

Next Practices Episode 01: Boost Academic Advising Capacity & Effectiveness with Rob Freidhoff

Katy Oliveira ([00:07](#)):

Welcome to Next Practices, data-informed strategies to shape the future of higher ed. In each episode, you'll hear from transformational higher ed leaders on how they're tackling today's most pressing challenges to make a difference for their students and institution. I'm your host, Katy Oliveira.

Rob Freidhoff ([00:28](#)):

A lot of times, those students who we're talking to are not often the ones who most need the help. So as an advisor, you kind of get this framework in your mind of like, well, this is where our students are at. This is what all, all of our students are going through. When in reality, we've been missing a chunk of our student voice in our student population. And so I think keeping it simple as you start and using a filter for a very low, low moderate, um, and then maybe starting around some very basic groups, whether that be a static group or dynamic group can be a relatively low lift from a understanding of how to do it, but also then has a very high value of return

Katy Oliveira ([01:12](#)):

Today on the show I'm talking with Robert Friedhoff, vice president of community development at Civitas Learning. Rob has extensive experience in higher ed as an academic advisor, advising administrator, strategic enrollment manager, an educational consultant focused on improving advising practice and as an Associate Vice President for Student Success today, we're talking about improving advising effectiveness in our conversation. We cover how to use data analytics and intelligent case management technology to ease capacity constraints, why data analytics and intentional advising philosophies like appreciative and developmental advising need each other, and where to start when implementing a data analytics and intelligent case management software on your campus. But before we dive in, take a moment to subscribe to the show, to stay up to date on the latest creative data informed approaches to student success.

Katy Oliveira ([02:12](#)):

Rob, welcome to Next Practices. I'm so excited that you're here. Thanks for taking time out of your day to talk with me,

Rob Freidhoff ([02:18](#)):

Katy, thanks so much for the opportunity to be here, excited to excited to chat with you.

Katy Oliveira ([02:22](#)):

So here at Next Practices, as you know, we explore, how do you use data informed approaches to answer urgent questions and go beyond best practices to solve today's challenges in a changing higher ed landscape. And today where we have a special treat in that, Rob is a highly experienced advising and student success leader who has recently joined the Civitas Learning team to work with our partners, to develop data-activated effective student success approaches that will improve student outcomes and help institutions reach their goals. So Rob, before we dive in, I would like for you to just share, take a moment to share a little about your work in advising and student success and your new role here at Civitas Learning

Rob Freidhoff ([03:08](#)):

Again, Katy, thanks for the opportunity to be here, to chat, uh, community, very excited to, to learn and grow with you over the, the next several years here and enjoying so far, what we get to do here at Civitas

it's such meaningful work and higher ed is so near and dear to my heart. Uh, a little over 20 years ago, I actually was hired on a college campus my first day on the campus into an academic advising center. So first day, freshman year at college <laugh> and, uh, little did I know at the time how fortuitous that moment was going to be, uh, have now spent 20 years of my professional life in the advising space. Uh, and I do joke a little bit that I'm a recovering pre-med advisor. Cause my first seven years in the field, I was pre-med dent, pharm and optometry, but then went into advising administration, spent 11 years at Grand Valley State University four and a half years at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and then four and a half at a comprehensive regional in, uh, Valdosta State University of Valdosta, Georgia.

Rob Freidhoff (04:02):

And, uh, I just love the spirit of advisors, academic advisors, the desire to help students, the goal to make an impact. And that's really what kept me in the academic advising area in higher education space. Uh, and honestly what made me excited to come and join, uh, team Civitas was the opportunity to increase, impact, to move beyond one campus and be able to have opportunities to hold conversations with colleagues and professionals that are really working in a tough environment, trying to best understand how to use data, to make sure that that data is actionable when it gets to the level of the people who are going to use it, and really try to ensure that we get to the right students at the right time so that we can have meaningful conversations, uh, that will hopefully change trajectories for those students, get 'em to persist, get 'em, to retain, get 'em to graduation. Um, and that's a partnership, right? And so I think for me, uh, I'm a relationship guy. That's what I love doing and having conversations, uh, with people that get better. But at the end of the day, for me, the goal is really going to be working with our users to increase usage and to make sure that they are getting the most out of the suite of products so that at the end of the day, we help more students to retain.

Katy Oliveira (05:18):

We know you and I both have our background and, and advising. And I think academic advising specifically as a student success intervention is really near and dear to both of our hearts. And we know it's one of the most impactful student support interventions out on a campus, but not all advising teams are set up to meet their full potential. What does it take to build a highly effective advising program? I know that's a big question so we can break it down, but I think that there is a little bit of a magic to it. There are some important ingredients that, that an advising team needs to be highly effective. And I'm just curious to know what you feel like it takes or what your experience and, and research has shown you. It takes to build a highly effective advising program.

Rob Freidhoff (06:03):

Yeah. Katy, I'm glad you're starting off with such a simple question. <laugh> yeah. So I think we could probably talk about that for an hour and a half. You know, it's interesting. I, I get asked this question a lot. Like if you were to come in and do one thing with an advising space, what would you, and, um, I've spent a little over a decade connected to the Appreciative Advising international team as well, been on campuses and this question, so we, and do mobilized to get the best out of our advising teams. And I think one of the, one of the first things that, that I think about is clear expectations on what is an advising duty and what is not an advising duty. And it probably seems a little nuance and maybe, maybe a little simple, but one of the things that I've seen over the years is that academic advisors often get asked to do more than just academic advising <laugh>.

Rob Freidhoff (06:52):

And so clear expectations can help, especially advising center directors, advocate for their teams to stay centrally focused on academic advising. And so that they're seeing students and they have responsibilities of a caseload potentially if they're doing kinda a caseload management system where those academic advisors, a hundred percent of their day are spent on academic advising duties. I think if you go across the university and, and took a look and, and surveyed what advisors are doing, you're going to find in a lot of institutions, they're not doing what most people would consider to be fully academic responsibilities. They're, they're catching some stuff that other offices may not want to do, or because there's just a huge demand in a need for people to do work. They're getting asked to support other areas. And because of that, most of those advisors are they're great people. They wanna help, they wanna do things to benefit the students, but they're getting taken away from kinda their core mission.

Rob Freidhoff ([07:46](#)):

So I think it starts with very clear expectations and, uh, while it's not super sexy, but really kind of starting with what is a job description and then what are those expectations for that job description? And then once those expectations are there, I think a lot of it comes into how do you set up the advisors to be trained, to make sure that they're comfortable with the job that they're gonna be doing, that they know their resources, that they understand the importance of referrals and those kinds of things. That's where, uh, a student success platform like Civitas then can really take that advising experience or that advising opportunity to the next level. You understand what you're supposed to be doing. You've been trained how to do it. And now you've got a system that can signal the students who are in most need of help.

Rob Freidhoff ([08:29](#)):

So you can go after those students and in a time right now where we're at, whether it's because the advising load is too high or maybe you're advising load is okay, but because there's some turnover in this space, you're asked to work with more students, the ability for these signals to come out, to know who to focus on is gonna be a really big bandwidth decrier, that's one of the things I hear, ah, there's so much bandwidth. I, I don't have any bandwidth left when we know who we need to go after we can decrease the bandwidth by being smart about what students we target.

Katy Oliveira ([08:58](#)):

Yeah. I think that there's some hesitation I've heard in, in my conversations in advising communities of moving away from providing equal support. So every student gets the same treatment. We call all the students in, at certain moments during the semester, or we deliver an advising appointment in the same way to each and every student to a shift, to more equitable student support. Um, not just to try to drive to close equity gaps, but to provide support that meets the needs of each particular student. And recognizing that there are students who are going to be able to navigate the landscape a little bit more easily versus students who maybe will need more support and trying to differentiate approach across those different needs is one way of addressing some of these capacity constraints.

Rob Freidhoff ([09:53](#)):

It's an interesting idea, right? And at the end of the day for me, I always come back to by nature, academic advisors are helpers, right? They wanna make sure that students are helped and that the student gets the, the most outta the experience. And, and that's why I love, love the academic advising space. Uh, but I do think that there has been the idea of what we do for one we do for all. And I do think, uh, we have opportunities and we can see this in the data, right, Katy, that you've got some students that really need minimal assistance. If you, you send an email nudge at the time, you have a walk in hour

group advising that they can drop into, but they're not going to need a whole lot of help to get from point a to point b. What you also see is that those are often the students who end up eating up a lot of your advising hours.

Rob Freidhoff ([10:39](#)):

And instead of spending the time with the students who most need it. Right. And so I do think in the advising space, we need to think about what you said, right? It's, it's not about equal, but it's about equity who needs the help, who needs the time with the advisor. And, and at what point do they need that interaction? And so I do think one of the things with the predictive tools that we've got, it's really nice because from day one, you can know if you've got a student who is, is struggling and, and needs some assistance and can do the reach out. But that is a difference in frame of mine in the advising world is to get their heads around the idea and the concept that, Hey, um, I can focus on a particular group and in doing so, I'm gonna lift that group and help that group to come up and to be successful.

Rob Freidhoff ([11:24](#)):

And then again, with some strategic communication and timed, outreaches, and different things like that, your folks who, uh, are more likely gonna make it without having interaction are still gonna be fine. And I saw this a lot when I was at the University of Michigan. Um, I was part of their college of engineering and, and computing area. And, and, you know, we had students who were fourth generation, fifth generation college of engineering, and they, to, to a certain extent had had advisors at home. Right. And then we had our students who were first generation, first time they'd ever been in Ann Arbor. First time they'd ever been to the University of Michigan, or, you know, the first in their family to go through school. There's a difference between those two students. Right? And I think what you're talking about is how do we honor and kind respect those differences and give the help to that fourth generation student that he or she needs, but also spending maybe a little bit more time with the first generation student so that that student can understand kinda the rules of engagement, uh, and learn a little bit about the ecosystem that is higher education.

Katy Oliveira ([12:21](#)):

Yeah. It's moving from sort of a passive, like I have a calendar open come and see me for advising and letting students determine how they're gonna fill that calendar to more intentional approach where you are prioritizing students who maybe are less likely to be a hand raiser or to come seek the support, or know what kinds of supports are available, making space for them to get in. I know oftentimes when I led my advising team, my advisors would say, but my, my calendar is packed. How can I get these students in who aren't making appointments? They felt busy. Our lobby was full, they had full inboxes, but that percentage of students who was the most vulnerable was often not amongst the students populating that, that lobby.

Rob Freidhoff ([13:08](#)):

Yeah. And I think some of the ways that we've kind of come around that to a certain extent, right? So let's, let's say that you've got a group of students that you want to get in, and they're not necessarily responding to the typical email outreach. And so they're not coming to your calendar. And you're, you're working with the student who is likely to persist. Anyways, we utilize graduate assistance quite a lot, and also our front desk, student workers. And so we provide them a list and it would just say something like, Hey, here's the, you know, 50 students that we wanna invite in. And so it would be, you know, Hey, this is Rob from the college of engineering and, and computing. Um, I'm a front desk worker and your advisor

would love to see you, you an email, if you could take a look at that and maybe come and see us, we'd love to see you and maybe answer the phone.

Rob Freidhoff ([13:49](#)):

Maybe they don't, but even if they don't answer the phone, they may go back in, take a look at that email. And there's some kinda personalization, but I think sometimes the advisor feels like, well, I've gotta do all of it, right. I don't wanna turn over the agency so to speak to the graduate assistant or to the student worker. But I think because of the amount of work that's on the advisor sending, uh, a well thought out email makes some sense, sending a text certainly can work, but the good old telephone, right. And, and having somebody make calls can be a really good way to do that. And we found some success with our grad students, making those calls and with student workers, making the calls. And I think that's a way that you can not putting it all the advisor, right. The advisor have to do all of the steps of the process. They can kind of lay it out, get the list and then get that over to whoever they may have and support of them and start trying to get more students into the center that need to be there.

Katy Oliveira ([14:38](#)):

Yeah. It's getting the right students in front of you. One of the things we've talked about in a previous conversation too, is using your supports, using a community of care, getting the right student in front of you. And then once you have the right student in front of, of you, it's also about how you move forward to support that student connect them to the right kinds of resources on your campus. Will you speak more to that kind of secret sauce of both being able to determine who needs help when, and then also connecting, using your human experience and your professionalism as an advisor to get the student connected to the right kind of care that they need to be successful.

Rob Freidhoff ([15:16](#)):

Yeah, that's, that's funny. I've actually had a little bit of a funny story with that. I was during my time at the university of Michigan, I was, uh, asked to come over and do some of the Appreciative Advising framework philosophy with our advisors inside of the college of mechanical engineering. And so they had an advising team, mechanical engineering, I pretty large area. And so we went in and we did the first phase, which Disarm and dithe second phase, which is Discover. We were going to do these on like a monthly cadence. Right. And shortly after we did the, the second session on Discover, I got a little bit of a panic email from the person leading the advising center and said, oh my God, it's working. We don't know what to do now. Like, please come over and let's do these all. So we know how to have these kinda conversations, right?

Rob Freidhoff ([15:59](#)):

And so I think about that a lot, Katy, with the way that our software works, there's a predictive tool, predictive analytic to it. And that helps to signal that something's going on and helps us get that student into the advising seat. But then when that student shows up, the advising process has to take over. So when I kind of talked about creating the expectations and then training in those creating expectations in those training components for advisors is going to be, what's the approach that we're going to take as an advising team, whether it's appreciative approach or a proactive or intrusive or developmental motivational interviewing all different kinds of styles that people will use to work with students that's really, once that student gets in front of you, that's when the secret sauce. So you were kind of talking about, right. It was the, Hey, we got em in the door.

Rob Freidhoff ([16:49](#)):

Now we need to have a meaningful conversation. I was 22 years old. My first year of advising, I was looking at a transcript. Young lady had a wonderful fall, not very good spring, wonderful fall in sophomore year. And then a, not a very good, uh, semester, the following spring, I was kinda looking at it and the student had come in and I said, Hey, you know, you were 3.5 in the fall and then barely above a two. And then above a three, five the next fall and below almost near a 2.0. And she goes, well, yeah, that's when I was diagnosed with cancer. And that's when it came back and I'm like, oh my word. Right? And so when we're training and we're having conversations with our advising teams, we need to help them be ready for those kinds of conversations. Because Katy that's the reality of the world that we live in, especially as we're hopefully through most of the pandemic at this point, but we're gonna hear more and more of those kinds of challenges, challenges with mental health and wellness challenges with food insecurity, challenges with homelessness and those, those frameworks, those philosophical advising frameworks, when they're taught to advising teams, allow them to have really fruitful conversations.

Rob Freidhoff ([17:57](#)):

And so after that student said to me, well, that's when I had cancer. And that's when it came back, what I said next mattered a lot or how I handled that conversation mattered a lot. And so one of the things we talk in the advising world is making really good referrals too. Right? So I think one of the things that if you're an advisor and you happen to be listening to this and you're in field please loud, and you don't to know all you don't you to become is expert at referrals. So sure that that student feels heard, that they understand that the space that they're in is a safe space, that you're thankful that they shared that kind of information, but maybe, uh, a trip over to the counseling center would be relevant, uh, to go and kinda work through what that is and work on mental health and wellness.

Rob Freidhoff ([18:41](#)):

And they can have that part of the university supporting, and then we can support with what we do on the advising side. But I think sometimes early in people's fields are early in their advising experience. They can feel like they gotta do it all instead of utilizing those resources out on a campus. But I think what we need to continue to think about is create the expectation, train the expectation, use the software that we have to become efficient. But then remember when those students come into those spaces, those are human beings. And we need to make sure that we're ready to have sometimes really difficult conversations, but that we're comfortable in the work that we're doing as advisors that we can. Then some of those things will be able to ourselves in advising space, but many times we'll need to create some connections to partners on our campus to, to fully support the student.

Katy Oliveira ([19:27](#)):

Yeah. That is a beautiful balance between having empathy and seeing your student and then lovingly guiding them to the right resource in a way that helps support them. It's not passing the buck. I think sometimes I would have advisors feel like they were passing the buck. And I think when done well, it's an art, it's the art of advising. It's not, it's not passing the buck. It's connecting students to the broad community of care on a campus. That's there to help them. And it's understanding what works for students and what kinds of interventions and programming is available to help students reach their goals despite of a wide range of ways that they may need support and know more and more campuses are offering a broad range of support.

Katy Oliveira ([20:12](#)):

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Katy Oliveira ([20:48](#)):

I wanna shift gears a minute to the other part of the recipe, which is using data analytics and case management technology. I know that many teams have adopted wide ranges of systems to help have visibility into what's going on with their students and to help them better manage their caseloads. I'm curious to know what opportunities do you see advising teams have with data analytics and case management technology to help them make a more significant difference with their students and the institution as a whole?

Rob Freidhoff ([21:20](#)):

I think the first thing is making sure that when that, uh, predictive analytics tool arrives on campus, that those advisors and those folks who are using it day in and day out, know how to use the tool. <laugh> that there is a, a level of, uh, trust with the tool that there's a level of understanding on how best to do it. I can tell you when we roll this out at Valdosta, it's such a robust tool. It's so powerful, and there's so many different directions in which you can go, that we really needed to kind of stop for a second and then break it down into workflow. So how do I with what I do day in and day out, utilize the tool in a meaningful way. And so for example, one of the things that we did is, Hey, listen, everybody is prepping for an advising appointment at some point, and typically 10 to 12 times a day, you're getting ready for an advising appointment.

Rob Freidhoff ([22:12](#)):

And here's how you can actually workflow in this system. You can open up a student profile, you can look at a persistence prediction. You can see whether or not the student's living on campus. If it's a first time in college, a transfer student, whether they're an athlete or not get some really good information right off that student profile. And then from there, check and see if there's any notes in the system and then go into who the advisors of record are, check to see if there's any early alerts that are in or engagement opportunities. And for our software. What's wonderful too, is that integration for the learning management system. And that's really such a game changer for advisors to be able to have kind of meaningful conversations with the students when they're in the space is, Hey, here's how you're kinda doing relative to a peer of yours, or they can get that insight up of how they're doing or here's how often you're logging in and accessing the LMS.

Rob Freidhoff ([23:00](#)):

And you can do that in 25 seconds, 30 seconds and get this really nice overview of the student before he, or she walks in into the door. I think what sometimes would take three or four different systems you can get from within the Civitas Learning Student Impact Platform. And that just helps on the efficiency front. It helps your advisors to become more prepared. It helps them to ask better questions when the student walks in the door. And then I think over time, too, with those persistence predictions, you know, they get an opportunity to kinda see, Hey, what, what type of student may be walking in? What types of questions may I wanna ask? And that's kind of at the individual level, Katy of, Hey, I'm getting ready for an appointment. I've got this person in front of me, but I also think that one of the secret sauce is the term that keeps coming out.

Rob Freidhoff ([23:46](#)):

You know, one of the things that we saw and, and really liked was the ability to create groups, um, whether that be a static group or a dynamic group, so that we could track that group in real time with updating data in front of us, that would inform our advising practice. And let me give you, you know, two, two examples here. So the first example inside of our college of education, they were lifting or putting static into the system at the beginning of the semester and tracking. So in their world, they had a professional block, one and professional two and three and cohorts there's power in keeping that cohort together. And so what, what they were doing was loading up their advising rosters by that cohort professional block. And then they were able to pull open that, that group every Monday and just take a quick scan and see how was everybody doing from a persistence perspective.

Rob Freidhoff ([24:39](#)):

And if there was an issue early on in the game, they could reach out and have that group come in, or that individual come in, or they could reach out to the person responsible in education from making sure that students were tracking successfully through the program. So that's kinda the static. And then the other group dynamic group is, as you're farther, along in the semester, you can create a list of students who have not yet ed for future semester and that's live and in real time. And I think if we're honest in the advising space, sometimes we are a little too reliant on a spreadsheet that comes out that the minute at prints is essentially out of date. And, and I don't know if that it's perfectly true for every environment, but almost every environment I've seen related to advising is, you know, somebody prints a spreadsheet or downloads a spreadsheet on Monday, sends it out on Tuesday.

Rob Freidhoff ([25:27](#)):

And by the time the advisor can take action on it, it's now Friday or it's the next week. And that data is old and outdated. And so you're able to utilize in time real, real time data to make informed decisions that best help the student. And, and just little things like thinking about that spreadsheet, right? If, if I'm an advisor and it was downloaded Monday sent to me on Tuesday, and I said something on Friday that says, Hey, Katy, I see that you're not registered yet. And guess what, Katy registered Wednesday. But that sheet was printed on Monday. Now. They're like, well, you're my advisor. You should know that I registered a couple days ago, but here is on Friday. You're telling me I need to go register. Uh, it's one of the things I think on the software that I love is that it is updating in real time. It does let you know what changes have happened and allows you to be more specific and granular on what the student need is.

Katy Oliveira ([26:17](#)):

Yeah, it's interesting. I think often times folks feel that that level of visibility can be intrusive, but it often is what students expect.

Rob Freidhoff ([26:27](#)):

Yeah. And I think these days, too, most of our students that are, especially those that are coming out of K12 systems have had Power School or some kind of a system set up where everybody and their brother, aunt and uncle has access to their record. Right. And so there's just kind of this assumption, uh, that, especially as an advisor, that I'm gonna be able to see everything. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I would ask somebody how they're doing and, and they would be like, well, you, you can just check the grade book. And I'm like, well, no, actually I don't have access to your grade book. Right. But there's that assumption that because I'm part of the university that I'm gonna have carte blanche access to

everything that that student has. I rarely to never see any kind of an issue related to, uh, students concerns on, well, Hey, how did you, how did you know that?

Rob Freidhoff ([27:10](#)):

Or what did that look like? Or, and in a lot of ways, Katy, I think, I don't think you have to even necessarily have a specific conversation about like, oh, Hey, your persistent prediction is this in fact, I don't think you want to do that. I think you just wanna have a conversation kind of comes back to what we talked about earlier, which is there's a synergy between the signal that gets thrown up to notify that we, we have a student in need to get them to sit down in front of us. And I say, sit down. I mean, more and more these days, there's the virtual or phone call or actually in office kind of a thing, but to create a space where the advisor and the advisor are together. And then from that point, the advising process takes over that's when you go in there and you just say, Hey, Katy, how are you doing?

Rob Freidhoff ([27:50](#)):

Tell me about your favorite thing. That's happened so far since you arrived at the university. Right? And then I hear that response. And either you say, oh my God, Rob, I love this group. And that group and this class is going so well. And I'm just in my height or conversely, you go in and ask that question, Hey, what's, what's the best thing that's happened to you since you came to the university and there's this pause and the eyes go down and you know, like I can't think of anything. Well, those are very different conversations. And now I can have a conversation and say, well, Hey, you know, this is what I noticed. And all the energy sucked out the room when we started talking about that and you know, what's going on, share with me, how can, how can I help kind a thing? And then we have that opportunity to be people in a space and, and then really help that student in helping that student again, whether that's that conversation and that space. And, and maybe they're just feeling completely overwhelmed. They dunno how to get into the LMS. And you just walk through the LMS real quick, like, oh my God. So much better. Or it's something more significant. We have an ability to impact in that moment with that student.

Katy Oliveira ([28:46](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Well, in institutions who are taking this kind of approach, what kinds of results, and I know we are all trying to retain more. Students have more students persist from term to term and, and graduate on time. But what other kinds of results are you seeing take place across advising teams when they approach it in this way?

Rob Freidhoff ([29:12](#)):

I think from a fundamental level, one of the things that I think about is how siloed universities can become and how difficult it can be to break across those silos. And so for some institutions, when they implement a success software like this, it gives them an ability to have communication across divisions and to help students more clearly because there's one kind of defined repository for notes, so to speak, right? So if I go in there and put in a note as an advisor, I can share that with a faculty mentor and that faculty mentor understands that there was some kind of an interaction that was going on for institutions that want to use it with early alerts to cut down, you know, some of the, just misses that happen because institutions can be large there's ways for those to become more streamlined communication, to become more streamlined the ability to go back and find information on a student.

Rob Freidhoff ([30:04](#)):

So they're not necessarily having to go into their story 15 different times. Somebody can kinda look at that, see where they've been and pick up from whatever that conversation had been. So there's, there's kinda a level of, Hey, this can help us talk and communicate better. I think it also, when we were talking about expectations, Katy right at the beginning, I think it can help. So in our world we use colors for, uh, likelihood to persist, right? And so if there's an expectation for advisors around, Hey, we're gonna spend our time going after very low, low, and, and moderate, uh, chance of persisting. Then that becomes the framework by which all of the advising teams are working and there's a commonality kinda component to it. And I think that helps, right. It helps to know, Hey, what advising team a is doing is similar to what advising team B is doing and C is doing so on.

Rob Freidhoff ([30:53](#)):

And so, and then from a more macro level, at a university perspective, Florida Atlantic University and South Florida University, both have just some tremendous stories related to decreasing equity gaps, right? And so when the software has a good amount of users and that usage is, then you start to see probably sounds too strong, but I think it's really true life-changing metrics. Uh, and I, and I do mean that I do, I do mean life-changing metrics and the fact that when students earn degrees, it doesn't just impact that individual. It impacts that individual's family and future generations of family, their socioeconomic status, their health, all of that because they earn a degree, right? And so Florida Atlantic University, South Florida, good examples of institutions that have utilized the software. And I've seen a decrease in equity gaps and seeing more students get to the point of graduation, which is incredibly exciting.

Rob Freidhoff ([31:50](#)):

I think it was Delmar if I have it right, a 30%, 34% increase in, uh, graduation applications, uh, in the first year that they, they turned on the platform and what it did was identify some students who were ready to graduate and just had submitted graduation applications. Right. And so I think from, from the, from the small scale schedule or small scale side, or it may seem like small scale is the ability to communicate in real time, much more efficiently. And then you think about it from these macro levels of more people getting to the point of graduation and institutions that we're working with, being able to decrease equity gaps. Those are phenomenal outcomes.

Katy Oliveira ([32:28](#)):

Yeah. It really does allow visibility into where students are getting stuck and can help both from a practitioner level, provide better support to students. But I think from an institutional level, provide visibility into where barriers are, allow iteration on policy and program and where resources are allocated, so that institutions can be nimble and agile and responsive to the needs of their particular students in a way that allows them to more efficiently and effectively begin to reach their institutional goals, at least be able to carve out a pathway in the direction of those goals.

Rob Freidhoff ([33:05](#)):

Yeah, that's interesting. We were working with another university recently about that. And I mean, that was one of the things that we looked at and kind of had as an initial conversation, was they had just gone through, uh, created a new strategic plan, right. And so there was persistence goals and retention goals and different things that they had over a five year, time period, and really kind of thinking with them about, Hey, how do we have check-ins? And so we're making sure that we're on our way to that goal. And I do think that's one of the things that's nice with. What we're talking about here is, you know, not only are there signals for the students on who to go and have conversations with, but it's so much more

robust than that. You can also track that persistence and you can track retention and you can track trends over time.

Rob Freidhoff ([33:47](#)):

And, you know, if you go up a level to the advising administrator or, or maybe even up another level to the executive administrator, and you're talking about it, administrative analytics, and you start digging in at a more macro level than what we've been talking about today, we've been more focused on the advising side per se, than the administrative analytics side, but there's a lot of tools in a lot of different ways than that. You can nudge from that executive level that has impacts overall too. And so I think that's, what's fun is it's the, uh, ability for an institution to start to really understand their own data, to make informed choices, to see areas where they have opportunity and then to put some of those, uh, campaigns or some of those ideas into play. And then I think our really successful institutions, Katy, what they're doing is they're identifying the opportunity.

Rob Freidhoff ([34:35](#)):

They're coming up with some kind of a plan with a group of, Hey, this is how we wanna tackle it. And then they're doing the third part, which is really important, which is all right, let's assess and figure out that actually work. Did that success tactic that we just put out into the world, um, have an impact. And if it did, let's, let's kind rinse and repeat that. And you know, it's interesting too, if you look at initiative analysis, sometimes it's, it may look like it doesn't necessarily have a huge impact overall, but the initiative analysis, you can kind of drill down on that and see maybe there was a particular population, first term, second term students that really, really benefited out of a success metric. And, and then we can get that actionable data to people who are doing work. Everybody say, Hey, we know that this is gonna give a lift of 7% for this population. Let's make sure we get more of that population into these, you know, success initiatives kinda thing. So, um, I dunno if we were gonna go into <laugh> admin extra, I guess for the, for the podcast today,

Katy Oliveira ([35:27](#)):

We could do a whole nother episode on, on the power, the, the abilities there from administrative level to impact, to impact success on the institution. We have covered a lot of ground though. And I do wanna give you one chance to respond or share something that maybe I didn't ask you that you think is really important part of this conversation.

Rob Freidhoff ([35:46](#)):

The thing that I would say for I'm going to say two things. I'm going talk to my advising people, or maybe those that lead advising centers. I've always said this about advising. Advising is a very challenging career pathway. It's very rewarding, but it's, it's very challenging. So please give yourself grace <laugh> in that first year, Katy, I dunno how you felt about it, but I felt like I was under water for the first year I was an academic advisor. Because there's just so much to learn and to do and to know, and there's so much information that's coming, coming at you. And so I think once, once you, as an advisor kind hit the space where you've seen an entire cycle, it gets a little bit easier, but with all of these kind responsibilities and how fast everything's coming at you, the policies and rules and procedures and all that kinda thing, you make a difference every day with what you're doing as an advisor.

Rob Freidhoff ([36:34](#)):

So please keep doing that, make sure you give yourself grace in that, in that moment. And then I think for, for folks that are using our tools and are kind of just getting started, the big thing that I would say is keep it as simple as possible. Katy and I have talked, I'm a big fan of the K.I.S.S. principle, right? Keep it super simple. And so I think there's just some really kind of straightforward ways that you could get started that don't require just this crazy amount of knowledge or crazy amount of comfort with the software, but that if done can make a really significant impact. And so, for example, I mentioned it before, if you were to just create a dynamic list off of folks who are persistence prediction, a very low, low and moderate, and you were to ask your advising teams, Hey, let's just put our focus on that group.

Rob Freidhoff ([37:21](#)):

Let's get as many of that group, the very low, the low, the moderate into our office as possible, or phone calls or text campaigns or whatever, it's with that particular group, as you're kinda getting, going with the software, you're going to see a very significant opportunity in front of you. I think you're going to hear from students that maybe you hadn't heard from before and Katy way back, you said something early on in the podcast about how the advising slots are filled up and how we're busy and different things like that. And, and I mentioned that a lot of times, those students who were talking to are not often the ones who most need the help and right. And so as an advisor, you kind of get this framework in your mind of like, oh, this is where our students are at. Or this is what all, all of our students are going through.

Rob Freidhoff ([38:07](#)):

When in reality we've been missing a chunk of our student voice and our student population. And so I think keeping it simple as you start and using a filter for a very low, low moderate, and then maybe starting around some very basic groups, whether that be a static group or a dynamic group can be a relatively low lift from a understanding of how to do it. But also then has a very high value of return. Shiny object syndrome might, if you, you throw too much out there like, oh that's cool. That's cool. Let's need help. Oh my God. And all of a sudden everybody's completely overwhelmed. Really just kind of distill it down and say, Hey, this is what we wanna do. This is how we're gonna do it. And then you set that expectation too. Right? And so then if you're an advising director, somebody like that, I used to be, then I could have conversations and say, Hey, we set out at the beginning of the semester to do number one, which is filter by persistence prediction and number two, create groups, whether dynamic or static, tell me how you've hit that goal.

Rob Freidhoff ([39:01](#)):

And that's relatively easy, straightforward. So starting with simple and then getting some success and then building from that success. And then building from that success ultimately is gonna allow you to do some really cool things on your campus.

Katy Oliveira ([39:13](#)):

Yeah. It's amazing how simple changes and taking it one step at a time can really start to make change over time. You don't have to have it all figured out right from the, from the get go.

Rob Freidhoff ([39:24](#)):

Yeah. Can I say one more thing?

Katy Oliveira ([39:26](#)):

Oh yeah, of course you can.

Rob Freidhoff ([39:28](#)):

I'm gonna say one more thing that I think is really important. I think when, especially related to advising analytics and getting advising on the campus in a meaningful way, especially at campuses where the advising is not particularly connected. So maybe there's advising being done all over the place by all different types of people. Um, I think there can be some really good success in creating a training team, Katy, where there's representation from a variety of offices. One of the things we did at Valdosta was to create co-leads of training. And that was purposeful because again, there is some turnover that's happening in the advising space. So if one person ended up leaving, we'd still have another person that had knowledge of what it is and add another co-lead. But then we, we added advisors from the different centers and you gotta be careful, don't be too large, right?

Rob Freidhoff ([40:16](#)):

You don't want it to be 14 people on a, a training team or anything like that, but probably somewhere between about five to seven or so, uh, people on the training team that can go out and provide training to the advising teams, to faculty, to administrators and different things like that. But the secrets also to speak in this training team is to make sure that you're getting all voices. Don't just grab people who absolutely are excited and love the product. I think you want to consider, Hey, who's a person who maybe has a healthy dose of questioning on whether it's going to work or not work and what it all looks like and, and bring them into the fold. Because what you're gonna find is that they're gonna ask some really good questions that are gonna get asked as you go out and do training anyways. And it'll give you an opportunity to kinda work through, Hey, what does this, what does the software do? What does it not do? How do we, how do we handle that from a university? What are our expectations? Um, it could just make you a lot stronger as a training team. And so I think when you're, when you're thinking about how do you deploy this on the campus, being strategic with a training team and making sure that you've got a training team that is gonna be comfortable once it hits campus is a really strong way to make sure you get off to a strong start.

Katy Oliveira ([41:22](#)):

We've covered so much ground about how to build an effective team. And I think one of the things I'm hearing that's really important. I just wanna put a point on is, is about being intentional, intentional about the students that you, you get in front of you intentional about the practice of philosophy, how you interact with those students, intentional about how you prepare your advisors and data analytics and technology are really powerful tools to help make that kind of level of intentionality feasible.

Rob Freidhoff ([41:51](#)):

Yep. Yep. And I think there's some ways to do that really well too, Katy, I know that when we started with, you know, scheduling software and then we started with some of the stuff on the Civitas side, we were including our student government association in this work, they knew about it were aware of it. And, and I think there's some benefit to that, right. Of kind of saying, Hey, the teams are doing everything they can to work and make sure that they can best support our students, right. That student government on a campus is, is all about that, right. Is the student voice and making sure that students are taken care of. And so I think when you have abilities to have the conversations and use, use the word intentional and be intentional about what does this actually look like? How does it work? What what's, what's the goal behind it?

Rob Freidhoff ([42:31](#)):

Next Practices Episode 01: Boost Academic Advising Capacity & Effectiveness with Rob Freidhoff

How can we make sure that more students are successful and share that story? That just reminds me of several times on Monday, they always meet late for whatever reason, but you know, Monday, late night sitting, sitting in some students center space, having conversations with our student government association about this, even from a student level, right. And then conversations, we had a, a group beta, which was our student success council, making sure that everyone's fully aware of, Hey, this is the tool. This is what it can do. And, and then being very intentional about, Hey, this is how it's gonna roll out. And so yeah, I like that word intentionality and, and making sure you're getting the most out of what this tool can afford the student at the university overall.

Katy Oliveira ([43:08](#)):

Well, we've covered a lot of ground. I think you so much for coming on Next Practices, Rob. I really appreciate it,

Rob Freidhoff ([43:14](#)):

Katy, thanks for the opportunity here today. I appreciate it as well.

Katy Oliveira ([43:19](#)):

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