

PASS

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

PROACTIVE ADVISING PRACTICE GUIDE: HOW ADVISORS CAN SUPPORT AT-PROMISE STUDENT SUCCESS WITH PROACTIVE ADVISING STRATEGIES

FEBRUARY 2022

TOPIC

The proactive advising process discussed in this guide provides guidance to academic advisors searching for practices and approaches that will increase at-promise students' college success in ways that traditional advising may not. Proactive advising is an alternative approach to traditional advising that can proactively address many of the barriers that at-promise students face as they navigate college environments.

In this guide, we offer a short overview of the PASS project, describe what proactive advising is—including when it occurs, who is responsible for proactive advising, and where it can be implemented—and finally present a model illustrating how to do proactive advising. We present scenarios to illustrate how to enact proactive advising practices based on the evidence-based model identified in our research. Throughout the guide, you will encounter reflection questions to facilitate making sense of how the information in this document can be used. Supplemental resources related to proactive advising are provided at the end of this guide along with action ideas for next steps.

PROACTIVE ADVISING

➔ **What is proactive advising?** Proactive advising is a holistic approach where advisors initiate contact with students early and consistently to build a connection with the student and engage in discussions around their academic and personal success. Common topics covered in proactive advising meetings include academic goals, career paths, time management, emotional needs, personal wellness, course planning, and strategies and resources for achieving success.

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This guide provides academic advisors with an evidence-based proactive advising model informed by a major study of at-promise college students' (low-income, first-generation, and/or racially minoritized) success called the Promoting At-Promise Student Success (PASS) project.

The target audience for this guide is college and university academic advisors and directors of advising offices seeking effective advising models to support at-promise students, however other educators (e.g., faculty) may also find the guide useful in their work advising at-promise students.

STUDY OVERVIEW

This guide is informed by the PASS project, conducted from 2015 through 2020. PASS used multiple forms of data to explore whether, how, and why the Thompson Scholars Learning Community (TSLC) at three University of Nebraska campuses (Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha) affected the college success of participating at-promise students. Data were collected from multiple sources, including longitudinal surveys with two cohorts of TSLC students, over 900 interviews with TSLC students, over 50 interviews with TSLC staff and instructors, and over 600 hours of observations of TSLC activities and classes. Data were analyzed over the course of several years by a diverse team of researchers.

PROACTIVE ADVISING (CONTINUED)

In the proactive advising model we identified in our study, advisors initiate contact with at-promise students proactively to: (a) provide students with structured opportunities to engage in guided self-assessment and reflection about factors that influence their college success; (b) receive genuine emotional and interpersonal support from an advisor—recognizing that personal and academic success are intertwined; and (c) engage collaboratively with an advisor to strategize about achieving their college goals including addressing barriers to their success (e.g., mental health challenges, difficulty applying course content) and connecting them to opportunities and resources to enrich their college learning experience (e.g., study abroad, tutoring, service learning).

REFLECTION—

- How would you summarize the proactive advising process to a colleague interested in implementing this approach in their academic advising?
- How does proactive advising compare to the academic advising approach typically used at your campus?
- Does the current advising strategy at your campus meet students' needs? Why or why not?

➔ Why should I consider proactive advising?

Proactive advising is linked to college students' success including cultivating academic confidence, retention, reduction in probation or withdrawal, well-being, and higher levels of academic achievement. While proactive advising is a useful tool to support all students, it may be particularly important for supporting the success of students from at-promise backgrounds that make up an increasing share of the college-going population and whose success may not be adequately supported by traditional advising models common at most colleges and universities. For instance, first-generation students or students from low-income communities may not be familiar with how they can access support to help them achieve their goals such as tutoring or service learning opportunities. Proactive advising is one promising, evidence-based tool advisors can implement to create an environment where at-promise students can succeed by proactively connecting students to resources appropriately tailored to their unique set of college needs, challenges, and goals identified by the advisor in collaboration with the student.

REFLECTION—

- What could be the benefits of implementing proactive advising in the context of your particular office, program, department and college or university? To the advisor? To the student?
- What role could proactive advising play in meeting the needs of at-promise students who attend your campus?

➔ Who is responsible for proactive advising?

Advisors are responsible for initiating contact with students and creating structured opportunities for conversations about their academic and personal assets, needs, and goals. Where possible, it is desirable to have an advisor who is a single point of contact—a go-to person for the student—who will build or has built an advising relationship with the student and understands their individual academic and personal assets, needs, and goals. Having an understanding of a student's background and current context helps the advisor appropriately coordinate and tailor student advising support over time. The advisor is then responsible for being knowledgeable about resources on campus and identifying and connecting the student to other educators on campus (e.g., academic departments, administrators, counselors, tutors, study abroad office associates, financial aid officers) who can help meet student needs and goals in college. It is not expected that any one academic advisor would be able to be all things to a student (counselor, tutor, financial aid officer, etc.). Rather, the advisor is a go-to person who understands a student's needs and can provide advice and refer them to support on campus that is tailored to specific needs, goals, and challenges.

REFLECTION—

- What kind of training or information would be beneficial to aid advisors in implementing proactive advising at your campus?
- What kind of tools (e.g., technology, advising systems) exist at your campus that could be leveraged to support proactive advising?

➔ When does proactive advising occur?

Advisors should engage in proactive advising early and consistently. Early and consistent proactive advising enables advisors to build relationships with students to identify students' multiple assets, needs, and short- and long-term goals in college. Then, the advisor can work with the student over time to develop a realistic action plan and steps for leveraging the students' assets and meeting their needs so that the student can achieve their college goals. Initiating proactive advising early on also enables advisors to intervene if a student is not on a path toward success by referring students to appropriate resources and support (e.g., tutoring, counseling) to address needs or challenges before they emerge or worsen. It also enables advisors to connect at-promise students to learning opportunities early on that they may not be aware of on campus — because they are first-generation college goers, for example — to foster an enriching learning experience proactively. Follow-up advising with students is essential to ensure that they follow through on plans the advisor and student developed to help them meet their goals, and to help them remain on track or correct course to meet their goals. Follow-up also enables advisors to maintain the relationship they began to build with students to ensure students remain connected to a caring person on campus who can help them continue on a path toward success as their needs evolve or change over time.

REFLECTION—

- What strategies might you use or questions might you ask in your advising work to get to know who students are and discover their assets and goals over time?
- What strategies might you use in your work to keep in touch with students and track student progress over time?

➔ Where can proactive advising be implemented?

Proactive advising can happen in a range of postsecondary contexts where academic advisors are involved in supporting at-promise student success — such as college transition and support programs, student success centers, advising centers, within department/college advising offices, academic and career services, or online advising environments. Proactive advising occurs in departments, offices, and program settings where advisors and advising leadership develop systems and training that enable proactive advising, where advising leadership builds consensus around pursuing proactive advising among those on the ground doing it and among institutional leadership responsible for supporting advisors in their work to promote the success of at-promise students.

REFLECTION—

- What kind of support would be needed to implement proactive advising in your office, program, department, and/or campus?
- What are some potential challenges (e.g., policies, culture, staffing) to implementing proactive advising at your campus, and how might those challenges be addressed?
- How does proactive advising fit in with the mission of your program, department, and college or university?

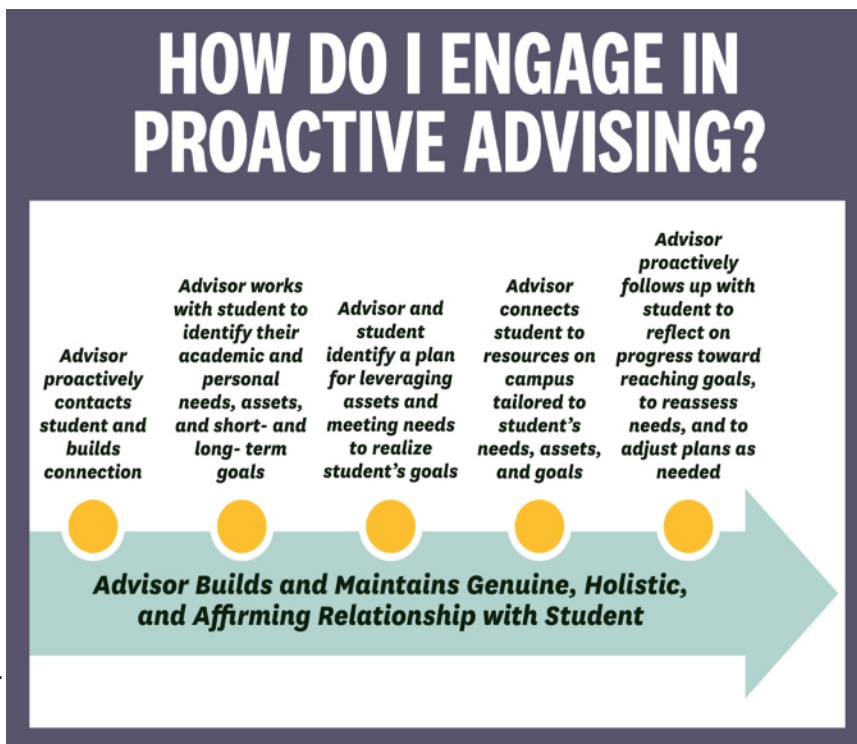
➔ How do I engage in proactive advising?

Proactive advising will likely necessitate additional advisor training on proactive advising processes, resources such as this guide, and buy-in from advisors and advising office leadership. If moving from traditional advising practices to proactive advising, systems and processes will need to evolve to better support advisors seeking to engage at-promise students in proactive advising practices. For instance, first-come, first-serve approaches to advising may need to be altered so that students are instead paired with an advisor with whom they can build a relationship and meet with on a recurring basis as a go-to single point of contact for advising support. Advising meeting length and advisee loads may need to be adjusted to allow more time to meet with at-promise students to ensure a nuanced approach to meeting their advising needs. Advisors and advising leadership will need to work in partnership to develop systems that are best suited for their particular context.

Appropriate proactive advising systems, training, and buy-in from advisors and leadership will enable advisors to engage at-promise students in effective proactive advising practices such as the model we identified in our study (shown in the figure to the right and described below). In the evidence-based proactive advising model we identified, the advising process begins with an advisor reaching out to student to build a connection with them and to learn about who the student is with a focus on both academic and interpersonal facets of their life. Then, through on-going advising meetings, the advisor and student collaboratively identify student assets, needs, goals, and ways the advisor can help the at-promise student leverage their assets and meet their needs to achieve their college goals. This is accomplished through structured opportunities for students to

assess their academic and personal challenges, successes, and goals. Students then work collaboratively with an advisor to take inventory of their needs and determine what opportunities exist for achieving their goals in light of their multifaceted needs. Then, students develop a plan alongside the advisor to reach their short-term and long-term educational goals.

Next, advisors proactively follow up with the student to ensure they followed through with their success plans to reassess resources the student needs to achieve their goals, to discuss their progress toward reaching their goals and revise course as needed. Advisors make any necessary adjustments to resources, plans, and support as student circumstances and needs evolve over time. Throughout the proactive advising process, it is imperative that advisors convey genuine interest and care for the student's success and well-being — recalling who the student is and their history of needs and goals — in order to build and maintain a successful proactive advising relationship. Advisors should affirm students and communicate to them that they are capable of success with the right support — and remind them that advisors will connect them to the resources they need to achieve their goals. This approach is experienced as validating by students, which our proactive advising model suggests is a key lever that will enable at-promise students' college success.



ENGAGING IN PROACTIVE ADVISING: SCENARIOS

We have included two example scenarios to illustrate how proactive advising might unfold between academic advisors and at-risk students based on our evidence-based model. These scenarios are not intended to be prescriptive — the content of the proactive advising meetings and support should be tailored to student assets, needs, and goals.

Proactive Advising Scenario #1: Kimmy

Kimmy is a continuing-generation, Asian-American woman from a working class family. She is experiencing some challenges academically and recently failed a midterm for a statistics class she needs to complete her social work degree. She is retaking the statistics class because she did not pass it the previous semester. She is feeling anxious that she won't be able to pass this class again, graduate, and pursue her dream career in social work. She feels lost and doesn't know what to do. She has tried studying hard, but it doesn't seem to help her succeed in the class.

Kimmy's campus uses an early alert referral program that allows faculty to connect with advisors when they observe a student is not on track to succeed in class. After Kimmy fails the midterm, the faculty member for the class goes to the online early alert referral system and logs his concern about Kimmy. As a result, Kimmy's academic advisor proactively reaches out to her over email to invite her in for a meeting. Kimmy remembers that this advisor had already reached out to her earlier on in the year during orientation to introduce himself and offered to meet with students to discuss challenges and successes. She is initially concerned when she sees the email from the advisor, but the message is warm, inviting, and says that the advisor is simply reaching out to see if there is any way he can support her this semester. The warm, inviting nature of the email communication puts her mind at ease and she feels good that someone on campus cares enough to reach out to see how she is doing. Kimmy and her academic advisor schedule a time to meet.

When Kimmy arrives at her appointment, the advisor begins by asking her how she is doing. He asks her about her interests, what is going on in her life, and they spend time briefly getting to know each other. This initial conversation puts Kimmy at ease and makes her feel that her advisor is genuinely interested in her life. As a result, when the advisor then asks if there are any ways he can help support her, she feels more open to share that she is very committed to a career in social work, but she is worried about being able to pass her statistics class and graduate with a social work degree. The advisor tells her he can hear the passion in her voice when she talks about her commitment to a career in social work. He glances at her transcript that he pulled up on his computer screen and communicates to Kimmy that she is clearly capable of success in social work as she has a solid B+ average in her other social work courses.

The advisor proceeds to ask Kimmy a series of questions about the challenges she is having in this particular statistics course. Through these conversations, Kimmy and her advisor identify the main challenge she is facing in the class. She feels unable to keep up with the dense reading load for the class and often does not complete all the reading needed before exams. The advisor works with Kimmy to develop a plan for accessing resources that may help address the issue she is facing. As part of the first step in the plan they create together, the advisor puts Kimmy directly in contact with a coach at the campus learning center. The advisor calls the learning center to schedule a visit with her right there during the meeting. Kimmy leaves the advising meeting feeling better that she has a plan in mind to help her reach her goals and one that is responsive to her individual needs and circumstances.

Days later, Kimmy receives an email reminder from the learning center about her scheduled meeting with them. She's so busy working part time and managing school that she is grateful for the reminder. She arrives at the learning center meeting with the coach, who then works with her to develop different strategies for completing large volumes of reading, such as skimming for the main idea of each paragraph, or partnering with peers in the class to split up and summarize course readings to then share reading summaries with each other. The coach's strategies help Kimmy feel prepared to manage the statistics course reading going forward, and to feel confident on future exams for the class since completing the volume of reading is the main challenge she faces in class.

ENGAGING IN PROACTIVE ADVISING: SCENARIOS (CONTINUED)

A few weeks later, her advisor reaches back out to check in on how the meeting with the learning center coach went and to see if she would like to meet again. Kimmy responds to the email to express gratitude, and to say that the strategies the learning coach shared with her have been very helpful in terms of helping her make progress toward her goals for the class. In fact, she improved by two letter grades on the most recent exam she had for statistics class.

Proactive Advising Scenario #2: Richie

Richie is a first-generation, Black man from a low-income family. He receives an invitation to participate in a mentorship program for Black men at his university because he signed up to participate during his orientation after the director of the mentorship program gave a presentation and told a compelling story about the program alumni and the successes they have achieved after college. The mentorship program director intentionally attends every orientation to give a presentation and proactively reach out to students and let them know about the opportunity and support available to them. As part of the mentorship program, Richie meets once a month with his assigned academic advisor and they, over the course of time, build a strong professional relationship and bond based on shared experiences, identities, and interests. As a result, he feels that his academic advisor genuinely cares about him and knows who he is and what is important to him in life.

As part of the mentorship program, each academic advisor has a set of broad topic areas they use to guide conversations with the students they meet such as family support, mental wellbeing, career goals, peer relationships, and academic success. Advisors are trained to use those topic areas to frame conversation to build holistic connections with students, and to learn about their strengths, needs, and goals. One day, during a meeting with his mentor program advisor, Richie discusses how excited he is to finally identify a potential major, engineering. He does really well in his engineering classes. Richie's only concern is that he doesn't really know what it would be like to be an engineer as his classes really focus on abstract knowledge. He's a first-generation student from a low-income community, and he did not know anyone growing up who was an engineer. Still, he's strongly interested in engineering and thinks he will make his community proud if he is successful in pursuing that career goal.

The mentorship program's academic advisor seizes on this point in the conversation, recognizing Richie's success in engineering and professed interest in becoming an engineer as assets. He tells Richie that there is a career center on campus that can help identify potential summer internship opportunities at local engineering firms if he is interested in knowing more about what an engineering career would be like through job shadowing. Richie's eyes light up, he's excited about the potential opportunity. The advisor works with Richie to develop a plan for reaching out to the career center on campus and applying for some internships in engineering. He connects Richie to his campus career center contact and Richie is put on the schedule to meet with them.

Richie's mentor program advisor meets with him the following month as part of their regular one-on-one meetings, and follows up about his experience at the career center. Richie excitedly shares that he has an interview coming up for a summer engineering internship that the career center connected him to. His advisor congratulates him on this accomplishment and suggests they schedule time to do a practice interview to help him have a successful interview. This tailored support leads to Richie feeling even more confident about his plan to pursue engineering.

REFLECTION—

- Describe a scenario from your own experience advising students where a student would have benefited from a proactive advising approach and how they would have benefited.
- What are some examples of how you have affirmed and validated student assets and strengths in the context of your academic advising work?

WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

If you are interested in adopting proactive advising practices in your work, office, department, program and/or campus, we encourage you to develop an action plan. Below are some guiding ideas to facilitate planning short-term and long-term goals for implementing proactive advising practices. This list of ideas is not exhaustive, but is intended to offer additional guidance for promising next steps.

Short-term goals to incorporate proactive advising strategies into your work

- Reflect on your own advising, training, and education and identify areas where you could enhance your advising approach by being more proactive, holistic, and student-centered.
- Proactively initiate a connection with your advisees and get to know them holistically (i.e., getting to know them both personally and academically). Be sure to learn student names and use them during advising sessions and communication.
- Alter the language used during advising to encourage students and convince them that they have what it takes to succeed and that you will help them achieve their goals.
- Collaborate with students to proactively identify their multifaceted needs, goals, and accompanying resource needs — develop plans with students to meet those needs and goals, and assist them in accessing appropriate campus resources.
- Discuss the possibilities and potential of proactive advising approaches with your advising colleagues and campus leadership.
- Identify the resources available at your campus that you could leverage to facilitate proactive advising outreach to students (e.g., advising technology tools).
- Read more about proactive advising and educate yourself and colleagues about its promise and potential (see suggested resources on page 8).

Long-term goals to incorporate proactive advising strategies at your campus

- Develop a formal plan for incorporating proactive advising strategies that is responsive to, and appropriate for, the particular context of your office, program, department, and/or campus.
- Continue to learn about what your campuses' various student support services and offices do to enable proactive and appropriate resource referral as needed during student advising.
- Build relationships with other offices on campuses to enable advisee referral and cross-office collaboration to meet students' multifaceted needs and goals.
- Revise advisor job descriptions to incorporate expectations around proactive advising outreach, consistent advising engagement, and holistic advising support.
- Implement professional development opportunities for current and incoming advisors to educate them on proactive advising strategies and expectations.
- Explore and implement advising technologies and systems that enable advisors to engage students proactively and document information from each advising meeting to build a holistic student profile to refer to in future advising.
- Cultivate an advising culture that is proactive, holistic, student-centered, validating, and focused on meeting diverse students' multifaceted needs.
- Develop an assessment and improvement plan to continually improve your proactive advising practices.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES AND READINGS

From the PASS projects:

- Learn more about the evidence-based model of proactive advising for at-promise college students in this animated video:
<https://youtu.be/CdR136qH950>
- Read more about the impact of proactive advising on student success and review our data-based model for practitioners in the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2020.1717963>
- Read more about engaging at-promise students for success through innovative practices:
https://pass.pullias.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Brief_Engaging_At-Promise_Students_2022_final.pdf

Other useful resources:

- Explore additional advising toolkits, blogs, and case studies to generate additional ideas for engaging advisees in proactive advising appropriate for your campus context, including information on advising technologies, long-term academic and career path exploration, mental health issues, holistic support, and equity-oriented advising support:
<https://www.advisingsuccessnetwork.org>
- Access additional proactive advising guidance, resources, and discussions of other successful proactive advising interventions by visiting the National Academic Advising Association clearinghouse:
<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Proactive-intrusive-advising-resource-links.aspx>

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