

Advisor/Student Conversation Starters*

While the article was based on academic advising, the concepts and conversations are relevant to student organization advisors and student learning in the Division of Student Affairs.

“Becoming self-authored requires transformational learning that helps students “learn to negotiate and act on [their] own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those [they] have uncritically assimilated from others” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). Unfortunately, most traditional-age college students have not yet developed these capacities, both because many enter college having been socialized to uncritically accept knowledge from authorities (including well-intentioned advice), and because many influential people in students’ lives are inclined to simply offer such knowledge.” (p. 8)

“The shift to self-authorship occurs when students encounter challenges that bring their assumptions into question, have opportunities to reflect on their assumptions, and are supported in reframing their assumptions into more complex frames of reference. However, college students commonly report that adults and peers in their lives tend to attempt to solve their problems for them rather than helping them learn to do so themselves. Thus, one of the myriad reasons that this shift seldom occurs during college may be related to the way advice is given and the lack of opportunities for guided reflection.” (p. 8)

“The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education Interview was structured to learn how student characteristics, including their views of knowledge, self, and social relations, mediated their participation in educational experiences. The interview further explored how students interpreted their educational experiences and which ones promoted their epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development.” (p. 9)

“Although there is no particular formula for this conversation, we suggest that it unfold in four general phases: getting acquainted; encouraging the student to reflect on important experiences of his or her choosing; encouraging the student to interpret those reflections; and concluding the conversation.” (p. 9)

Learning Partnerships Model. “Learning partnerships challenge learners by explicitly portraying knowledge as complex and socially constructed, emphasizing that learners must bring their sense of self and values to deciding what to believe, and sharing expertise and authority among educators and learners in interdependent relationships. These partnerships support students in facing these challenges by validating students’ capacity to construct knowledge, situating learning in students’ experience, and defining learning as a mutual interaction between educator and learner. Learning partnerships engage students at their developmental edge: they welcome students’ current assumptions yet invite exploration of more complex ones.” (p. 10)

“There is an inherent tension in accepting students “as they are” while encouraging them to transform their meaning making frameworks through learning and personal growth (i.e., to change). We resolve this tension by using students’ development as a starting point, avoiding

judging them as deficient or incapable of moving forward, and helping them evaluate their current frameworks in terms of their current struggles and future goals.” (p.11)

Getting Acquainted and Building Rapport (early fall)

Invite students to share in ways they are comfortable:

- Tell me about your self and your interest in this organization.
- What do you expect from this year and this experience?
- Have your experiences so far matched your expectations?
- What do you want to learn/accomplish this year as a leader (as opposed to what you want the organization to accomplish)?

Encouraging Reflections about Important Questions (late fall-early spring)

Ask students to identify, reflect on, and make sense of their salient experiences:

- Tell me about a significant experience you’ve had so far in this organization.
- What has been your best experience so far? Why?
- What has been your worst experience so far? Why?
- What kinds of challenges have you had, and how did you approach them?
- Have you had to make any difficult decisions? What was that like?
- Student organizations can expose you to people with different backgrounds and opinions. Have you encountered new perspectives and how did that impact you?
- Have you identified any new skill areas that you would like to develop?

Encouraging Interpretations of These Reflections (early spring-mid-spring)

Prompt students to make sense of their experiences

- How do you think this leadership experience has affected who you are, how you see yourself, and what you believe?
- What have you learned from this experience?
- In what ways do you see yourself as the same as when you started this leadership experience?
- In what ways do you see yourself as different than when you started this leadership experience?
- What have you learned from this experience?
- What questions or goals does this raise for you about the future?

Concluding the Conversation (late spring)

Affirm the value of sharing and thinking through experiences to be more self-aware and understand implication

- What has this leadership experience meant for you in terms of academic, career, or other leadership opportunities?
- How would you describe your learning to a potential employer in an interview?
- What have you learned about working with other people in interdependent relationships?
- How has this leadership experience framed your values and belief system?

*based on Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (2008). Toward reflective conversations: An advising approach that promotes self-authorship. *Peer Review*, 10 (1), 8-11.