



A conceptual framework for a proposed intervention: interdisciplinary academic advising and mentoring through personal tutor groups

Yousra Osman & Ruta Vaidya

To cite this article: Yousra Osman & Ruta Vaidya (2025) A conceptual framework for a proposed intervention: interdisciplinary academic advising and mentoring through personal tutor groups, *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 33:1, 112-128, DOI: [10.1080/13611267.2024.2425928](https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2024.2425928)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2024.2425928>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 11 Nov 2024.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 1368



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 1 [View citing articles](#)



OPEN ACCESS



A conceptual framework for a proposed intervention: interdisciplinary academic advising and mentoring through personal tutor groups

Yousra Osman ^a and Ruta Vaidya ^b

^aDepartment of Education, Middlesex University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates; ^bDepartment of Media, Middlesex University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

ABSTRACT

Students' engagement and interactions within higher education are limited to domains of sports, cultural events, and extracurricular activities. However, it is important to cultivate an all-rounded enriching experience for them within their university life. Furthermore, due to limited classroom communication with both their classmates and lecturers, it becomes more restrictive to share academic experiences and thus wholly enjoy classroom learning. As a resolve, interdisciplinary interactions have proven to be effective in helping students truly appreciate their university life, particularly academia. We propose an intervention based on a unique approach by adopting interdisciplinary academic advising through personal tutor groups. To propose this as a university-wide initiative, this paper adopts a conceptual framework to recommend the gaps in existing systems in higher education related to the approach and its benefits to the culture and community of a university – its staff, lecturers, and importantly the students within The United Arab Emirates (UAE).

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 31 August 2023
Accepted 30 October 2024

KEYWORDS

Academic advising; interdisciplinary; personal tutor mentoring; motivation; belongingness; action research

Background

This paper is based on recommendations for an intervention to formalise academic advising and mentoring through personal tutor groups, an approach that is lacking in universities in the UAE. The objective of the paper is to provide an overview of the concerns and problems related to student motivation and their sense of belongingness to the university, particularly related to their academic activities. Based on our preliminary observations and experiences as full-time faculty members at one of the largest universities in the UAE, we propose interdisciplinary academic advising and mentoring through personal

CONTACT Ruta Vaidya  r.vaidya@mdx.ac.ae  Department of Media, Middlesex University, Dubai Knowledge Park - Blocks 15, 16 & 17 P.O. Box 500697, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

tutor groups that could help increase student motivation and their social connectedness among peers and faculty. While we recognise and acknowledge that academic advising is not a unique approach, what adds to our proposed action research is to adopt interdisciplinary academic advising by conducting small personal tutor groups outside of classrooms. We argue that it is beneficial for students' overall experience in higher education to not only interact with those from the same discipline, but with those from other disciplines as well. And thus, our paper is a conceptual exploration of approaches to academic advising in higher education, conducting personal tutor groups to help facilitate interactions between students and lecturers outside of classrooms, and to highlight the gaps in these service-oriented approaches within universities in the UAE. Our paper will add to contextual knowledge for a region-specific case.

The role of students from passive consumers of knowledge has changed over the years as co-creators of knowledge within higher education (Araújo et al., 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2023). Though their co-creation is seen through avenues such as sports, cultural events, activities, and clubs, their all-rounded experience as university students seems lacking due to their limited participation and cross-curricular collaboration within academia. This tends to impact their social connectedness among their peers. Social connectedness is related to belongingness, and the point at which the students experience a sense of social relationships and integration (Dias-Broens et al., 2024; Kuwabara et al., 2002; Lee & Robbins, 1995). And thus, feeling belonged and connected is a crucial experience of students' learning pertaining to higher education (Hehir et al., 2021).

While social connectedness takes place within the same disciplines, students often benefit from connecting with those from other disciplines, sometimes even more. However, there seems to be a disconnect among students from different disciplines, often arising out of a lack of opportunities to connect (Krause et al., 2012). This perhaps arises due to limited and restricted opportunities to connect and interact between students and lecturers outside classrooms. Student-faculty relationship has proven to improve via social support through mentoring avenues beyond classrooms (Cox et al., 2010; Micari & Pazos, 2012).

While this is observed among most year groups, it is witnessed more among year one students. The lack of social connectedness and a sense of belonging arise from various factors such as the diverse ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds, varied curriculums, and social anxiety while transitioning to a new environment (Morieson et al., 2013). This diversity in culture is visible in a region like the UAE with over 200 nationalities and ethnicities. While intercultural classroom exchanges can widen students' perspectives, their interactions outside the classroom can provide favourable outcomes to their well-being and engagement in university set-ups. Moreover, there are positive outcomes to student-faculty interactions in social settings outside of classrooms that enhances teaching and learning (Demir & Leyendecker, 2018; Estell &

Perdue, 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2012). However, students' interactions with one another are often limited to classrooms, which makes them consider academic environment as an obligation towards their roles as students.

In addition to lack of opportunities to interact, it is not surprising to see that student motivation can be an enabler or barrier in teaching and learning. Motivation can be described as students' determination to engage, learn, and reach their potential (Martin, 2008). Although motivation is a multilayered and subjective experience that can be challenging to explore (Gagné & Deci, 2005), studies have shown the impact it has on student engagement, academic achievement, and general wellbeing (Brooks & Young, 2011). It is even more crucial within a higher education context as students need to be self-directed and independent learners, which requires a strong sense of motivation (Leenknecht et al., 2020). A lack of a sense of belongingness and social connectedness among university students can hinder students' academic progress and motivations. In this, educators have a huge role to play in which it is crucial to go beyond theory and implement strategies of action that facilitate addressing those concerns.

The role of academic advising

Various terms are used to describe academic advising such as career counseling, mentoring, guiding, advocating, etc, which makes its definitions vaguer. Moreover, adding to the ambiguity is the set functions and varying structures within institutions (Himes, 2014; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). The three broad purposes of academic advising are: engaging students in reflective conversations about their educational goals, providing them an overview of higher education, and helping them realise their goals towards self-awareness and responsibility (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Academic advising falls under informal educational experiences, outside of classrooms that help students navigate opportunities and interactions outside of classrooms. Academic advisors are the students' most consistent links between academia and their overall experience at the University (Hunter & White, 2004). This scholarship add that 'academic advising, well developed and appropriately accessed, is perhaps the only structured campus endeavour that can guarantee students sustained interaction with a caring and concerned adult who can help them shape such an experience' (p. 21). Academic advising is crucial in the development of competencies among students such as their ability to improve interpersonal skills, fulfilling career objectives, communicate on varied levels that helps students with the capacity to succeed in society (NACADA > Resources > Pillars > Concept, n.d.). Academic advisors are a catalyst for the expansion of the students' academic environment, while assisting students in navigating their own personal concerns, development and serve as a point of contact between

various faculty, academic and campus resources, as well as resources outside of the university (Spratley, 2019).

Several universities in the West consist of academic advising functions mainly within the departments. This is primarily due to academic advising's integral role in guiding students through general requirements of education programmes and in helping them navigate a university's curricular terrain for fulfilling those requirements (Egan, 2015). In that sense, the role of the academic advisor is within the domain of curriculum and discipline-specific guidance. However, we argue that the role of the academic advisers need not be confined strictly to these matters. Their role goes beyond the formal educational structures and more of mentoring and helping students in smooth transitions through different levels, and to help their academic growth and success. To fully help students navigate their academic lives at the university, academic advisors are responsible for mentoring students outside of educational requirements. Yet little has been examined in relation to how advising beyond educational goals is structured and can benefit students and help them enjoy and participate in academic activities as much as they participate in other extra-curricular activities. As Templeton et al., (2023) explain, for effective mentorship, the mentor–mentee relationship entails a collaborative and reciprocal dynamic, characterized by the shared exchange of power and knowledge, thereby departing from the traditional hierarchical structure. That is to help them truly engage in the university culture that produces knowledge.

Strayhorn (2015) uses 'culture' as a metaphor for university life believing that, to apprehend this culture, students must be socialized into it, imbuing the implicit and explicit aspects of it. To aid that he refers to lecturers as 'cultural navigators' – those who 'strive to help students move successfully through education and life ... – the academic advisors' (Strayhorn, 2015, p. 59). Cultural navigators in higher education help guide students until they are comfortable steering, while they act as guides on the side and keep them on their path. This can be seen as a way of scaffolding students in their journey of learning with others. Students need more than basic academic skills to experience the culture of higher education (Strayhorn, 2015). This could be considered a general understanding of the merits of academic advising, both for students and educators.

In the UK, academic advising takes on a multifaceted approach, encompassing both pastoral and academic dimensions. Faculty advisors are tasked with offering comprehensive guidance and mentorship to students, addressing not only their academic pursuits but also their holistic development. In contrast, the majority of universities in the UAE adhere to the conventional US model of academic advising, primarily focused on supporting students in achieving their academic objectives and making informed program choices (McGill et al., 2020). However, a challenge as well as an opportunity lies in the limited research conducted in academic advising within the region as well as the need for

improved policy and practice within this arena (Alshamsi & Mohebi, 2022). A closer examination of university websites in the UAE reveals that certain institutions have dedicated full-time academic advisors, with this responsibility shared between them and faculty members, termed a 'shared-dual model' (Swanson, 2006). Notably, research conducted among undergraduate students in the UAE demonstrated a general satisfaction with their advisors, although it indicated the need for potential modifications in the delivery of advisory services to enhance effectiveness. Furthermore, there was a call for the incorporation of essential life skills within the advising process, which would prove beneficial not only during the university journey but also in post-graduate life (Gudep, 2007).

There are challenges that arise with academic advising on an international level, including institutions within this region, and that involves faculty members being obligated to deliver research outcomes, maintain high teaching standards, and secure specific grants in addition to advising. Since advising is not a task that positively influences promotions or tenure decisions, instating, and structuring it can become a hindrance (Swanson, 2006).

For academic advising to be effective and successful as an outcome for the students, academic advisors are expected to have knowledge about the institutions policies, programme details, and students' performance. However, currently in most universities, academic advising is done by faculty members to advise and track students' progress through their years at the university. But faculty members may lack the required knowledge, experience, techniques, and strategies for academic advising (Loucif et al., 2020). Because academic advising focuses on academic aspects such as helping students choose a programme, to reviewing their progress and ensuring their successful graduation, academic advisors are mainly from the same discipline or the same programme. However, academic advising has proven to increase students' academic performance at the university level. And thus it is important to advise and guide the 'whole' student beyond just academics to truly foster their growth thus creating among them a sense of belongingness (Light, 2021; Strayhorn, 2015; Zhang et al., 2017).

Kuhn (2008) refers to academic advising as scenarios in which institutional representatives or faculty members provide advice, insight, and direction to students about academic, personal, and social matters. This approach resonates the most with our proposal for academic advising within universities in the UAE. The interdisciplinary approach to be introduced allows for a student's all-rounded experience at the university level so that they truly feel belonged (Strayhorn, 2015).

Interdisciplinary approach in education

Within education, there has been a lot of emphasis on interdisciplinary studies. Klein (2010) outlines that interdisciplinary approaches 'integrate

content, data, methods, tools, concepts, and theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge in order to advance fundamental understanding, answer complex questions, and solve problems that are too broad or complex for a single approach' (p. 181). The definition suggests that to gain optimal knowledge and output in academia, the interdisciplinary approach is the most effective. Exposing students to different specialized fields of knowledge and to the develop disciplinary awareness could be understood as a basic foundation to the relevance of interdisciplinary structures (Egan, 2015). While knowledge exchange in relation to auditing or choosing modules from other disciplines is not offered to students in most of the academic institutions outside of the US, knowledge exchange can be facilitated in the form of academic advising within this concept of 'interdisciplinarity'. Research has shown that colleges and universities are increasingly making connections across disciplines to encourage analytic and integrative thinking, and that academic advisors play a critical role in developing students' capacities to identify relationships between concepts, draw connections, and apply knowledge and skills sets across disciplines (Egan, 2015; Gaston et al., 2010).

The interdisciplinary approach which stems from the American higher education context aims at exposing students to different specialised disciplines and to create awareness foundational to an interdisciplinary understanding (Egan, 2015). It can be argued that if interdisciplinary knowledge within classrooms can benefit students' perspectives and learning, then an interdisciplinary approach in students' and educators' interactions outside classrooms could also prove beneficial to their overall development and progress. As inhibitions and obligations towards classroom learning outcomes are released when taken into more informal settings.

The discourse on and implementation of interdisciplinary approaches in humanities and social sciences is not new, in the West, and particularly in the United States. Little attention is given to the interdisciplinary approach, particularly interdisciplinary academic advising in the Middle East/Gulf region. Zayed University in Abu Dhabi as a case study offers and integrates interdisciplinary modules and curriculums, which have proven effective in structuring and promoting humanities and social sciences (Joseph, 2010). While we acknowledge, that interdisciplinary academic advising would also have limitations in terms of matching disciplines such as humanities and social sciences, we argue that 'interdisciplinary advising' need not only focus on academic aspects, but should adopt a holistic approach of mentoring, advising, and tutoring outside of classrooms where students might require that extra conversation and interaction with lecturers and students from other disciplines too. At the same time, we also maintain that to be able to advise and mentor purely on academic matters, the integration of disciplines might not be effective in terms of outcomes for both students and lecturers.

Several higher education institution and universities have peer tutor support. However, this is largely seen within departments and disciplines with larger cohorts, in which attention to many students at the same time becomes challenging. Thus, the proposal is to form smaller groups of students, whereby the lecturer can actively engage students through academic advising pertaining to the classroom discourses and curriculum. Interdisciplinary academic advising through small groups not only facilitates students' interactions with others from different discipline, but they are also able to freely express themselves better with people they do not interact with closely (Cox et al., 2010). This aligns with Morieson et al. (2013) 'Belonging Narrative Model' suggesting that there is a desire among students to develop a sense of belonging not just to their programme peers but also to the interdisciplinary community of the school.

Conceptual framework

This paper explores the proposed solution of having interdisciplinary personal tutor groups to help develop different elements of motivation and sense of belongingness using two main theories as the foundation: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and self-determination theory (SDT).

Maslow's (2018) theory focuses on the level of needs a student might have to reach self-actualisation to develop the intrinsic motivation to learn, but other scholars have adapted this to see how it looks within a Higher Education setting (Milheim, 2012; Prescott & Simpson, 2004) (see [Figure A1](#) in Appendix). Whether the motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic, there are certain needs that need to be met to improve the learning experience. Physiological needs would include students finding timetables, maps, information, and resources within the university; safety needs would involve the uncertainty in assessment strategies and course expectations. Love and belonging would be the student-instructor and student-student relationships in addition to social and academic inclusion, while esteem would be feeling respected and valued by others through feedback and collaboration. Leading to the final level self-actualisation, which involves an independent learner with the motivation to learn (Milheim, 2012; Prescott & Simpson, 2004). Having a two-hour lecture/seminar makes it challenging to ensure all the above needs are met, and whether students are accessing the right resources within the institution. During class time, the content tends to be module-focused, and the interaction with students is limited.

Therefore, having personal tutor groups with interdisciplinary dialogue allows multiple perspectives within academia and can provide an allocated time and space to help students with their individual needs, whether it be physiological, safety, love and belonging, or esteem, thus increasing their motivation to learn. To keep student retention for first year students, an affective commitment to the institution is required (Lay-Hwa Bowden, 2013) and with personal tutor groups, academic staff

can provide holistic support to students from personal to academic to professional, allowing the personal tutor to build a bridge between student and institution (Grey & Osborne, 2020). Not only can students find support and guidance through their personal tutors, but even more so when connecting with a small number of other students (Wilcox et al., 2005). Research has found that personal tutor groups can help students develop a higher self-concept and motivation as well as have better social integration, but for this to occur tutors should authentically care about the students and create a warm, friendly relationship (Buskirk-Cohen & Plants, 2019; Yale, 2019).

The two main elements of motivation within most motivational theories are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with the former involving an innate interest in an activity, so the reward is doing the activity itself, while the latter is when the activity is conducted for a certain outcome (Czikszentmihalyi, 1982). However, self-determination theory (STD) takes it a step further by providing a possible process where extrinsic motivation can lead to improved performance and reduced dropout rates (Jeno et al., 2018).

Self-determination theory provides a continuum with amotivation on one end that includes no motivation on one end and intrinsic motivation on the other with autonomous motivation. In between are various types of extrinsic motivations with different levels of controlled-autonomous motivations, for instance, external regulation (controlled motivation) is based on the consequences of doing the activity, whether it be a reward or a punishment. Within a higher education setting this could include parents enforcing a certain discipline, or a job requiring a degree. Integrated regulation (autonomous motivation) is when the behaviour is fully internalised because it is highly connected with their sense of self (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Research has shown that individuals with fully internalised extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation perform better (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

To help students reach autonomous motivation within SDT, three main aspects are required, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT is used as the conceptual framework for the interdisciplinary personal tutor groups to help impact student motivation. Autonomy is the student feeling as though they have some sort of control or choice in their learning, and this can be implemented by providing students with activities that allow them to work autonomously (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The scope of the personal tutor groups involves allowing students to decide what they would like to discuss and to ensure the content is individually personalised to their needs. Moreover, the students create their own short- and long-term goals whether it be personal or academic. When developing goals, it is useful to guide students to focus on intrinsic goals such as personal growth, which helps with well-being rather than extrinsic ones such as fame or success because that encourages comparisons (Neto, 2015; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Students need to see how the learning is relevant to

their long-term intrinsic goals, so even if they are not interested in a particular activity or assignment, they see the value of it (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Competence is similar to Bandura's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) in that the students are confident in completing the task successfully, and the aim is to have students reflect on their strengths and weaknesses to achieve the tasks they assigned themselves. Research has shown students have more perceived competence when they considered their instructors to be autonomy supportive (Jeno et al., 2021). Lastly, relatedness involves a sense of belonging through meaningful relationships with others (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2020), and one of the main notions of the personal tutor groups suggested is to have students connect with their tutors and peers through invaluable, multidisciplinary discussions within a safe and more informal setting outside of class.

Proposed intervention

Teacher action research focuses on changing a problem within a teacher's professional environment to improve teaching practice and students learning to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach (Vaughan & Burnaford, 2016). It is a cyclical inquiry motion in identifying a problem, gathering, and analysing data to then creating an action plan (Stremmel, 2002). The 'action' in action research implies that there will be a plan executed based on the findings of the study to inform decision making related to the intervention (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010, p. 8). The proposed intervention is an initiative centring around interdisciplinary academic advising at the university we currently teach as lecturers in Dubai to encourage and foster learning and collaboration with another department within the creative arts and social sciences such as Media, Education, Graphics Design, and Fashion. The intervention will focus on areas pertaining to creating and building student communities through advising across disciplines that can get together and discuss ideas and perspectives, thereby creating strong bonds among them and the lecturers.

Based on common knowledge and observation, while the interdisciplinary approach is adopted at the level of faculty collaborations, it is lacking at the student-centric level. Additionally, the culture of academic advising inculcates the sharing of best theories and advising practices, however without empirical support (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010, p. 5). We recognized that there is a lack of such service-oriented initiatives in the UAE. In addition, there are limited academic interactions between students from other disciplines, which can prevent them from truly engaging in their academic life at university.

The objective is to conduct academic advising sessions through personal tutor groups face-to-face with the aim of keeping the number of students smaller. Thereby dividing and mixing students into four groups by managing two groups each, between lecturers from the various social science

departments. Research suggests that academic advising helps promote students' active learning and growth through informed, structured, and expert advice from advisors (Antoney, 2020). Academic experiences are largely affected by personal experiences which hinder their classroom engagement. Students often see lecturers from a top-down hierarchical perspective, and this adds to their fears of approaching their lecturers. For true co-sharing of knowledge, it is crucial to break that barrier and engage with students on an equal level thus helping them recognize academia, their classroom experiences as enjoyable rather than obligatory towards obtaining a degree. The intervention will involve conducting interdisciplinary personal tutor groups to promote learning and collaboration between students. The idea is for the students to have a safe space to raise their concerns, reflect, and connect with tutors and peers. The aim is for students to choose session topics related to their experiences during the first year, but also ensure the three elements of SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are embedded. Therefore, the proposed action project is based on identifying the impact lack of motivation has on students' learning experiences through class observations and implementing interdisciplinary academic advising through personal tutor groups within two departments at a university, as an action plan to elevate their levels of motivation, and help create a sense of belongingness to the university.

Conclusion and recommendations

Most departments in our university do not have faculty providing official academic advising services, with the exceptions of a few. Furthermore, in the UAE in general this is limited to one-to-one sessions related to purely academic goals. The challenges and the critique of academic advising is that it has never been a priority in most of the universities. In a teaching-oriented university, value is placed on evaluating faculty members' teaching, research, and service. Whereas in a research-oriented university, emphasis is on research, teaching, and service, in that order. There are few to no examples of service-oriented universities. And thus, teaching and research awards are a common phenomenon while service awards within academia are not. "There is a lack of incentives for faculty to provide high-quality advising" (Hossler et al., 2009, p.8 in Zhang et al., 2017, p. 54). Academic advising falls under a service-oriented approach and the recommendation is to formalise a centre that allows for more interdisciplinary dialogue and participation thereby creating a sense of belongingness among the students and educators.

At our university, very few departments have academic advisors, who are assigned groups of students. However, the advising sessions are voluntary and are availed based on the students' requirements. And thus, its effectiveness cannot be measured or studied unless it becomes a crucial part of the disciplinary structure and are embedded into the learning outcomes of the

curriculum. To implement interdisciplinary academic advising is for the advisors or faculty members to have the breadth of knowledge, expertise, and skills across disciplines. And thus what we propose is slightly different and extends beyond academic advising to adopt a holistic approach of advising and mentoring which ultimately helps students succeed in their academic journey. Through interdisciplinary collaborations and interactions with students and lecturers, they gain varied perspectives, and experiences required to effectively function and work once they graduate.

We have also found that while only one university in the Gulf region focuses on 'interdisciplinary approach' (limited to only courses and curriculums), it adopts the American education system, where students are allowed and, in many cases, required to take courses from other disciplines (Joseph, 2009). Thus, interdisciplinary academic advising in that context might not be challenging. Whereas ours being a UK university, there is no structure to facilitate the offer for cross-disciplinary modules. The study is also limited in that it is from the perspective of students being able to adopt the interdisciplinary approach. It does not focus on the role of educators and lecturers as interdisciplinary mentors, nor does it apply beyond classrooms.

As studies have suggested that the adoption of the interdisciplinary approach is aligned within the disciplines of humanities and social sciences (Joseph, 2009; Klein, 2010). Though, those who represent singular disciplines or 'monodisciplinarians' may contest this (Groenhuijsen, 2009), however, academics rarely see connections to other disciplines through an interdisciplinary approach (Krishnan, 2009). A shift toward an interdisciplinary approach in higher education has become a prominent characteristic of academia in recent times (McGill et al., 2022).

Though we agree with these studies, our proposal is to focus on the overall development and success of students that facilitates in fulfilling their academic journey. And to embrace varied perspectives and knowledge, it is crucial to get acquainted with students from other disciplines too. Many disciplines share similar content and assessments; therefore, it would be useful to group such disciplines together such as Psychology, Education, and Media or Marketing with Accounting and Finance. The idea is not only to restrict mentoring to academic advising, but to inculcate a sense of connectedness and belongingness among students that helps them relate to and be accepting of students and their perspectives from other disciplines. Because we adopt a holistic approach of mentoring and discuss and converse about concerns and issues that hinder students' academic journey, we propose to conduct sessions and workshops on common learning strategies across disciplines such as 'time management techniques', 'academic writing and referencing', and 'strategic planning and writing for assessments'. For academic related matters, students will be directed to the respective faculty members. This structure

aligns with and integrates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and self-determination theory (SDT), in which students develop intrinsic motivation through interdisciplinary interactions and collaborations, that heighten their sense of belongingness to the community and culture of the university.

In the UAE, academic advising is mainly conducted by staff or faculty whose role is to mentor students with course advising, and monitoring degree progressions (McIntosh et al., 2021). The region lacks a holistic approach to advising with an interdisciplinary method. Interdisciplinary academic advising through personal tutor groups has potential in enriching students' learning experience in higher education and increasing their motivation levels. It also provides a basis on how they could be improved thus cultivating unique experiences in academia and increasing a sense of belongingness among them. Our proposal will enable perspective and policy changes within the University, and can serve as a model for other higher education institutions in the Middle East.

A further area of research could focus on exploring the structure of peer-mentoring within the framework of academic advising, wherein the academic advisors can appoint mentors from higher cohorts and delegate tasks to manage small the personal groups effectively. Once the interdisciplinary academic advising structure is in place, and expands within the institution, the peer mentors can add value to providing the link between academic advisors and the personal tutor groups. These peer mentors from different disciplines can not only assist novice students in their academic performance (Colvin & Ashman, 2010), but can provide general advise, guidance, and personal and social support to the mentees (Heim & Holt, 2022), considering that the mentors would have faced similar challenges and thus would be able to assist the mentees better based on how they experienced social and academic aspects of being higher education students. This added structured could help heighten a sense of belongingness through the peer-mentor arrangement under the scope of interdisciplinary academic advising.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the numerous scholars, friends, and colleagues who provided their valuable feedback at various conferences and seminars we presented this paper. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the University where we currently work, for providing the platform and opportunity to combine our separate research disciplines of Education and Media.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Yousra Osman  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8395-5977>

Ruta Vaidya  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4477-4185>

References

- Adi Badiozaman, I. F. B., Leong, H., & Jikus, O. (2020). Investigating student engagement in Malaysian higher education: A self-determination theory approach. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(10), 1364–1378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1688266>
- Aiken-Wisniewski, S. A., Smith, J. S., & Troxel, W. G. (2010). Expanding research in academic advising: Methodological strategies to engage advisors in research. *NACADA Journal*, 30(1), 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-30.1.4>
- Alshamsi, A., & Mohebi, L. (2022). Academic advising policy and procedure in a selected federal university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(7) Article 7. 197–218. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.7.11>
- Antoney, L. (2020). Academic advising – a conceptual integration of advising models and approaches. *International Journal of Education*, 2(2), Article 2.
- Araújo, N., Carlin, D., Clarke, B., Morieson, L., Lukas, K., & Wilson, R. (2014). Belonging in the first year: A creative discipline cohort case study. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 5(2), 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i2.240>
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *The American Psychologist*, 37(2), 122–147. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.37.2.122>
- Brooks, C. F., & Young, S. L. (2011). Are choice-making opportunities needed in the classroom? Using self-determination theory to consider student motivation and learner empowerment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(1), 48–59.
- Buskirk-Cohen, A. A., & Plants, A. (2019). Caring about success: Students' perceptions of professors' caring matters more than Grit. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 31(1), 108–114.
- Colvin, J. W., & Ashman, M. (2010). Roles, risks, and benefits of peer mentoring relationships in higher education. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 18(2), 121–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611261003678879>
- Concept of Academic Advising. (n.d). *NACADA > Resources > Pillars > Concept*. Retrieved June 13, 2023, from <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/Concept.aspx>
- Cox, B. E., McIntosh, K. L., Terenzini, P. T., Reason, R. D., & Lutovsky Quayle, B. R. (2010). Pedagogical signals of faculty approachability: Factors shaping faculty-student interaction outside the classroom. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(8), 767–788. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9178-z>
- Czikszentmihalyi, M. (1982). Intrinsic motivation and effective teaching: A flow analysis. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 1982(10), 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.37219821004>
- Demir, M., & Leyendecker, B. (2018). School-related social support is associated with School engagement, self-competence and health-related quality of life (HRQoL) in Turkish immigrant students. *Frontiers in Education*, 3, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00083>
- Dias-Broens, A. S., Meeuwisse, M., & Severiens, S. E. (2024). The definition and measurement of sense of belonging in higher education: A systematic literature review with a special focus

- on students' ethnicity and generation status in higher education. *Educational Research Review*, 45, 100622. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2024.100622>
- Egan, K. (2015). Academic advising in individualized major programs: Promoting the three I's of general education. *The Journal of General Education*, 64(2), 75–89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jge.2015.0015>
- Estell, D. B., & Perdue, N. H. (2013). Social support and behavioral and affective school engagement: The effects of peers, parents, and teachers. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(4), 325–339. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21681>
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331–362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>
- Gaston, P. L., Clark, E. J., Ferren, A. S., Maki, P., Rhodes, T. L., & Schilling, K. M. (2010). *General education and liberal learning: Principles of effective practice*. Association of American Colleges & Universities.
- Grey, D., & Osborne, C. (2020). Perceptions and principles of personal tutoring. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(3), 285–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1536258>
- Groenhuijsen, M. S. (2009). Does victimology have a theoretical leg to stand on? Victimology as an academic discipline in its own right? In F. W. Winkel, R. M. Letschert, G. F. Kirchhoff & P. C. Friday (Eds.), *Victimization in a multi-disciplinary key* (pp. 313–331). Wolf Legal Publishers (WLP).
- Gudep, V. K. (2007). Issues and challenges in academic advising: A multivariate study of students' attitudes towards academic advising in United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Contemporary Management Research*, 3(2) Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.7903/cmr.87>
- Hehir, E., Zeller, M., Luckhurst, J., & Chandler, T. (2021). Developing student connectedness under remote learning using digital resources: A systematic review. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(5), 6531–6548. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10577-1>
- Heim, A. B., & Holt, E. A. (2022). Perceived social and academic roles of peer mentors in a pre-health college program. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 30(5), 584–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2022.2127257>
- Himes, H. A. (2014). Strengthening academic advising by developing a normative theory. *NACADA Journal*, 34(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-13-020>
- Hossler, D., Ziskin, M., & Gross, J. (2009). Getting serious about institutional performance in Student retention: Research-Based Lessons on Effective Policies and practices. *About Campus*, 13(6). https://ecommons.udayton.edu/eda_fac_pub/226
- Hunter, M. S., & White, E. R. (2004). Could fixing academic advising fix higher education? *About Campus*, 9(1), 20–25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.91>
- Jeno, L. M., Danielsen, A. G., & Raaheim, A. (2018). A prospective investigation of students' academic achievement and dropout in higher education: A self-determination theory approach. *Educational Psychology*, 38(9), 1163–1184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2018.1502412>
- Jeno, L. M., Nylehn, J., Hole, T. N., Raaheim, A., Velle, G., & Vandvik, V. (2021). Motivational determinants of students' academic functioning: The role of autonomy-support, autonomous motivation, and perceived competence. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 67(2), 194–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.1990125>
- Joseph, S. (2010). *Applying an interdisciplinary model for promoting the study of humanities & social sciences*. The Case of Zayed University (UAE).
- Klein, J. T. (2010). *Creating interdisciplinary campus cultures: a model for strength and sustainability*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Krause, K., Hartley, R., & James, R. (2012). The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies.

- Krishnan, A. (2009). *What are academic disciplines? Some observations on the disciplinarity vs. Interdisciplinarity debate*. Working paper. National Centre for Research Methods. <https://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/id/eprint/783/>
- Kuhn, T. L. (2008). Historical foundations of academic advising. In *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed., pp. 3–16). Jossey-Bass/Wiley.
- Kuwabara, K., Ohguro, T., Watanabe, T., Itoh, Y., & Maeda, Y. (2002). *Connectedness oriented communication: Fostering a sense of connectedness to augment social relationships* (pp. 186–193). <https://doi.org/10.1109/SAINT.2002.994476>
- Lay-Hwa Bowden, J. (2013). What's in a relationship? Affective commitment, bonding and the tertiary first year experience – a student and faculty perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing & Logistics*, 25(3), 428–451. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-07-2012-0067>
- Lee, R. M., & Robbins, S. B. (1995). Measuring belongingness: The social connectedness and the social assurance scales. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42(2), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.42.2.232>
- Leenknecht, M. J. M., Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Rikers, R. M. J. P., & Loyens, S. M. M. (2020). Building relationships in higher education to support students' motivation. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(3), 632–653. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1839748>
- Light, J. (2021). Academic advising as a tool to analyze the experiences of students of color at a diverse university [Master's Theses]. <https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/1359>
- Loucif, S., Gassoumi, L., & Negreiros, J. (2020). Considering students' abilities in the academic advising process. *Education Sciences*, 10(9) Article 9. 254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090254>
- Lubicz-Nawrocka, T., & Bovill, C. (2023). Do students experience transformation through co-creating curriculum in higher education? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(7), 1744–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1928060>
- Martin, A. J. (2008). Enhancing student motivation and engagement: The effects of a multidimensional intervention. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 33(2), 239–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2006.11.003>
- Maslow, A. H. (2018). *A theory of human motivation*. Wilder Publications.
- McGill, C. M., Ali, M., & Barton, D. (2020). Skills and competencies for effective academic advising and personal tutoring. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00135>
- McGill, C. M., Schindler, W., Solon, K., Bridgen, S. T., & Mathews, S. A. (2022). An exploration of graduate education in academic advising: A case study analysis. *NACADA Journal*, 42(1), 22–34. <https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-22-05>
- McIntosh, E. A., Troxel, W. G., Grey, D., & Van Den Wijngaard, O. (2021). (L. Thomas (Ed.), *Academic advising and tutoring for student success in higher education: International perspectives*. Frontiers Media SA. <https://doi.org/10.3389/978-2-88966-496-2>
- Micari, M., & Pazos, P. (2012). Connecting to the professor: Impact of the student–faculty relationship in a highly challenging course. *College Teaching*, 60(2), 41–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2011.627576>
- Milheim, K. L. (2012). Toward a better experience: Examining student needs in the online classroom through maslow's hierarchy of needs model. *MERLOT Journal of online learning and teaching*, 8(2), 159–171. <http://jolt.merlot.org/index.html>
- Morieson, L., Carlin, D., Clarke, B., Lukas, K., & Wilson, R. (2013). Belonging in education: Lessons from the belonging project. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 4(2), 87–96. <https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v4i2.173>
- Neto, M. (2015). Educational motivation meets Maslow: Self-actualisation as contextual driver. *Education Matters*, 5(1), 18–27. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jseem/vol5/iss1/4>

- Prescott, A., & Simpson, E. (2004). Effective student motivation commences with resolving 'dissatisfiers'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28(3), 247–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877042000241733>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- Schulenberg, J. K., & Lindhorst, M. J. (2008). Advising is advising: Toward defining the practice and scholarship of academic advising. *NACADA Journal*, 28(1), 43–53. <https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-28.1.43>
- Spratley, S. (2019). Exploring the role of the academic advisor in leadership education. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 19(2) 19(2), 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.12806/V19/I2/R3>
- Strayhorn, T. (2015). Reframing academic advising for student success: From advisor to cultural navigator. *NACADA Journal*, 35(1), 56–63. <https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-14-199>
- Stremmel, A. J. (2002). The value of teacher research: Nurturing professional and personal growth through inquiry. *Voices of Practitioners*, 2(3), 1–9.
- Swanson, D. J. (2006). *Creating a culture of 'engagement' with academic advising: Challenges and opportunities for today's higher education institutions*. In Online Submission. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED491534>
- Templeton, N. R., Abdelrahman, N., & Donop, J. (2023). Editorial overview: Mentoring as a partnership in learning. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 31(2), 185–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2023.2195341>
- Vansteenkiste, M., Lens, W., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents in self-determination theory: Another look at the quality of academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(1), 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985sep4101_4
- Vaughan, M., & Burnaford, G. (2016). Action research in graduate teacher education: A review of the literature 2000–2015. *Educational Action Research*, 24(2), 280–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2015.1062408>
- Wang, M.-T., & Eccles, J. S. (2012). Social support matters: Longitudinal effects of social support on three dimensions of school engagement from middle to high school. *Child Development*, 83(3), 877–895. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01745.x>
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(6), 707–722. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036>
- Yale, A. T. (2019). The personal tutor–student relationship: Student expectations and experiences of personal tutoring in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43(4), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1377164>
- Zhang, X., Gossett, C., Simpson, J., & Davis, R. (2017). Advising students for success in higher education: An all-out effort. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 21(1), 53–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116689097>

Appendix

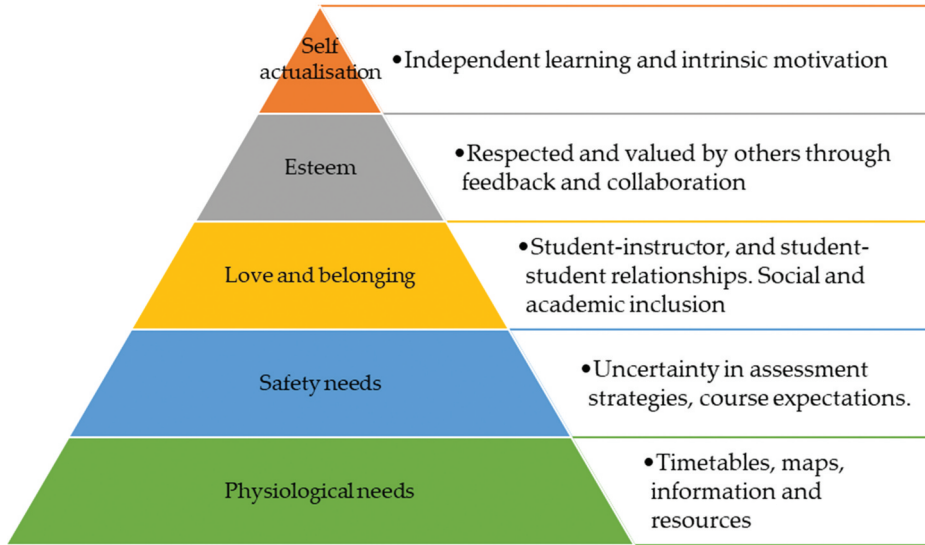


Figure A1. Maslow's theory in higher education – (to be placed on page. 11).