The Power of Empathy and Active Listening in Advising Diverse Student Populations

In & Out of CLASS Conference
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Naomi Farabee, Danny Khotsombath, Uyenthi Tran Myhre
Presentation Overview

- Introductions
- Expectations
- The case for empathy and active listening
- Core concepts
- Practical tips
- Putting it into practice: small group discussion and ‘empathy first aid’
- Final thoughts
Expectations

Expectations of **Presenters**: 
- Presenters speak on behalf of themselves, not associated with their offices/depts/orgs
- Presenters employ the concept of ‘equity in air time’
- Presenters reserve the right to be funny, humorous, charismatic, energetic, and informative

Expectations of **Audience**:
- Audience reserves the right to laugh out loud, clap, snap, or ‘mmhmm’ as you wish
- Audience also employs the concept of ‘equity in air time’
- As an informal educational space, give grace and seek understanding

- Adapted from GLBTA Programs Office Juicy Topics Expectations
The Case for Empathy & Active Listening

“Equity and Diversity Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills: An understanding of how cultural history, contexts, and differences and institutional/social barriers influence students’ experiences and the ability to serve as an advocate for students.”

- CLA Student Services Core Competencies of the Advising Profession (Advising Relationships)
The Case for Empathy & Active Listening

“...considerable evidence supports the idea that feeling empathy for a person in need leads to increased helping of that person.”

- Daniel Batson, Handbook of Positive Psychology

“In the struggle for social justice it’s not how much empathy we feel that makes the difference, but what we do with it in concrete situations.”

- Kristen Zimmerman, Open Democracy
The Power of Empathy
Empathy is the ability to sense other people’s emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling.

The Greater Good Science Center
University of California, Berkeley
Active listening is the practice of listening to a speaker while providing feedback indicating that the listener both hears and understands what the speaker is saying.
The article speaks to the practice of developing relationships with your advisees, using empathy and listening as important tools in this process.

1. Share with the group ways that you have successfully built relationships with advisees. Do you see any areas for improvement in your relationship-building skills/practice?

2. Have you intentionally employed active listening and/or empathy with a student and experienced a change in the relationship? Do you have examples?

3. Do you see a connection between empathy, active listening, and successful advising of a diverse student population? How does this connect to your daily work?
Empathy: Practical Tips

• Use people's name.
• Be fully present when you are with people.
• Encourage people, particularly the quiet ones, when they speak up and express themselves.
• Give genuine recognition and praise.
• Take a personal interest in people, show people that you care, and have genuine curiosity about their lives.
• Listen – truly listen to people.
• Don't interrupt people, don't rush to give advice.
• Tune in to non-verbal communication.

Adapted from: What's Empathy Got to Do With It? [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)
Listening in Practice

No matter who we are, there is room to listen and learn.

Listening is not:
- looking for tidbits from another person to confirm our worldview
- waiting to respond or hoping for dialogue

Listening is:
- opening up to another’s words as well as the sum of their lived experience behind those words
- opening ourselves with the desire to learn and understand before looking for engagement, disagreement, or dialogue

Jamie Utt, Everyday Feminism
Empathy First Aid

During drop-in advising a student stops by to meet with you. You notice on the drop-in slip that the reason for coming in was “Personal Issues.” How would you begin the drop-in appointment?

1. “Just so you know, we only have 5 minutes since this is drop-in advising.”
2. “What brings you in today?”
3. “So it looks like you want to talk about personal issues?”
4. “I noticed that you checked that you wanted to talk about ‘personal issues,’ is there anything you would like to talk about today?”
During the same drop-in appointment the student says, “I found out last week that I’m pregnant and I don’t know what to do.” How do you respond?

1. “Oh no.”
2. “Congratulations!”
3. “Thanks for sharing that with me, it seems like this is big news for you, and there are probably a lot of decisions to make.”
4. “Wow. You should go to the Student-Parent Help Center and we should talk about doing a leave of absence.”
Empathy First Aid

A student says that they haven’t really fit in on campus, and is hinting about some issues on campus like finding safe spaces. How do you respond?

1. “What have you tried so far? Tell me more about what you’re interested in.”
2. “Have you visited the second floor of Coffman? They have everything there.”
3. “So you are feeling like you haven’t really fit in on campus. Tell me more about that.”
4. “Here, let’s look at the student groups website.”
A student comes in to her appointment and looks irritated. She says, “I was walking here to meet you for my appointment and a group of men honked and hollered at me again.” How do you reply?

1. “Oh no, what did you do?”
2. “That happens to me, too. It’s just part of being in a big city.”
3. “Don’t feel bad; it’s just a compliment.”
4. “That’s really frustrating and annoying. Sounds like this isn’t the first time you’ve experienced something like this?”
A student comes in for an appointment. You notice they have an AU hold. You ask how the semester is going so far and they say, “Things are okay, I had to move out of my old place right before the semester started. I’ve been living with friends and I’m trying to figure stuff out.” What would the “best” next step in your appointment?

1. Say “Good luck with that” and move on to their APAS report.
2. “It can be hard to have your living situation in flux right before school starts. What kinds of things have you been trying to figure out?”
3. “That’s good to hear. By the way, you should talk to One Stop about your financial hold.”
Empathy First Aid

You meet with a student who is really interested in majoring in Art, but is inquiring about taking a particular American Indian Studies class. What do you say in response?

1. “Why would you want to do that? I think you should pick something different.”
2. “I think that’s a great idea, that department has a lot of great classes. What interests you about this class?”
3. “It’s great to explore different classes outside of your major.”
Final Thoughts

- Empathy and active listening are at the core of building strong advising relationships. Relationships matter to people - to students.
- We may fear being overwhelmed by students’ responses to our empathic practices, but we have much more capacity for empathy and relationship building that we give ourselves credit for.
- Empathy and active listening can be used to create space for all students to engage with us as academic advisers.
Resources

- http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_limits_of_david_brooksLimits_of_empathy
- http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/kristen-zimmerman/forget-empathy-%E2%80%93-it%E2%80%99s-time-for-radical-connection
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw&feature=share
- http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/empathy/definition
- http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/active-listening
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9jC1ThqTNo
- http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html