

Academic Coaching in Higher Education – A White Paper about a Practitioner-Led Movement to Professionalize Academic Coaching

Authored by: Chairs of each work group

About

On July 29th and 30th, 2019, the University of Colorado, Boulder, hosted a collaborative visioning summit to begin work on a practitioner-led effort to professionalize academic coaching in higher education. This white paper briefly describes the conditions that motivated the summit, the process, content, and results of the summit, and the continuing efforts to advance objectives identified at the summit. The white paper uses the terms *academic* and *success* interchangeably in front of *coaching* because of the varied ways that academic and success coaching are referred to in higher education. For the purpose of this paper academic/success coaching broadly includes programs that support students in the development of successful traits and habits for an improved collegiate experience.

Prior to the visioning summit, several academic/success coaches across the country began communicating about the need for a coaching community specifically for those operating in higher education. They also realized that academic/success coaching was in need of professionalization in order to achieve both a consistent standard of quality and recognition for the critical work performed by such staff. These people organized a committee for planning and executing the summit. Intentionally crafted, the design of the summit facilitated a collaborative process amongst practitioners to identify needs and next steps to propel the profession of academic/success coaching into the future.

The planning committee advertised the summit via academic/success coaching networks and much interest was shown from a variety of institutions. Prior to the summit, the committee sent out a survey to all participants to learn more about how higher education academic/success coaching programs implemented their coaching services. The summit ultimately included fifty participants from across the nation representing 25 academic coaching programs from a variety of institutions ranging from community colleges to Tier One research universities.

During registration, participants were asked what outcomes they would like to see at the summit. The planning committee combined this desired outcomes data with the survey data on coaching practices collected prior to the event and identified seven areas of foci, which included the following: definition, standards, branding, training opportunities, community, best practices, and research and assessment. A workgroup was established for each focus area at the summit. Participants self-selected into the workgroup of interest. An independent facilitator was assigned to each workgroup to ensure best practices for the communication and collaboration with the groups (e.g., inclusivity, etc.).

In addition to forming workgroups, summit participants attended presentations. Christian van Nieuwerburgh, Professor of Coaching and Positive Psychology at the University of East London and an international coaching expert and author, gave the keynote address. Christian outlined the international state of coaching in higher education and provided an overview of the GROWTH coaching model—a model for coaching efficacy (Campbell 2016). Adina Glickman, former Director of Learning Strategy Programs at Stanford University, co-founder of the Resilience Consortium, and a pioneer in the field of

academic coaching, advocated for an understanding of students within a “whole person” model and a correspondingly sensitive and sophisticated approach to academic coaching.

Following the summit, a chair(s) of each working group was identified, and working groups are meeting to further the accomplishments of the summit. To build on the continued momentum around academic coaching in higher education, a conference on academic coaching will be hosted at the University of Oklahoma in August 2020.

Campbell, J. (2016). Framework for Practitioners 2: The GROWTH model. In C. van Nieuwerburgh (Ed.), Coaching in Professional Contexts (pp. 235-240). London, UK: Sage.

About the Working Groups

Assessment and Research Workgroup

The Assessment and Research Workgroup began by identifying its main goal of increasing and creating a consistent presence and means of producing robust assessment and rigorous research of this emerging student support service in higher education. Together, the group created a vision for what assessment and research of coaching in higher education could and should look like right now as well as in years to come. The group members agreed that boosting research and assessment of coaching in higher education is essential for this profession’s emergence and sustainability. Coaching in higher education needs to become an increasingly formalized service, which will be supported by creating more published articles on coaching as well as by providing a robust understanding and standard means of assessing student outcomes for coaching programs. Overall, the group believes that it is of utmost importance to engage in the following initiatives:

- (1) Web-presence
- (2) Assessment Tools
- (3) Standards
- (4) Funding Resources
- (5) Writing Group

From the group’s discussion, the purpose of this work group emerged as follows:

The purpose of the Assessment and Research Workgroup is to understand potential answers to two specific questions: first, we need to understand *what and how* coaches and scholars are assessing in terms of coaching programs. Second, the coaching community needs to understand *for whom* to assess in order to understand the further reasons that assessment and research can be important to the further legitimization of this profession in higher education. These questions are explained in the paragraphs that follow.

What Assessing?: Although the group understands that assessment procedures will be tailored to the unique needs of each institution and each program, the group believes that each program will need to answer the fundamental question: *What is the point of the coaching department on your university campus?* The group asserts that knowing the framing of the program will allow its members to determine their most important, individual outcomes.

For Whom Assessing? First, the group members believe that assessment and research are key to the success of the emerging program so that coaches in higher education can understand the purpose and

heartbeat of their roles more easily. Second, the group members also believe that this type of work will be important for administrators and other institutional stakeholders to understand coaching and begin to take this service more seriously. Finally, the group members believe that providing research will add legitimacy to this emerging service in higher education and will help students understand exactly the explicit function coaches serve in higher education.

Definition of Coaching Workgroup

At the summit, the Definition of Coaching Workgroup developed a definition of coaching in higher education that focused on core elements of coaching while also outlining the diversity of approaches, topics, and roles associated with coaching. Currently, the Definition Workgroup is focused on further developing the definition drafted at the summit via literature review and feedback from planned surveys. The final deliverable for the year, presented at the next summit, will be a professional slide presentation that can also be delivered at other relevant conferences (e.g., NACADA). The presentation will include (a) an explanation of the definition-building process, (b) the purpose of the definition, (c) literature review, and (d) survey feedback on the definition from those coaching in higher education.

Identifying Best Practices Workgroup

The Identifying Best Practices Workgroup aims to create a standard of excellence and guidelines for campuses that aspire to create and implement coaching practices on their campus. Recognizing the varied needs and unique institutional culture, the work group aims to create a list of broad guidelines that should be easily adoptable on campuses choosing to use a coaching framework. The best practices team also recognizes that many institutions have created their own frameworks, have insight into best practices for their institution, and are aware of and are utilizing literature to inform their work. The best practices group is working toward creating a collective, collaborative, open source consortium library to allow higher education coaching professionals to view and implement practices as they see fit for their campus.

Messaging/Branding Workgroup

The Messaging and Branding Workgroup aims to identify and test best practices for marketing and branding campaigns for academic coaching on various campuses. The workgroup submitted survey questions to the larger summit team to investigate how programs across the nation message and brand their work on their campuses and to share that information with the larger group of participants. Finally, this workgroup also serves as a lead on relaying communication about the 2019 Summit and will continue to communicate the progress of the workgroups.

Network Workgroup

The Network Workgroup began by discussing the topics brought forth from all summit attendees. Throughout the workgroup members' time together, the group created a vision for the Coaching Network as well as the Coaching Summit. The vision posits that in the future, coaching in higher education is a legitimate profession. Coaches in higher education have access to affordable training and certification options that focus on coaching in the higher education setting. Coaches are connected with one another, valued on their campuses and by campus partners, have shared resources, are well funded, and engaged in transformational work.

Purpose:

The purpose of the Coaching Network workgroup is to make sure academic, success, and other coaches in higher education have a community to learn from, gain professional development to learn how to coach better, and move the field forward. During the 2020 academic year, the Coaching Network will discuss ideas, conduct research, and create a proposal on the following topics:

- (1) Potential community names;
- (2) Ways to support each of the Chairs of the working groups and create a space, website, or system for easy communication between professionals in the community;
- (3) Systems to ensure the yearly gathering continues;
- (4) A purpose, mission, and vision for the coaching community;
- (5) A proposal with pros and cons of creating a new organization, and/or making connections with existing organization(s);
- (6) A process to determine which group of participants will host the yearly Coaching Summit;
- (7) A process to choose steering committee members for yearly Coaching Summit;
- (8) A process to facilitate decision-making among group members;
- (9) A leadership structure, if needed; and
- (10) A set of by-laws, if needed.

Additional items were included in discussions such as supporting professional development throughout the year, providing a space for consultation, a space to conduct research and assessment, and a space to develop graduate programs to obtain certification, etc. These will be included in future conversations as the workgroup moves forward.

Next Steps:

At the next coaching conference, the workgroup plans to have proposals for each of the topics above to present to the participants.

Training Workgroup

The Training Workgroup met twice in fall 2019 and continues to meet. The group solidified the vision and mission, as well as confirmed they would like to submit survey questions to the Coaching Summit attendees to identify core competencies for coaching in higher education. The objective of the group is to elevate the profession of coaching in higher education and ethical practice by establishing a governing body that has clear training best practices. In addition to core competencies, the group would like to create a bank of research and training resources and opportunities that are available for coaching programs to use at a low or no cost. The training group has submitted survey items to the larger survey efforts of the summit team. The next steps of the training group are to learn about the immediate objectives of the summit organization, identify how the training group may contribute, and review survey results to identify potential competencies.

Workgroup Members

Assessment and Research Workgroup:

Jessica Robinson Chair (University of North Texas), Sasha Tarrant (Brazosport College), Claire Robinson (University of South Carolina), Sara Rensing (Wilmington College), Sessi Aboh, Rose-May Frazier (Florida State University)

Definition Workgroup Members:

Nicholas Santascoy, Chair (Stanford University), Christopher Pisarik (University of North Georgia), Matthew Birnbaum (University of Northern Colorado), Sara Rensing (Wilmington College), Cassandra Hirdes (University of Arizona)

Identifying Best Practices Workgroup Members:

Jenny Steiner, Chair (University of Minnesota -- Twin Cities), Kathleen Shea Smith (University of Oklahoma), Jena Frommeyer (Wilmington College), Marlin Blankenship (Southeastern Oklahoma State University), Wayne Walker (Northeast Wisconsin Technical College)

Marketing and Branding Workgroup Members:

Eryn Elder, Chair, (University of Colorado, Boulder), Tiffani Bates (University of Oklahoma), Juan Rivas, (Colorado State University), Christian van Nieuwerburgh, (leading academic and thought leader in academic coaching)

Network Workgroup Members:

Alicia Sepulveda, Chair (University of Colorado, Boulder), Alana Davis-Delaria (University of Colorado, Boulder), Alison Herr, Jess Kerr (Kansas State University), Mike Seaman, and Lyle Slack (Texas A&M University).

Training Workgroup Members:

Audrey Blankenheim (University of Colorado Boulder), Marlin Blankenship (Southeastern Oklahoma State University), Ashanti Chunn (Tennessee State University), Allison DuLac (Kansas State University), Alyssa O'Keeffe (The University of Arizona), Lisa Richardson (Waubonsee Community College), LaShae Roberts (Florida State University), Kai Takatsuka (University of Minnesota), Wayne Walker (Northeast Wisconsin Technical College), Rowie Wolfe (University of Colorado Boulder)