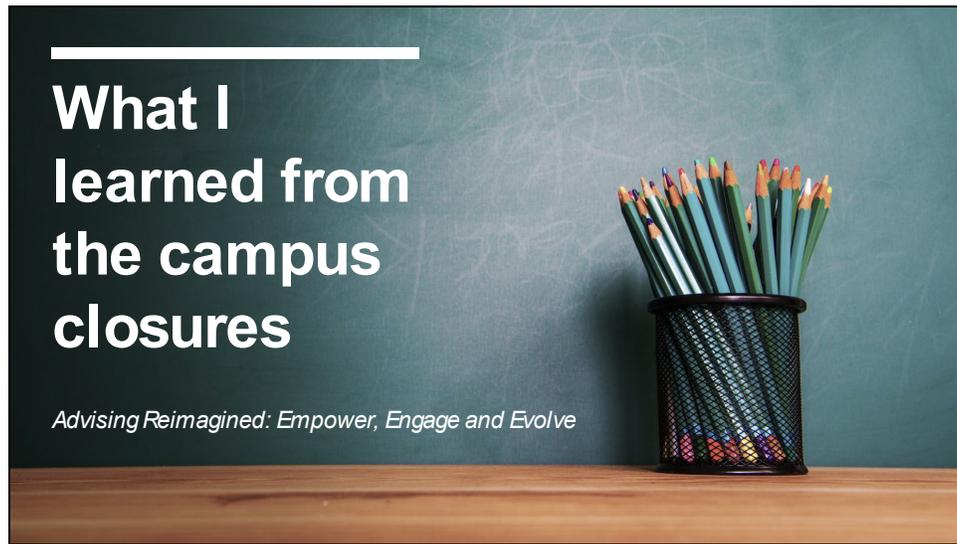


Slide 1



Denise:

Thank you for attending our presentation. Today, Courtney and I will be discussing what we learned from the campus closures and how you may be able to use our experience in your own spaces to advise students on their needs. I have worked in higher education for 16 years at an online and brick and mortar universities. I have been serving at the Waukesha location since 2017 as an Academic Advisor. I first started splitting my time between the UW-Washington County campus in West Bend and the UW-Waukesha campus. It was wonderful to be connected to so many student support staff around the state. There was another regionalization and UW-Milwaukee became our receiving institution in 2019. Through the many changes, I have enjoyed my role as a Senior Academic Advisor guiding and supporting students to their academic goals.

Courtney:

I've worked in higher education for over 20 years, starting as an academic advisor at a medium-sized private institution. From there, I moved into a role overseeing advising and new student programs at what was then UW-Waukesha. In 2012, I became the assistant dean for student affairs and enrollment management at UW-Waukesha. Over the years, I've held various leadership positions across the Waukesha, Washington County, and Sheboygan campuses. Now, as I near the end of my career with the Waukesha closure in June, I'm serving as assistant dean for student affairs and have taken about 60 advisees due to staffing changes. During the regionalization years (2015-2019), I also served as campus administrator, managing the day-to-day operations, including campus safety, facilities, and general campus oversight.

Slide 2



## Learning Outcomes

- *Recognizing the reason to serve students*
- *Understanding the changes*
- *Adjusting advising style*

Denise:

To bring our experience to you today is just one way we are using the 2025 WACADA Professional Development Institute theme, Advising Reimagined: Empower, Engage, Evolve. Hopefully, your campus will not close and I feel that what we will be discussing today are strategies that can help you when working with students. The learning outcomes we present to you are; recognizing your reason to serve students, understanding the changes happening in your situation and how it will affect your students, and adjusting your advising style if necessary.

Courtney:

I believe that what we will present and discuss with you today has the potential to serve as a valuable foundation for navigating the numerous changes we are bound to face during our time in higher education. The academic landscape is evolving at an unprecedented pace, and the insights we share today can help us adapt to and thrive amidst these ongoing transformations.

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# Background



Denise:

On October 17, 2023, a directive from the Universities of Wisconsin was delivered stating that the UW-Milwaukee at Washington County campus located in West Bend will be closing at the end of the Spring 2024 semester. Then, on March 11, 2024, it was announced that the UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha campus will be closing by the end of the Spring 2025 semester. After the initial shock of the closures, we did what every student affairs team does. We dug in. Courtney and I will each share our experiences with you today.

### Slide 4



## Empower

- *Understanding the changing environment*
- *Gathering information*

#### Denise:

At our core, the student affairs team goal is to support students. It compels us. I began asking, what will happen to my students?, how do I answer their questions?, what do we do? All at the same time coming to terms that all my colleagues – staff and faculty alike, were all losing a place we have called home for many, many years. Instead of feeling sorry for myself, I remembered why I am an academic advisor and why I feel compelled to help students. I remember all the hard work I poured into my education and the years I have spent side-by-side with students recognizing their hard work and accomplishments. The return on this very important investment has come back to me many times over.

I know that my passion for students has not changed, it has gotten stronger. My new goal for my students is to make sure that they are informed to make the best academic decisions before the campus closure. I make it a point to learn all the information I can to best serve students because when you boil it down, everything I do is to help retain students.

#### Courtney:

Within the first day of the announcement, I called an emergency staff meeting. It's important to note that no one, including myself, was aware of the announcement beforehand, so it came as a shock to all of us. I provided space for staff to grieve and express their frustrations, while also recognizing and praising them for the work they had accomplished and the challenges of the uncertain tasks that lay ahead. My primary goal has always been to ensure that our team functions cohesively, enabling us to serve our students in the most effective way possible. I hold high expectations for my staff, believing that excellence is achieved through dedication and teamwork. At the same time, I understand the importance of granting grace and providing latitude, allowing each team member the freedom to excel in their unique way. By fostering an environment where individuals can bring their strengths to the table, we create a supportive and dynamic team that is well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of our students.

### Slide 5

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## Engage

- *Adjusting advising style for student needs*
- *Getting connected*



#### Denise:

We knew we had to dig in and gather as much information for our students. For both Courtney and myself, we have served on various committees and workgroups to ensure the smooth transition of students to their new academic pathway, educating ourselves along the way. Like any academic advisor and administrators, we were constantly answering questions and providing information to students who were just as uncertain of their future as we are. I learned a lot about myself and my colleagues. We are all in this together and even though we were losing the home we built, we all still wanted to see our students be successful. I feel that this trait is at the heart of all educators and support staff.

I personally started informing students with information to prepare them for the campus closure and this was the main topic of most advising appointments for me. Many staff meetings and conversations were held to discuss how staff can support students and answer questions. When I met with students, I did a lot of validating and ensuring students that there is a place for them, just not at our campus. These discussions can be difficult, and I came to rely on my advising team and student affairs team while I supported students. Asking for help can be difficult especially through stressful and uncertain times. My team has been invaluable as I continue my advising work.

#### Courtney:

As an administrator, when the announcement came, I drew on my past experiences with similarly shocking news, such as the restructuring in 2018 and regionalization in 2015. These experiences taught me how to maintain stability during times of uncertainty. Additionally, my work on sensitive conduct cases as they emerged honed my ability to remain calm and focused under pressure. I stayed engaged with students, faculty, and staff by concentrating on the immediate tasks at hand and supporting my team in any way possible. It was crucial for me to create spaces where people could reflect and express their feelings, allowing them to vent their frustrations. At the same time,

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I set a clear goal to preserve the sense of community we had all worked so hard to build. By balancing empathy with a focus on maintaining our community, I was able to guide our team through the challenges we faced.

### Slide 6

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# Evolve

- *Staying involved*
- *Advising approach*



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#### Denise:

When I would meet with students, they usually asked, Where are you going? What will happen to you? And I would usually answer with, I will be okay. But I didn't take any time to assess how I was doing and the stress building up about my future. When I finally did reflect on the situation, I realize that I was angry and confused by the closure decision. After many conversations with my colleagues and family, I realized that I need to move forward with my goal of helping students discover their potential no matter where that was. Helping student discover their potential has been my career goal I have had since I realized what I finally wanted to do with my life when my undergraduate academic advisor helped me discover my potential. My academic advisor, Dr. Bryan Lewis, who just happens to be the keynote speaker today, so I had invaluable support all those years ago. There are other resources that I was able to use as well to help me with this huge change such as the Employee Assistance Program and wellness programs offered through the human resources department. Through my conversations and self-reflection, I can see that I am still committed to my students.

#### Courtney:

When the announcement about the Washington County closure was made, my immediate priority was to ensure that we heard directly from the students. Within about a week, we organized a town hall meeting to provide a platform for students to voice their concerns and questions. This was crucial in addressing their immediate needs and uncertainties. I collaborated closely with the executive director of admissions to clarify questions regarding transferability and admissions for the remaining spring 2024 term. This process was challenging, as we were essentially building the framework for these transitions from scratch. Nothing had been predetermined before the announcement, so we had to meticulously gather questions and develop answers. This task was both laborious and exhausting at times, but it was essential to provide students with the information and support they needed during this uncertain period. By prioritizing open

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communication and collaboration, we aimed to guide students through the transition as smoothly as possible.

Denise:

As I continue to learn all the ways students are affected by the closure, I can evolve to learn how to better support students. I work with my colleagues to discuss all the ways students are and will be affected, and I have adjusted how I advise students. One way I can help students now is to continue to stay involved on campus and continue to advise students because they are still here and I am still here. If I were to let my anger, hurt and frustration decide my future, I would be doing my students a disservice by giving up.

I have turned to more of a prescriptive way of advising students – telling them what will happen and the options they have now instead of a more developmental or appreciative way of advising students. Usually, I would let students tell me what they want or need, and I would guide them to the information because we had the time to develop an educational pathway. Before, I would follow up with the information necessary at specific times in the semester. Now, I proactively contact students and have talking points for each appointment because each student needs to figure out where they are going to transfer after the closure and make plans to start that process now.

Another way I have evolved to help my students is creating even more open lines of communication. I have increased my walk-in advising times of availability and contact them more often because I can have more communication with students now that our population has decreased. Collaboration with my colleagues at the Waukesha campus and UW-Milwaukee main campus has also increased. I want to make sure that my students are taken care of when they decide to transfer, because they may be transferring earlier than they wanted originally and can be overwhelming for them. I work with students to identify realistic academic and career goals by researching and finding a degree program that will best fit the student's academic needs. I want to make sure my students are prepared and know how to advocate for themselves.

Courtney:

While I wouldn't say everything has remained entirely status quo, my approach to working with students, faculty, and staff has largely been consistent in its foundation of empathy and support. I believe that others would describe my initial response to difficult situations as one rooted in understanding and encouragement. For my staff, I see myself as a coach, guiding them through challenges while also allowing them to see my own vulnerabilities. I believe this openness fosters trust and strengthens our team dynamic.

With students, my priority is to listen first, ensuring I fully understand their concerns before attempting to provide answers. During this time, maintaining frequent and open communication has been crucial. Although the lack of information from higher levels has been challenging, we have continued to advocate for our needs and those of our students, more so now than ever before. I am deeply committed to our mission, and this dedication is reflected in the energy and effort we invest in serving our students. Despite the challenges we have faced, it has truly been an

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honor to work through this period, and I am proud of the resilience and commitment demonstrated put into serving our students.

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## Discussion

*Recall a time that you needed to empower, engage and evolve your advising approach.  
What did you do?*



Denise:

Recall a time that you needed to empower, engage and evolve your advising approach. What did you do?

Courtney and Denise:

- Give time for 3 to 5 individuals to discuss their situation. Approx. 10 minutes
- Discuss a main theme: Advising Reimagined: Empower, Engage, Evolve. Approx. 5 minutes
  - How did their experience bring change?
  - Collaboration and communication with colleagues

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Slide 8



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### Questions?

*Presenters:*  
*Denise Lorge, Senior Academic Advisor*  
*Courtney O'Connell, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs*  
*UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha*

Denise:

- Thank you and questions
- Slide deck will be available
- Please fill out the evaluation form