Using Chickering’s Seven Vectors In Advising

(Adapted from Worcester State’s Club & Organization Guide)

One of the most common theories used in higher education today to explain the steps of adolescent development is Chickering’s Seven Vectors. Each step of this theory is evident in our students, from freshmen year to their senior year. As advisors, it is important that we are aware of these steps and we should adjust our advising style based on the step that each student is currently at.

Building on the work of Erikson and others, Chickering (1969) formulated his theory of adolescent development. Viewing the major areas for development as vectors which possess both magnitude and direction, Chickering identified seven key components to development.

1. **Achieving Competence.** There are three key aspects to developing a sense of overall competence. (a) intellectual, (b) physical and manual, and (c) social and interpersonal. The adviser may observe that a student is not just a good leader; the student may be a skilled motivator. A good problem solver, creative with ideas but weak in understanding budgets.

2. **Managing Emotions.** Students seek self-control and the confidence to know their behavior will be consistent. Specifically, they must manage aggression and sex as major impulses. The adviser may observe - a student whose ideas were rejected in the last meeting may be angry and talk about quitting the group.

3. **Becoming Autonomous.** The foundation of this vector is the “independence of maturity”. The student is seeking both emotional independence (diminishing the need for outside approval and trying to win favor and be liked) and instrumental independence (being able to overcome one’s own problems without continual help, including financial support). The culmination of autonomy is the awareness and acceptance of interdependence as a desired state. The adviser may observe a student disagree with a proposed hazing practice and speaks out against group sentiments or a committee chair finally holds a meeting without needing to review every specific item on the agenda with the adviser.

4. **Establishing an Identity.** This vector builds the developing sense of competence, autonomy, and the management of emotions. This solidification of the inner sense of self is further enhanced by the acceptance of physical appearance, a sense of personal style, and sexual identity. The adviser may observe a female chairperson of an all male club. The member who comes to an event inappropriately dressed, and instead of fleeing in embarrassment, stays and jokes about his error.

5. **Freeing Interpersonal Relationships.** With the acknowledgment of interdependency and identity, the student is more able to appreciate the enrichment of diverse relationships. Awkward relationships or intolerance towards others due to difference in age, sex, race, and other characteristics are welcomed and even warm relationships develop. With a sense of personal identity, the student finds advisers and even parents becoming real people and potential friends, the student may observe a young, single student stops to chat with an older, married student after the meeting. The white social chairperson proposes that several of the
social events planned (dances, music, films) must specifically appeal to African American students.

6. **Clarifying Purpose.** As skills and relationships develop, it is important to clarify how these events will fit into a student’s future. What career, hobbies, and planned family relationships will be apart of the future? The challenge of this vector is to effectively integrate seemingly incompatible goals. The adviser may observe a STEM student select an engineering major that will give her time for the family life she desires. The student declines a nomination for president because she knows she already has many obligations for next year with transferring to a four year institution and responsibility at her new job.

7. **Developing Integrity.** Building on purpose and identity, the development of integrity is “the clarification of a personally valid set of beliefs that have some internal consistency and that provide at least a tentative guide for behavior: (Chickering, 1969, p. 17) the student must personalize and integrate values. The desired goal is behavior congruent with values. The adviser may observe - a student who values a sense of responsibility does a shift on the clean up committee although the student is getting cold. A manager observes the treasurer pocketing 5.00 from the cash box and immediately asks the treasurer to explain that action instead of letting it pass or telling someone else to handle the issue.

**NACA Competency Guide for College Student Leaders**

This evaluation tool created by the National Association for Campus Activities is intended to be filled out by both the student leader and adviser. The student leader should fill out their section then the adviser comments on their section. After both have completed their sections independently, the advisor and student should meet to discuss feedback. Not every core competency may apply to every situation. Feel free to utilize the core competency evaluations that apply to you.

There is a facilitator’s guide and a student’s guide available in the Student Activities Office for a more in depth analysis of the tool. Feel free to contact Melissa Welch for an electronic copy of this information.