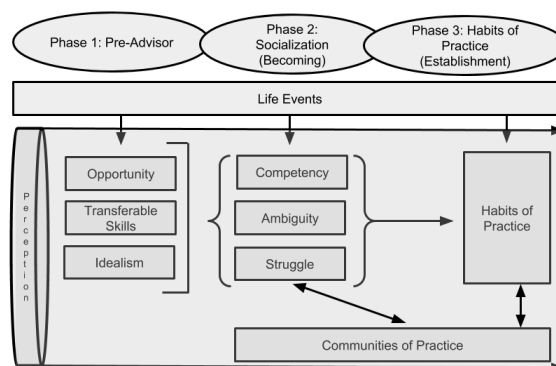
upon the insights of the conversation phase. We conducted three rounds of coding including initial coding, focused coding, and thematic coding. Though not part of our original design, we began grounded theory analytic procedures when we saw the relationships in our emerging themes in our original coding. Finally, in the fourth process, we engaged in a prolonged period of collaborative scholarly writing in which we further refined the interconnected themes and attempted to link them to existing conceptual frameworks.

Although creating a model was not our original intention, the model described below became an expression of the interrelationship of themes within the extensive data of our own narratives. We gathered additional insights from our interactions with one another in semi-weekly phone meetings over the course of several years. Additionally, we presented our work to colleagues at two regional and four annual conferences held by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. The responses of the audience feedback on the ideas presented became data for consideration as well as means of checking our ideas.

## FINDINGS

We present a collaborative analysis of our reflections on becoming primary-role advisors in an emerging model (see figure 1). We agreed upon nine themes: 1) Life Events; 2) Opportunity; 3) Transferable skills; 4) Idealism; 5) Competency; 6) Ambiguity; 7) Struggle; 8) Communities of Practice; and 9) Habits of Practice. Within these themes, evolving perception is a core category. Evolving perception takes on the form of how we, as advisors, entered an emerging profession that has many paths of preparation both academically and via numerous professional experiences. First is the point when we come to advising (pre-advisor: the threshold), in which our life events have led us to perceiving opportunity in the work of advising and identifying transferable skills to offer the emerging profession. Next, is a stage (socialization: becoming an advisor) wherein our perceptions of advising can become idealized and simultaneously ambiguous, resulting in dissonance about the field of advising. Simultaneously, in the midst of, and as a result of, the struggle with dissonance, we are socialized by communities of practice shaping habits of practice which we perceive as varying levels of competence (establishment: communities of practice and habits of practice).

Figure 1 – MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION



### Pre-Advisor: The Threshold

The first part of our model describes the conditions of entering advising. We entered the field of advising without a clear understanding of what the day-to-day work of advising truly involves. Life events are an obvious and omnipresent phenomenon that can directly and indirectly lead us into the opportunity of advising. Securing a job in advising and having the base competence to pursue a job requiring transferable skills. The themes of life events, opportunity, and transferable skills constitute the threshold into the field.

We acknowledge the ways socialization within the emerging profession of advising is not an isolated set of circumstances within an advisor's work life limited to a single domain. *Life events* are experiences, controlled and uncontrolled, that are part of the self and environment before, during, and after initial socialization. Life events influence all parts of the socialization process to varying degrees.

We assigned the code *opportunity* to data that showed a perceived set of circumstances that was potentially advantageous to our pursuit of advising. Opportunities provided chances for professional development, further committing us to the work of the emerging profession. However, our data displayed a tension between the welcoming of opportunities that shaped our professional identity by connecting us to the work we loved, but also led to overcommitment. Being energized by the work you do, being recognized for the work and afforded opportunities might lead to commitment to academic advising but can also lead to professional burnout. Mark saw the opportunity of applying his helping skills with a different population, with a different set of is-

sues, in a different environment. Drew perceived advising as an opportunity to depart from residence life work at the time he was expecting his first child, setting up a workday he believed would be more amenable to work-life balance. Craig was teaching music as a part-time adjunct and concomitantly enrolled in Kansas State's graduate certificate program in academic advising, which solidified his desire to pursue a career in advising. These examples show the interconnection between opportunity and life events.

*Transferable knowledge* and skills are the application of outside experiences to academic advising builds upon the previous two themes. For instance, Mark, burned out in school counseling and welcoming his newborn son, saw academic advising as a closely-related field where he could utilize transferable skills. Academic backgrounds shaped our skill sets and knowledge base prior to, and in the beginning of, our work as advisors. Drew's undergraduate major in music education and master's degree in student affairs emphasized reflective practice and social justice. Mark explained how his academic background provided relational skills and a respect for the landscape of education. Craig described how his master's degree in music theory shaped his interaction with students pursuing majors in the humanities. Since academic advisors come from a wide variety of backgrounds, this lens of disciplinarity in combination with personal experience serves as transferred knowledge and skills that connect to habits of practice. We also came to advising from different work environments and advising allowed us a chance to use transferable knowledge and skills.

We define *idealism* as an attitude or belief about the state of the profession and what the work of the profession ought to be (we use "profession" here to connote the ideal state). This study revealed two facets of idealism: that it can be based on conceptual ideals (i.e. "I thought it would be this way, but it isn't") and that it can come from experience ("It should be this way but isn't"). We pondered the purpose and function of advising. We each articulated a vision for what advising ought to be, but not necessarily what it is. Whether or not it is always practiced as such, each of us attempted to define what we felt advising should be. For Craig, advising was the process of helping students establish educational identities and aspirations. He believed students achieved these goals through the process of exploration with the support of an academic advisor. Our idealism arose from expectations of advising

and our conceptions of how academic advising ought to be practiced.

### **Socialization: Becoming an Advisor**

In the next phase of the model, three additional themes describe the process of crossing the threshold into becoming an advisor. Competency developed over time and in varying degrees; Ambiguity emerges at the point where our (mis)perceptions prior to becoming an advisor encounter the reality of advising in practice. Struggle arises from the tension between ambiguity and idealism.

We define *competency* as the ability (or perceived ability) to perform the work of advising successfully and efficiently. This involved a consideration of the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions (e.g. importance of being inquisitive) to do the work of advising well. This took many forms in our data. For instance, competency was expressed as one's ability to integrate formal learning into practice. This might involve taking knowledge from one's academic degrees or prior career experience and integrating it into academic advising. Mark's training in school counseling (his application of active listening with attending behavior to his advising practice) provided one example. Additionally, we each spoke about the use of learning resources—both global and local—to develop our practice. This included institutional resources and NACADA as our professional association. The theme also encompassed learning from others, both alongside our students and observing colleagues. We each perceived competency as including professional development, engaging field literature, and knowing the history and development of the field. We recognize this did not always happen within our own experiences and probably not in other advising settings.

*Ambiguity* describes the lack of distinction and clarity regarding aspects of academic advising. Evidence of ambiguity included a lack of clarity about advising being considered a profession; variation and inconsistency in job roles, responsibilities, and authority; a lack of a unified model of advising; an overabundance of advising models; and insufficient differentiation of academic advising from other related occupations. For example, Mark noted:

I would imagine the actual day-to-day duties of advisors varies greatly from institution to institution. For example, some advisors may be more inclined to meet one-on-one

whereas others present in classrooms. Some may focus on creating schedules and ensuring credit requirements are met whereas others focus more on how a student's socio-personal development impacts academic performance. Surely, different institutions and student populations will benefit best from tapered approaches. However, I do not think that disqualifies the benefit of a unified role definition for academic advising.

For understandable reasons, NACADA has taken a cautious and broad stance in defining the purpose and function of academic advising. When NACADA makes such concessions, there are consequences. Drew wrote about the difficulty for NACADA adopting a unified (or minimally unifying) definition of advising because of the plethora of advising models and approaches practiced by the members on the local level. Making too strong a statement about what advising is or does would potentially alienate some members based on local institutional expectations of the function of advising. We speculated that members are not particularly engaged with more scholarly approaches to advising because it is hard to imagine implementing those approaches within the institutional level model and expectations of advising (Bridgen).

We define *struggle* as the cognitive disconnect between the ideal and the current reality of advising practice. Our ideals or higher purposes for our work and the potential for our field conflict with current constraints of time, expectations from others, and the current culture of advising. We noted the support (or lack thereof) that we experienced upon entering the field. Drew articulated struggle in seeking to find the elusive definition of academic advising:

I go back and forth on whether I think that the elusive "unified theory" of advising is 1) desirable; 2) possible; or 3) inevitable and operating whether we name it or not. I get the point of leaving it open-ended and a space where lots of ideas and other theories can permeate. However, I have lived in the challenges of how we define ourselves if we don't have a common definition which implies a common theory.

The connection of this contemplation of a theory of advising with the practice of advising is further explored:

It seems to me that purpose vs. function is a very different thing and there is such thing as higher purpose vs. institutional purpose vs. utilitarian purpose. Sadly, I think that my practice tends to serve institutional and utilitarian purpose in far more clear ways than the higher purpose. However, it is the latter that keeps me going. I want my advising to mean something. I don't think that I will change the world in a single conversation, but I want it to inspire students to serve the common good and for me that means social justice.

### **Establishment: Communities of Practice and Habits of Practice**

Our common experiences suggest that both socialization and institutional colleagues influence individual practice. *Communities of practice* represent the reciprocal influences of socialization experiences and the practice of advising. Mark noted:

When I decided to become an academic advisor, I was given a handbook and two days of meeting everyone with whom I would be working. I was given an opportunity to shadow other advisors, but it was quickly apparent that my school counseling experience prepared me to have academic discussions with students. Therefore, the largest area lacking in my practice was institutional knowledge. The handbook and consulting with my peers allowed me to learn that aspect of academic advising rather quickly. In many ways, I felt that I entered the profession with an advanced skill set that many who come from the admissions side of colleges have to develop after they have become academic advisors.

Communities of practice consists of local and global communities. Each of us saw stark contrasts between what we gained from our local community and NACADA. Mark later reflected on how his initial connection to NACADA brought a change in perception of what advising was, including how he was struggling with ambiguity and developing competency. Through interaction with the global community of practice, Mark made social connections,

which in turn provided new perspectives, subsequently leading to changes in his practice as an advisor.

Both the socialization of the local and global communities of practice influence *habits of practice*, the amalgamation of the other eight themes: the actions in the work of advising that are derived from several factors and sources (e.g. community; habits of mind; environmental reinforcers). Habits of practice integrates formal learning, observations of others, expectations of advising work, prior knowledge and experiences, and is influenced by feedback from the environment. Habits of practice develop actively, passively, and with varying degrees of intentionality. These habits exist whether we are aware of them or not: “I have integrated my skill-based training in counseling (i.e. active listening) and therefore do not consciously use it as much as I use what I have learned from the Ed. Leadership degree” (Mark).

Habits of practice can come from formal or informal learning. Drew’s master’s program required defense of a competency portfolio involving reflection. This was bolstered by his graduate assistantship supervisor instilling a habit of reflecting critically upon the day’s work (e.g. contemplating conduct hearings, examining White male privilege). Drew developed the habit of practice of observing other advisors from his supervisor in that role. From those observations, he learned new advising practices and was reminded to incorporate advising-teaching into his work with students.

Mood and life events can also impact habits of practice. For instance, Drew noted that fatigue played a factor in maintaining some of his habits of practice. Habits of practice can be good (putting students in the driver’s seat) or bad (not using techniques you believe are best for students due to tiredness or shortness of time). For us, feelings of professional burnout, bad workplace morale, and negative personal events led to bad habits of practice regardless of how good of an advisor we may have been in the past.

## DISCUSSION

The thematic elements of the model come from our collaborative analysis of our own stories coded as data, while the form of the model comes from drawing connections between those themes via the iterative interpretive processes of CAE. Commonalities within our stories of becoming advisors emerged by identifying our evolving perceptions of

the nine aforementioned themes. Moreover, the rate of change in perception seems to slow over time though an advisor may continue to live in relationship to the thematic elements of the model.

One aspect of professional identity considers how a practitioner enters a field and how they become engaged in the work. Advisors must have a sound understanding of themselves and their worldview relating to the advising context to practice effectively and responsibly. Achieving this involves a deep understanding of one’s values, levels of concentration, stress, emotions, and commitment. Higginson included advisor self-knowledge within the informational component of Habley’s competencies (the other two were relational and conceptual). However, these personal issues go beyond the traditional framework of training new advisors. They include self-awareness, maintenance, and development and therefore, are not purely informational, nor are they likely to be conveyed to students in an advising session. McClellan broadened Habley’s original model to include “the personal” as its own component. To activity monitor how one’s subjectivity plays a role in their practice requires action: a decision must be made to commit to these (oftentimes difficult) exercises that force advisors to honestly self-appraise. Like all forms of identity construction, the process is iterative and ongoing.

In our model, the thematic interrelationships show hope and tension in our perception of advising as a field and an emerging profession. Through our conversations, we observed that there tends to be a level of shock that new advisors experience when their idealism is met with reality. Ambiguity and struggle emerged for us when we perceived disconnection between our idealized vision of the field and the actual practice of advising at the local level. If this becomes particularly pervasive, the dissonance may lead to burnout and attrition. How many skilled advisors have left the field for other opportunities, or for roles that are more respected or further professionalized? Our stories illustrated our experiences with this disconnect and this, in part, contributed to the fact that we have all accepted positions outside of primary role academic advising. Yet, each of us is highly invested in the research, practice and professionalization of the field.

Perception is important during the malleable periods of an advisor’s professional identity. For advising administrators, this means understanding

how advisors perceive opportunities within the role, institution, and global field. Administrators and others who socialize new advisors should ponder the following questions: How does this new advisor perceive advising as an idealized thing (or not)? What life events are shaping this new professional's identity as an advisor? How can I help my new hire contextualize transferable skills/strengths? These questions will help guide those who train new advisors in clarifying the purpose and meaning of the work of advising as that new professional develops their identity as an advisor.

Advising can be a lifelong career. To be a lifelong career, the field needs to have the appropriate level of opportunity, support, and fulfillment to sustain that level of commitment. Our intention with this study was to better understand advisor socialization. Our work identifies experiences wherein we perceive ambiguity, dissonance, and struggle as new advisors. If our experiences are shared by others, then advising administrators ought to develop remedies to circumvent some of the barriers associated with new advisor socialization. Additionally, our work highlights the hopes and aspirations of new advisors. As an emerging profession, we need to capture, encourage, nurture, and retain those hopes and aspirations. That begins and ends with professional socialization and professional recognition.

Moreover, because there is not a uniform path into the field of advising as exists in other professions, advising administrators need to be intentional in socializing new advisors. Advising administrators ought to take actions to lessen ambiguity, affirm the struggles with ambiguity, and engage communities of practice. Being thoughtful about developing habits of practice that meet the ends of advising with a higher purpose and the values of institutions on a local level will further the goal of reducing ambiguity. Habits of practice and the ways advisors know and encounter them may be important to the worklife of advisors and to the ways in which they encounter students. Advising administrators can minimize this ambiguity by making clear connections to the scholarly literature on advising through resources like the *New Advisor Guidebook* (Folsom et al.). Rather than simply handing new advisors a copy to read, advising administrators might consider engaging new advisors in discussion about the various chapters in the text through the formation of reading groups and/or pairing new advisors with more seasoned advisors.

As our emerging profession matures, the need to understand the development of an advisor's personal and professional identity grows in importance. Understanding advisor identity development has the potential to inform many aspects of the field, not limited to advisor training and development, job satisfaction, and program design. We hope our project demonstrates that it is essential for serious advisors to question and have a deep curiosity for the work of advising, to reimagine their practice frequently, and to deeply understand the impact advisors have on students and students' impact on advisors. One means of closing the gap between the idealized version of advising and its practical application is accomplished by critically examining how, when, and why this cognitive dissonance emerges throughout one's professional career as an advisor.

The study was designed and intended to explore the experiences of becoming an advisor and not our shared or divergent identities. Our stories are unique to us. Any other group of three advisors may have developed different themes. Though we propose an emerging model, we stress that this is iterative and descriptive of our experiences rather than a grand all-encompassing theory that is universally applicable to all advisors in all places. But the model is a framework from which to base future research, advisor training practices, and ongoing development of advising as an emerging professional field. From these findings, larger scale inquiry can be inspired, leading to generalizable conceptualizations of the current state of professional socialization for academic advisors. This research can potentially impact advisor training and development, understanding the professionalization of academic advising, and can identify potential causes of advisor burnout and turnover. We invite our work to be challenged and enhanced by those with other identities taking on a similar study of advisor development or rendering critique of our model.

Within the context of our three experiences, one might (mistakenly) draw the conclusion that our experiences with the field of academic advising, especially with regard to socialization, were predominantly negative. The impetus for this study is quite the opposite: we believe there is great promise in the field of academic advising. New initiatives, such as the 2017 redesign of NACADA's Core Values and the creation of a set of Core Competencies for academic advising pave the way for much less ambiguity in de-

fining the field of academic advising. It is our intention to initiate a broader dialogue about the professional socialization of academic advisors with the purpose of improving the experiences of the next generation of academic advisors.

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# Advising Pre-Dead Students: The Task of Critical Advising Today

Ilya P. Winham, PhD  
Academic Advisor, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences  
University of Georgia  
Email: [iwinham@uga.edu](mailto:iwinham@uga.edu)

We remember the old saying:  
*Si vis pacem, para bellum.*  
If you wish peace, prepare for war.  
The times call for a paraphrase:  
*Si vis vitam, para mortem.*  
If you wish life, prepare for death.  
—Sigmund Freud<sup>1</sup>

*that many students avoid, often due to parental, social, and economic pressures that push them toward premature professional narrowness. I develop my approach to critical advising in contrast to Andrew Puroway's overtly political Frierian-inspired approach. I also offer some practical advising strategies and examples of how advisors can help students open themselves up to the life-changing study of the humanities.*

**Keywords:** critical advising; humanities; Burns B. Crookston; Cornel West

## INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that in our market-driven society students entering college are eager to be on a pre-professional track, especially a pre-business or pre-med track.<sup>2</sup> But let's face it, whether they like it or not, they are all on the "pre-dead" track; they are human beings on their way to becoming, well, corpses.<sup>3</sup> It is understandable that young, anxious, career-minded students might ignore this grim truth. Focused on graduating on time, the last thing students want to think about in their academic advising appointment is their short life on earth. But in the time that they are in space and time they have to carve out their place in the world and figure out what kind of human being they are going to choose to be. What

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8vfyiN93jg>; MIT, February 8, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Bc6TRjptKI>; Brown University, March 6, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2ntOqoCUQk>; Brandeis, October 22, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKi-mvW72sE>; St. Mary's College, April 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJxK6cmVwaA>, and Baylor University, November 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwBxVjkOeV0>. See also the transcript of his October 5, 2009 lecture at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, [https://www.hws.edu/news/transcripts/09/cornel\\_west.aspx](https://www.hws.edu/news/transcripts/09/cornel_west.aspx).

*Abstract— Academic advising, to be "critical," must be emancipatory. I argue that the task of critical advising today is to liberate students from the dominant conceptualization of higher education as pre-professional schooling in order to open them up to humanistic exploration and to help them make their education meaningful on their own terms. Inspired by Cornel West's idea of going to college to learn how to die, I introduce the concept of "pre-dead" students to argue that the task of critical advising is to help students move from a premature professional narrowness to a maturation of the soul. Using Burns B. Crookston's theory of education for human development, I argue that the task of critical advising is to open up students to self-examination by way of a deep, disciplined humanistic education*

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *Reflections on War and Death* 72

<sup>2</sup> For an insightful analysis of this trend, see Grubb and Lazerson.

<sup>3</sup> My concept of "pre-dead" (as opposed to pre-professional) students is inspired by Cornel West's lectures and conversations on the humanities and liberal learning that he gave from 2016 to 2019 and that are available on YouTube. See his remarks at: AEI, November 30, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SER\\_TrUGo2o&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SER_TrUGo2o&feature=emb_logo); Dartmouth, April 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwwdUhgPpew>; The University of Denver, January 2018,



kinds of virtues, visions, and values are they going to enact and embody in their life as opposed to merely landing a job? The idea of students on the “pre-dead” track is that when students go to college to get a better job, they are in danger of missing out on an education that offers them the opportunity to engage with the arts and humanities and to wrestle with existential questions about what it means to be a human being and to live a meaningful and happy life.

Whereas a pre-professional student comes to college with the belief that the ultimate goal and purpose of higher education is to provide them with current, marketable skills and ways to make money, a pre-dead student, by contrast, comes to college to learn how to die. As philosopher and critical pedagogue Cornel West explains, “You learn how to die in order to learn how to live by critically examining yourself, scrutinizing yourself, and when you give up an assumption or presupposition [...] that’s a form of death. And there’s no maturation, no development, no growth, without that kind of death.”<sup>4</sup> But wait! Am I really imagining a student telling his or her parents: *Yes, it’s a lot of money to go to college, but don’t you want me to learn how to die?* Won’t this student be told by his or her parents that they sacrificed and saved money so their child could go to college, learn a skill, and earn the highest possible income? And won’t student and parents alike resist any academic advisor who suggests purposes and goals above and beyond securing a better job and more job security? Yes, they will! And this is precisely why I think academic advisors, whose job is to talk to students about their academic choices and goals, have a *critical* role to play in higher education.

To guard against possible misunderstanding, let me clarify at the outset that the whole point of introducing the concept of “pre-dead” students is to suggest that the task of critical advising is to help students focus less on what politicians and business leaders want, or what their parents and others around them want, and focus more on the existential question of what kind of human being they want to be in life. Getting students to think about higher ed-

ucation in terms of going their own way as intellectual, moral, and spiritual beings, guided by their own unique interests, desires, and talents, is an incredibly difficult task today, as students are encouraged to complete their education as quickly and effortlessly as possible in order to plug into the job market. For the sake of trying to secure a good job, pre-professional students tend to avoid humanist, liberal learning that is transformative of one’s perspective and character, thereby arresting their own growth and development. Any academic advisor who supports student learning and development should be critical of the crowding of students into the narrow confines of occupational training and pre-professional education.

In this article, I offer a way of thinking about critical advising that is guided not only by the idea of “pre-dead” students, but also by the work of Burns B. Crookston, the founder of the student development movement and a co-founder (along with Terry O’Banion) of developmental advising.<sup>5</sup> Crookston offers a theory of education for human development that is critical of the seismic shift toward vocationalism and pre-professionalism in higher education since the 1970s. Building upon Crookston’s theory, I argue that the task of critical advising is as follows: to open up students to self-examination by way of a deep, disciplined humanistic education—engagement with the best that has been said and thought in the Western tradition, and in all traditions—that for the most part students avoid due to parental, social, and economic pressures that push them toward premature professional narrowness and a single over-arching human type, “the successful, upper-middle-class professional they’ve already decided they want to become” (Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep* 24). Assuming that the possibility for experiencing a transformative humanistic education still exists in most institutions of higher education today, I argue that the mission of critical advising is to help students realize that the humanities can change their lives as no other material can. In the section below, I develop my approach to critical advising in contrast

<sup>4</sup> Cornel West at Baylor University, November 15, 2019 (33:30-33:45). For West, inspired by Plato, Seneca, and Montaigne, learning how to die means to engage in Socratic self-examination. On the idea of philosophy as learning how to die, see Plato, *Phaedo*, 64a and 67d-e; Cicero, *Tusculan Dispu-*

*tations*, 1.30.74-1.31.75; Montaigne; Hadot; and Jahanbegloo. For a useful portrait of West as a critical pedagogue, see Christensen and Durm.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of Crookston’s life and work, see Fried. For a chronicle of the time Crookston spent as Dean of Students at Colorado State University, see Morrill and Hurst.

to Andrew Puroway's overtly political Frierean-inspired approach.

### **CRITICAL ADVISING: A CROOKSTON-INSPIRED APPROACH**

Why should advisors read the work of Burns B. Crookston to think about the concept of "critical advising"? The concept has been developed through Paulo Friere's pedagogy by Andrew Puroway. But I think we should look to Crookston rather than Friere for inspiration, and offer the following reasons: first, Crookston actually wrote about academic advising (Friere did not); second, Crookston grappled with the rise of vocationalism in higher education and its implications for human development (Friere did not); and third, Crookston's commitment to fostering human development by way of Socratic self-examination is a more appropriate commitment for critical advising than Friere's commitment to achieving social justice and other overtly political goals.

First, whereas Crookston wrote explicitly about the practice of academic advising, Friere did not write about academic advising at all. Friere mainly wrote about "teaching" with an emphasis on dialogue, the posing of problems, and the development of critical consciousness. While it is true that in his *Letters to Cristina* (1996) he devotes a chapter (the 16<sup>th</sup> letter) to the role of thesis and dissertation advisors in a university, and sometimes calls thesis supervision "advising," this is not the same activity as "academic advising." Thesis supervision, as anybody who has written a master's or dissertation thesis knows, involves "the development of the advisee's research and ideas; the depth of the advisee's language; the difficulties the advisee faces with the topic, the bibliography, or the very act of reading and studying; and the loyalty with which the advisee writes about topics or people" (Friere 168). Advisees in the academic advisor-advisee relationship, by contrast, are undergraduates who are not writing a thesis of any sort and are not seeking help with their research or coursework (they go to their professors, peers, or tutors, for that). Put simply, thesis supervision is about research and writing, whereas academic advising is about registration and graduation. Friere wrote about the former but not the latter. While Puroway, for example, twice cites Friere's chapter on thesis supervision in developing his approach to critical advising, he is careful to note that Friere is writing about the supervision of master's

candidates and not academic advising (7, 8). Since I'm concerned with the work of professional academic advisors in (large) university settings, I do not find Friere's writings on teaching and thesis supervision relevant or inspiring.

By now you might be thinking: didn't Crookston coin the idea of "advising as teaching"? Although he did use that phrase in the title of his groundbreaking 1972 article, "A Developmental View of Academic Advising as Teaching," his actual discussion of the relationship between advising and teaching is far more complex than his title's simple equation of the two practices. Crookston reconceived advising under a collaborative teaching-learning model for the sake of facilitating the achievement of the goal of general education and of education for democracy—the student's own growth and development as a person. He argued that advisors should not be aloof authority figures who give advice to students whom they regard as lazy, immature, irresponsible grade-grubbers with no interest in learning. Instead, advisors should approach students as human beings who have the potential to become almost anything to which they set their mind ("A Developmental View" 13). The advisor-student relationship should be a transaction between two parties where the student is treated as an active, responsible, maturing human being who seeks not only the rewards of grades, credit, and income, but also the rewards of "personal growth, self-fulfillment, and humane commitment" ("A Developmental View" 14).

What Crookston says about the advising relationship is not that advisors are teachers or that advising is teaching. Rather, he argues that the practice of advising has a "teaching function" in the sense that its "product" is some "individual, group, or community growth and development" ("A Developmental View" 12). Crookston is absolutely right to think of academic advising as an educational practice whose product is human growth and development, which is a product of *all* educational practices, including teaching. But just because both advising and teaching have growth and development as their product, does not mean they are essentially the same practice, any more than a high-heeled shoe and a hammer are essentially the same thing because both may be used to drive nails into the wall. Crookston is mistaken in claiming that wherever individual student learning or development is taking place, "teaching" must be occurring as well. This claim leads him

to suggest that not only faculty, but also advisors and even students may be designated “teachers.” This overly broad claim about teaching is not necessary, it collapses the distinction between formal teaching and self-teaching, and it confuses the institutional roles of faculty, advisors, and students.

For Crookston, the whole point of thinking about the “teaching function” of advising is not to equate advising with teaching so much as to emphasize the kind of relationship that students want with their advisor, one that is not passive, reactive, hierarchical, bureaucratic, correctional, and status-based, but active, egalitarian, collaborative, and competent. As the student takes more initiative and responsibility for the advising session, Crookston argued, the advisor may serve as an expert, critic, facilitator, collaborator, consultant, or negotiator, all functions of human development “teaching” (“Education for Human Development” 54-55). Rather than approach advising as teaching (which inevitably prompts Lowenstein’s question: “If advising is teaching, what do advisors teach?”), Crookston wants us to think about how to make the advisor-advisee relationship more relevant to the development of the student as an individual who strives to give coherence and meaning to their life and world, and not just to their curriculum.

The second reason to look to Crookston rather than Friere for a conception of critical advising is that much of what Crookston says about college students in the late-1960s and early 1970s finds an echo in contemporary debates about the decline of the humanities and the rise of vocationalism among college students today. Like us, Crookston lived in times defined by “public support for career education and technical training” but not for “general education,” which seemed “nonutilitarian and remote” from students’ lives (“Education for Human Development” 52). From Crookston’s viewpoint in the early 1970s, the vocationalism of college students seemed to be caused by “the shortening of adolescence” and the desire to become an independent adult, for which it is important in our “utilitarian society [...] to have a skill that can produce something” (“Education for Human Development” 61). While vocationalism is driven by different causes today (Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges* 26-27), the trend is only accelerating. As former Harvard president Drew Gilpin Faust observed in 2009: “Since the 1970s there has been a steep decline in the percent-

age of students majoring in the liberal arts and sciences, and an accompanying increase in preprofessional undergraduate degrees. Business is now by far the most popular undergraduate major, with twice as many bachelor’s degrees awarded in this area than in any other field of study. In the era of economic constraint before us, the pressure toward vocational pursuits is likely only to intensify.” Indeed, in his book *Liberal Arts at the Brink* (2011), a report on the dire situation of liberal arts education, Victor Farrell Jr. sums up the situation as follows: “There is no evidence that the movement away from liberal arts education to vocational instruction is temporary, or that it is cyclical and, over time, will reverse itself. To the contrary, it appears to be an accelerating trend. The demand for vocational instruction is skyrocketing. [...] [T]he time for liberal arts education now appears to be passing away, a change driven by shifting societal norms and values” (155).

Today it is not just humanities and the liberal arts, but academic learning itself that seems a luxury to students and parents who, often worrying about paying back student loans, consider fields of study in terms of career tracks, job stability, and financial futures. Envisioning themselves as future attorneys, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, journalists, accountants, consultants, investment bankers, computer programmers, engineers, and so on, pre-professional students seek out the few majors that seem to be tailored to their career aspirations. To these students, general education requirements are an inefficient hindrance to their “success.” Even in the most “practical” of majors, these students often resent the fact that they are forced to take courses that they care little about and see as a waste of time because they have no obvious and direct relevance to their career goals.

Crookston’s human development perspective is valuable for thinking about the task of critical advising because it illuminates how the intense vocationalism of today’s pre-professional students is a problem. The problem, as most academic advisors know from experience, is that students’ professional goals, especially those imposed on them by parents, have crowded out consideration of higher education as about deep learning, acquiring wisdom, and undergoing a process of self-examination and self-transformation. As Crookston explained in his famous 1972 article, one of the philosophical foundations of human development is that “higher learning

is to be viewed as an opportunity in which the developing person may plan to achieve a self-fulfilling life; that *the perspective of work and professional training more properly should be placed within the development of a life plan instead of the current tendency to prepare one's self for a profession and then build one's life around it*" ("A Developmental View" 12, my emphasis). Here Crookston targets "the perspective of work and professional training," and argues that "higher learning" should be approached not in terms of pre-professional training but as an opportunity to develop "a life plan"—a life plan in which vocation and career development play an essential part, but which is about achieving a self-fulfilling life and not just a successful professional career. Let's call this Crookston's critical theory of student development that is broader than pre-professional training, the primary aim of which is not political but existential: the development and actualization of the individual.

Consider, for example, the advice that one University of Georgia student offered to incoming students on reddit. If there is one thing that students entering college should know before they start, this student wrote, it is that college is an opportunity to "put yourself out of your comfort zone and figure yourself out. College is a 'safe place' to explore and find out who you are (and hopefully pick up skills for a career along the way) before you have a job, mortgage, and kids where shit gets real if you suddenly decide you don't want to be an accountant anymore." What this wise student is saying is that you are not in college only to gain access to a skill so you can plug into the labor force. You are in college to "figure yourself out" when you are young and have the time, independence, and support to do so. If you think of the value of a college education only in economic terms, you may very well wind up a wealthy and successful but miserable accountant or other professional who feels they are wasting their life doing meaningless work that they do not value or find satisfying on an existential level. Indeed, many people live their life like Cephalus, the satisfied old rich man that Socrates speaks with at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*. It is only when he is on the brink of death, and can no longer enjoy the physical pleasures of his youth—"sex, drinking parties, feasts, and the other things that go along with them" (*Republic* 329a5)—that he begins to examine himself and reflect on how he has lived his life. Knowing that individuals have a

tendency to avoid or indefinitely delay self-examination, Crookston insists that it is up to education, and, we might add, advising, to "provide the means by which such examination takes place early and often thereafter" ("Education for Human Development" 63).

This brings us to the third reason to look to Crookston rather than Friere for a conception of critical advising: Crookston's theory of education for human development is a far more appropriate way of thinking about the task of critical advising than Friere's theory of education for social justice and the common good. I have explained elsewhere why I think Puroway's Frierian-inspired approach is inappropriate and unworkable ("Letter to the Editor: Is Advising a Political Activity?"). My point here is that there is no reason to assume in advance that "critical advising" must involve a commitment to achieving social justice and other overtly political goals. Rather, I think that the essential criterion for advising to be considered "critical," following the tradition of "critical theory" of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno), is that it must be guided by some sort of emancipatory task. For the followers of Friere, the emancipatory task of advising is primarily *political*: "advocating for common good projects in educational goal setting," to quote the fourth of Puroway's "four possible means to engage in critical advising" (9). In contrast, what I'm proposing via Crookston is that the emancipatory task of advising is primarily *existential*: for students to engage in the Socratic process of self-examination "to make sense, purpose, and direction for their lives while young" ("Education for Human Development" 61). What students are to be emancipated *from* is not oppression and social injustice but the dominant neoliberal ideology which herds students away from humanistic exploration toward preprofessional programs, and is hostile to the Socratic belief "that life has little meaning and purpose unless it has been examined by those who must live it" ("Education for Human Development" 63). A student on the pre-dead track needs to know that there will never be in the history of the cosmos another you—that is a beautiful thought, but it is also a terrifying one. It means you need to examine who you are and who you want to become.

Pre-dead students should take as their motto Socrates' claim at his trial that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being (*Apology* 38a5-6). This claim, as the philosopher Richard

Kraut explains, does not stand on its own but is based on a picture of human development and human nature: “human beings are naturally attracted to pleasure and averse to pain. They seek power and status, and the wealth that brings power, status, and pleasure. It is no accident that these were the dominant values of Athens (*Apology* 29d-e); they are the dominant values of nearly every human community” (“The Examined Life” 238). Indeed, students coming to college today have been nurtured and educated by a commodified, marketized, commercialized culture to believe that to be human is to be obsessed with success, popularity, pleasure, power, and profits. Fearing disapproval, they are anxiously concerned about and consumed by their image—looking a certain way to their peers, potential life partners, and professional schools—rather than with the content of their character, mind, and soul. Without engaging in the Socratic self-examination that a liberal education offers, what awaits these students is not just physical death, but intellectual, moral, and spiritual death. Cold-hearted careerism, egotistical calculation, mindless consumption, meaninglessness, cowardice, callousness, all this awaits students unless they make an effort to learn how to die. So the task of critical advising, in short, is to help students on the pre-dead track, no matter what professional occupation they hope for, to understand that college is probably their best chance to learn how to die by wrestling with what it means to be human and to live an examined life.

### ADVISING PRE-DEAD STUDENTS

So what can academic advisors do to advise pre-professional students as pre-dead students who seek out opportunities to engage in Socratic self-examination? Or to put the question another way: if the goal of critical advising is to emancipate students from the neoliberal ideology that is hostile to Socratic self-examination, how can advisors help students open themselves up to the life-changing study of the humanities? There is no magic bullet or single strategy, of course, and advisors have little power within higher education, but they do have one-on-one conversations with students, and they can and do affect the choices students make when they register for classes. During these conversations, advisors can ask the kinds of questions that J. S. Mill asks his readers in chapter three of *On Liberty*—questions

designed to urge his readers to stop thinking about their class status and financial anxieties and to start thinking about their individuality as a crucial element of their well-being and happiness. Mill suggests that his readers ask themselves with respect to their own way of life: “what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive?” (61). An academic advisor could put these questions to students in the spirit of self-examination: what do you prefer to study? what job or discipline would suit your character and disposition? what job or discipline would allow the best and highest in you to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? It’s okay if students cannot answer these questions. Simply by putting these questions to them you get them to engage in self-reflection.

Beyond asking students questions to prompt them to reflect on their unique character and preferences, another strategy to get students to reflect on their lives is to bring in the perspective of death.<sup>6</sup> The perspective of death is an effective way to prompt students to think about what values, virtues, and visions will guide them through their life. An advisor could ask a student: when you are dead, what do you want people to say about how you lived your life? If the student does not seem receptive to such a question, an alternative is to ask: what do you plan to do with your life when you are retired? The point of both questions is to get students to think about their life as a moral, spiritual, and intellectual person apart from their life as a money-making worker. When I’ve asked students what they want people to say, when they are dead, about how they lived their life, they spoke about being a good, kind, hardworking, virtuous person who cared more for their family, friends, community, and the world than about fame, money, and power. Being asked such a question in the context of choosing their classes could help them reflect on their motivations for their class choices. Are they choosing classes based on shallow dreams of “easy As,” ready riches, and living a luxurious lifestyle, or are they choosing classes that will help them articulate and actualize their values and vision of themselves as the person they want to become? This moment of reflection provides an opportunity for advisors to expand a student’s understanding of

<sup>6</sup> For an illuminating, book-length meditation on death, see Tisdale.

higher education from merely a means to get a better job to an opportunity to search for truth and to better understand themselves, others, and the world in which they live. It is also an opportunity for advisors to help students connect their courses to what they say is meaningful and important to the bigger picture of their lives beyond getting a job.

Richard J. Light provides an example of what I would call pre-dead advising in *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*. Light recounts the story of a first-year African American pre-med student who had an advisor who changed his perspective on what he could study beyond taking science courses for medical school. As the student explains:

My advisor made a real difference. He asked me very hard questions about why I was doing what I was doing. He asked me whether I had thought about alternatives. He pointed out that I could complete all the requirements for medical school and yet concentrate in a more traditional liberal arts field. When I told him my mother had urged me to focus on preparing for medical school, we actually sat over medical school catalogues, and for the first time I understood that I didn't just have to load up on science courses. As it turns out, my true love is philosophy. [...] I realized that I am using philosophy and some of the dilemmas it raises to understand more fully some of the questions that had led me to want to go to medical school in the first place. [...] But the point I want to make is that my advisor kept pushing me to relate my coursework to my own interests. After we had met several times I confided to him about how my interest in medical school began. My mother has severe emphysema. [...] I see that she will struggle to keep a decent quality of life for herself. And I would like to help in any way I can. In retrospect, my advisor's pushing me to relate my work at college to my personal concerns is what encour-

aged me to do philosophy while preparing for medical school. I am sure I will be a better doctor because of this good advice. And I think I can be a better son too. (90-91)

This example shows one way to advise pre-professional students as pre-dead students: encourage self-reflection by asking questions about why they want to study what they are studying, point out that there are other ways to do what they want to do and ask them if they've considered these alternatives, show and tell them that in addition to the courses required for their intended career they can also take humanities and liberal arts courses, and then push them to relate their coursework to the interests and concerns that led them to decide to pursue their chosen career in the first place. The result in this case is not just a successful student but a more actualized human being—a son who will take better care of his mother and a doctor who will take better care of his patients because he did not avoid his love for philosophy but embraced it with the help of his advisor. Isn't this what you would want for your son? Isn't this the kind of doctor you would want to have in charge of your health? Isn't this what we, as advisors, want for our students?

This is a difficult example to imitate, to be sure, and there is only so much an advisor can do one-on-one with a student to facilitate self-reflection. Students need to read poetry and philosophy, study religion and art history, and wrestle with what is best in Western civilization, or any civilization. To this end, critical advisors can urge students to gain a background in the arts, humanities, and social sciences—the disciplines that give our short, fragile lives meaning by raising fundamental questions about being human. Advisors can urge students to take demanding courses that challenge them to read, write, and think critically. And after a student has taken a class in the humanities, an advisor can ask them: What did this course tell you about who you are and what you would like your life to be or to mean? Self-reflection is not the only thing the humanities contribute to an individual's path in life, but the process of transforming the individual to his

or her own humanity has historically been the task of a humanities-focused liberal arts education.<sup>7</sup>

If this sounds like a defense of the humanities and liberal arts today this is indeed what it is. For the point of a humanities-focused liberal arts education is to liberate you from your pre-existing and unexamined beliefs, desires, and interests that have been deposited in you by your society and culture, and in so doing to effect a process of self-transformation and maturation in which the nature and structure of your beliefs, desires, and interests are changed and become more enlightened. Cornel West characterizes this transformation as “moving from the superficial to the substantial, moving from the frivolous to the serious, and then cultivating a self to wrestle with reality and history and mortality and, most importantly, promoting a maturation of the soul” (*Examined Life* 2). West’s idea of going to college to learn how to die specifies and supports the task of critical advising that I am proposing here, which seeks to liberate students from the dominant conceptualization of higher education as pre-professional schooling in order to open them up to humanistic exploration and to help them make their education meaningful on their own terms. While this task is ultimately the work of the entire university, academic advisors have their own part to play in helping pre-dead students move from a premature professional narrowness to a maturation of the soul. As I have evolved and developed as an academic advisor, especially as an advisor of pre-medical and pre-pharmacy students, I’ve come to think of my task in more critical terms as advising pre-dead students. While I don’t have pre-dead advising all figured out, I believe it is a promising approach to critical advising today, and I welcome further discussion from all perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

A critical advisor believes that students are first and foremost human beings on the way to becoming corpses, and what matters is the education of their hearts, minds, and souls. As Margaret Atwood once quipped, “You can take the humanities out of the curriculum, but you can’t take the humanities out of the humans. They are built in” (131). Indeed, the humanities are too important to be left to

the humanities majors; they are useful for all students insofar as they are human. If you see your job as an academic advisor, in the words of Mark Yudof, former President of the University of Minnesota and the University of California, and former Chancellor of the University of Texas System, to be to “minimize friction between the students and the institution and its requirements” (8), as if students were commodities coursing through the institution, that’s fine, and your institution will be pleased with your performance. But to be a critical advisor you must believe that it is wrong to justify the time and expense of a college education merely as a training ground for career opportunities, and you must believe that the justification for the teaching that goes on in colleges and universities is not to provide access to job skills, but to educate students in the life of the mind, in the best humanity has to offer, the best traditions, individuals, and movements. To be a critical advisor you must believe in the ideal of learning for personal growth, self-fulfillment, and humane commitment and not just for a grade or a better job. You must face up to the grim fact that despite what the op-ed writers say, the liberal arts and humanities are not dying—you are, and so are your students. And whether they know it or not, they’ve come to college to learn how to die.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Emily Sahakian, Michael Hill, and Edie Parsons for their help in formulating, correcting, and refining the concepts and arguments of this essay. I would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and constructive criticism on an earlier draft of this essay. Needless to say, responsibility for the views expressed here rests solely with me.

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<sup>7</sup> Philosophers and political theorists have written eloquently and extensively on this topic. See Gutmann; Hankins; Murchland; Nehamas; Nussbaum; and Roche.



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