



APLU'S

POWERED BY PUBLICS

SCALING STUDENT SUCCESS

Powered by Publics Learning Memo: Metropolitan Cluster

By [Matthew Rust](#) and Julia Chadwick

September 2021

Helping students overcome hurdles at various stages of their academic journey is key to advancing student success and addressing the equity gap. To better understand how universities can use proactive advising to anticipate and address challenges facing students, a subgroup of institutions in the Metropolitan Cluster of Powered by Publics have undertaken an in-depth examination of proactive advising to help inform a grounded theory of implementing proactive advising.

Proactive advising, formerly called intrusive advising, is an advisor-initiated effort anticipating potential barriers to students' learning goals and providing timely interventions based on students' strengths and identities. A more detailed definition of proactive advising is available in the [grounded theory of proactive advising](#) the cluster subgroup developed. The grounded model draws on meetings, focused interviews with advising leaders at nine institutions in the proactive advising subgroup, as well as a large national survey of advisors with responses from 326 unique institutions across 48 states.

This semester, the model is being used to launch proactive advising initiatives focused on Pell Grant-eligible students at six schools (University at Albany, the University of Cincinnati, IUPUI, the University of Louisville, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and Portland State University). The schools had proactive advising efforts at various stages underway, but the grounded theory is informing iterative improvements across the participating institutions. IUPUI and University of Louisville are co-leading this work, which is supported in part by seed funding from Powered by Publics.

Since the subgroup of the cluster started in 2019, the need for bolstered proactive advising has grown even more important on many campuses as the pandemic has forced institutions to focus limited resources to reach students most in need. Under old advising models, too many students are lost to attrition and advisor burnout is all too common. Proactive advising helps address both these problems by focusing advisor efforts on the students who will benefit most from the meaningful conversations advisors facilitate.

As a best practice, many institutions have focused advising on targeting first-generation, first-year students, and those facing academic challenges. Informed by the grounded theory, the six schools are now using proactive advising to ensure more Pell-eligible students have the support they need to succeed. The group of institutions is centering their proactive advising work around three areas – Timing, Targeting, and Topics – to maximize the impact of proactive advising.

On timing, the institutions are focused on reaching students in the first seven weeks of the semester – a critical window in the student journey where additional support and resources can mean the difference between a student dropping out or going on to complete their degree.

This outreach is also targeted. Though each institution has a unique approach, they are all undertaking personalized outreach. At IUPUI, for example, the Pell-eligible student population will receive emails and texts reminding them to set up an appointment with an advisor by a specific date. If a student doesn't schedule an appointment by then, IUPUI auto-schedules an advising appointment for the student for a time that doesn't conflict with courses while giving the student the ability to reschedule a time that better fits their availability. This increasingly proactive approach flips traditional opt-in processes around to help remove every possible obstacle to accessing advising.

Finally, the advising meetings go beyond traditional advising topics. Instead of focusing on course planning or scheduling for the next semester, advisors intentionally raise topics such as mental, physical, and financial wellbeing. They encourage students to take part in high-impact engagement practices (such as internships, undergraduate research, and study abroad), ask about issues students may be struggling with, and discuss career planning. When a student identifies a need for support that goes beyond the advisor's expertise area – detailed information on financial resources, for example – the advisor connects them with an expert on campus who can offer more robust help.

The six institutions are currently implementing proactive advising for Pell-eligible students while tracking the success of their efforts, with the hope of sharing lessons from their work early next year.

Other Resources

In May, the cluster also hosted a Powered by Publics Learning Event on [Building Financial Confidence Through Coaching-based Advising](#), a virtual workshop with Dr. Kathleen Shea Smith Associate Provost for Academic Advising, University of Oklahoma that nearly 500 individuals attended.