SPAN 2014

Advising MDiv Students for Success in Seminary and in Ministry
WELCOME!

Introductions

• Who are you?
• Where are you from?
• What is your role at your school?
• Why is this workshop of interest to you?
Candler’s Context

• University-Related School of Theology
• Official Seminary of the United Methodist Church
• 441 total students in Fall 2013
• 340 MDiv students
• Entering MDiv classes of approximately 120 students each fall
• 40+ denominations
• Range of ages 21-60+
• Variety of vocational plans and paths (70% parish ministry, others planning for teaching, counseling, chaplaincy, non-profit work, youth ministry, and more)
What Students Need

- Ways to engage the curriculum that best support their vocational goals
- Opportunities to explore vocation, especially for those who aren’t in a denominational discernment process already
- A “Rhythm of Life” for their time in school
- Resources for constructively engaging community life without becoming overwhelmed and overcommitted
- Tools that will serve them in ministry and life
Candler’s MDiv Advising Program
An Evolving Model

Way back when…

Prior to 2007, Advising at Candler was folded into Supervised Ministry/Contextual Education

Pros:
No Scheduling Issues
Extensive Faculty/Student Interaction

Challenges:
Advising had little intentionality
If student had problems in Con Ed, the advising relationship could be negatively affected
Plenaries with registrar or similar were scheduled separately and were optional
Candler’s MDiv Advising Program
An Evolving Model

2007

New Advising Model Introduced with New Curriculum.

Included 8 meetings across two semesters, limited plenaries, and money available for a group meal. No connection to Contextual Education.

Pros: Fellowship among faculty and students across entire year
Time for plenaries with registrar and financial aid
Peer Advisors (3rd year MDiv students)

Challenges: Ad Hoc Scheduling
Uneven student experience
Disconnect from Contextual Education was helpful on the Con Ed side of the equation
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An Evolving Model

2008-2011

Various (and seemingly constant) tweaks to the program including:
• Reconnection to Contextual Education groups while maintaining a separate purpose and structure
• Removal of 1 hour of academic credit with reduction of meetings and limitation to first semester
• Funding dissolved for school-paid group meal
• Attempts at assigning themes to small group meetings
  • Vocation of Being a Student
  • Vocational Plans After Seminary
  • Navigating the Curriculum
• Variations in timing of meetings in the semester

Each variance proved to have new challenges as well as improvements.
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2012

Introduction of a Common Syllabus for MDiv 505: MDiv Advising

- Balance of small group meetings, plenaries, and engagement with various parts of student life
- Invites holistic engagement during seminary and provides rhythms, information, and skills that can also serve a student well after graduation
  - Personal health and wellness (mental, physical, and spiritual)
  - Academic enrichment/support
  - Vocational discernment
  - Student life/organizations
  - Financial health
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2013

Common Syllabus was revised to include new Faith and Finance component

- First year focus on debt reduction and budgeting
  - Video/Curriculum provided
  - Small group discussion based on video segments
  - Meetings with Financial Advisor in Spring semester
- Future meetings regarding financial leadership in churches and organizations, clergy taxation, saving for retirement, etc.
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What’s Working

• Financial Literacy curriculum folded into the advising groups/curriculum
• Connection to Contextual Education groups
• Seeking Sanity in Seminary plenary
• Student engagement with various parts of student life
• Inviting engagement with all levels of academic enrichment/support
• Encouraging students to find balance without being too heavy handed
• Having a place to be sure students get critical information/experience that isn’t New Student Orientation
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Continuing Challenges

• Scheduling
  • 50-minute time slot
  • Coordination with First Year Common Courses
  • Student Life and Program Calendars

• Anticipating student needs/interests and getting others involved
  • Vocational workshops example
  • Certificate interest luncheon example
Sharing Best Practices

• What are the biggest needs of students in your context?

• What is your institution doing already that is working well?

• What are your biggest challenges? What ideas do you have for addressing them?
Thank you for your participation!

Questions, Comments, Ideas to Share?

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