



Assessment of Academic Advising Institute Rocks

Kay Adkins, Assessment Institute Scholarship Recipient



In the 2011 spring semester, I began a new vocational journey as an advising specialist for the Student Success Center at Ozarka College in north-central Arkansas. As a “higher ed. rookie,” I knew I needed some help gaining knowledge and skills to work more effectively with my advisees and help them reach their goals. I soon discovered NACADA as an indispensable resource. I also enrolled in the online Master’s in Academic Advising program at Kansas State University.

My first exposure to advising assessment was through the Kansas State University course, *Administration of Academic Advising*, taught by **Rich Robbins**. The course introduced students to the assessment cycle. Each part of the cycle was an “aha!” moment for me—a process I wanted to share with my advising colleagues at Ozarka.

When I began to explore possibilities for my 2012-2013 professional development experience, my attention went quickly to NACADA’s **Assessment Institute**. Developing measurable advising outcomes and a variety of methods to test my effectiveness in achieving them is a process had I found in my K-State course to be very tricky, and one that takes much time and focus to hone. So I knew that my own learning could be re-enforced by attending the Institute.

When I was privileged to be awarded one of the **NACADA Assessment Institute scholarships**, the tuition savings opened the door for both me and my supervisor, **Mickey Freeze**, to commit to this conference. Participating in the Assessment Institute as a team greatly enhanced the experience and created greater synergy for improving our advising services as a department. We learned from many of today’s most respected advising and assessment mentors; we spent workshop time developing a mission and goals for our own department; and we received valuable feedback from the experts and from other attendees.

In the welcome session, institute faculty member **Karen Boston** (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville) set the stage with her humorously profound opening PowerPoint slide containing only the word “ASSESSMENT” placed on a background of rocks. Her “Assessment Rocks” message eventually dawned on each of us (it took a minute or two), and the ice was broken for a rigorous but fun three days of learning about why “Assessment Rocks.”

NACADA’s Executive Director **Charlie Nutt** delivered the first plenary session: “The Assessment Process in Academic Advising.” He explained some misconceptions about assessment—what assessment is not, and what it is: a cycle of setting desired outcomes, mapping a process to achieve them, gathering

evidence to determine effectiveness, interpreting data, making improvements, and starting the process over again.

Charlie said, "Advising is not about service. It is about teaching and learning, and we need to use that language. We are part of the educational process." That concept, for me, established the starting point to begin to map out my advising tasks in such a way that they will better facilitate my advisees' growth and development. I realized that if providing "services" is my only goal, my work with students becomes very prescriptive and does little for the student other than shuffle them through the system. But if teaching and learning is my goal, my students will be more likely to develop autonomy and become aware of and committed to their own growth and achievement.

For the group discussion workshops, Mickey and I selected Charlie's Foundational Level group, to explore and begin to develop an advising vision, mission, goals, objectives, and desired outcomes for our department. Those farther along in the assessment design process could attend either the Conceptual Level group or the Operational Level group. For me, time with a co-worker spent brainstorming, identifying, and articulating some agreed-upon goals was a rare and productive opportunity. With our office environments separated by more than 25 miles and lots of work to tend to, it takes a "retreat" to dedicate ourselves to the task of program planning and development.

The Assessment Institute faculty truly modeled a culture of assessment for the attendees. Charlie closed discussion group meetings by having each group present what they had developed. We received valuable feedback and encouragement from Charlie and constructive comments from the other groups. Through that assessment activity, Charlie could evaluate each group's level of understanding, and we could assess ourselves by comparing our own ideas with the ideas of other groups, making adjustments to our assessment plan accordingly. Also, we regularly assessed the Assessment Institute itself! At the end of each plenary session attendees completed a survey about the session. We knew the forms were reviewed immediately because concepts noted as unclear in one session were clarified quickly in the next plenary session. The data gathered was immediately utilized to adjust and improve the Institute.

The opportunity to advise college students in an economically challenged region has been very gratifying for me. Without the presence of Ozarka College, comprising four campuses in four different north Arkansas counties, many residents would likely never attempt post-secondary education. Ozarka's mission, "providing life-changing experiences through education," rings very true. But with a high percentage of at-risk students, I need to be the best advisor I can be.

The NACADA 2013 Assessment Institute equipped me with tools to develop an advising curriculum that I can test and continually improve for a more significant impact on my students. (And personally meeting two of my K-State instructors, Charlie Nutt and Rich Robbins, who were serving on the Institute faculty, was icing on the cake!) I am very grateful to NACADA for that experience.

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