

Marc Lowenstein: A Personal Retrospective

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This article is a personal testimony to more than 40 years of my experiences with Marc Lowenstein, which provides only a small piece of our personal and professional relationships.

[doi:10.12930/NACR-21-09]

KEY WORDS: collaboration, ethics, academic administration, Lowenstein

My stories with Marc Lowenstein originated when I first arrived at Stockton University (then Stockton State College) and met Marc, a member of the Stockton faculty at the time. He was untenured, but like any aspiring faculty member, was making every effort to earn that distinction. To that effect, he volunteered to join the group of Freshman Preceptors I was recruiting at the time. I was the new (and first) Director of Academic Advising at Stockton and had envisioned this cadre of faculty members, to whom new first-year (Freshmen) students would be assigned, as their *preceptor*, a term that is synonymous with educator, pedagogue, teacher. Stockton faculty had chosen that term since its beginning in 1969, and it is still used today.

Marc enjoyed that role and performed well in it. However, he was not granted tenure and had to move on. He earned an Assistant Professor of Philosophy appointment at Otterbein College and taught there for one year. During that time, an administrative appointment became available at Stockton, and Marc returned to Stockton in that capacity. Such positions were one-year appointments and did not include the opportunity to earn tenure, so Marc took his chances to return to the institution he really loved. He was always a strong advocate and supporter of the Stockton unique General Studies curriculum. He would be working for the academic chair that had oversight of that aspect of the overall curriculum for all Stockton students. That appointment turned a page in Marc's academic career, although he could have no idea at the time how it would evolve.

Marc progressed upwardly in the administrative chain, serving as the Dean of Professional Studies. This position appeared to have many anomalies, but I always saw these as characteristics of Stockton's unique approach to general education and interdisciplinary curricula overall. The School of Professional Studies housed both Business Studies (Accounting, Management, Finance, Marketing, and Computer Science) and the Health Sciences (Nursing, Public Health, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech Pathology and Audiology), and was led by a philosopher. Now that's interdisciplinarity at its best, or at least its most unique. However, it worked. Ultimately, enrollment growth, accreditation demands, and overall administrative responsibilities necessitated the creation of two separate schools and two new deans, and Marc was the person who managed these transitions.

Marc's next step was into the Vice President for Academic Affairs Office, where we worked much more closely. I had also moved into that office by that time. Marc and I conferred on academic appeals, academic integrity cases, academic reinstatements, academic policy reviews, and typical aspects of the newly named Provost's Office. Through these discussions, Marc and I (and often Peter Hagen) regularly engaged in various opinions, preferences, and counter-arguments centering on academic advising and how we could enhance it at Stockton. These discussions always had the challenges of working within a union contract that required all regular full-time faculty members to be preceptors, maintaining equity in numbers of advisees (preceptees) among these faculty members, and assuring quality advising for the students.

It was rather early during his transition periods that Marc and I became engaged in ethics in advising. An anecdote I must share is how Marc and I started the conversation about ethics in advising—perhaps a bit off the track from his award-winning article (Lowenstein, 2005), but I think it exemplifies his expertise and our work together for approximately 35 years.

I struggled (ethically) when deciding how to respond to student appeals for exceptions to academic graduation requirements. So, I went to Marc (a philosopher who taught ethics) to help me understand *why* I was struggling in making these decisions—*why* did I respond one way in one case and differently in another when the same issue was being appealed?

Here is one example of my dilemma: two students appeal the same General Studies requirement for graduation. One student exhibits an angry approach for not being told of the requirement until three weeks before graduation and that the requirement was useless anyway. My approach almost always began with “Have you seen your preceptor?” My attention to ethics evolved from recognizing that my next response was always dependent on the student’s attitude. With these types of (angry) students, I would remind them of the importance of seeing one’s preceptor, that the requirement appears in several places, that all parts of the curriculum have a purpose, and whether they had assumed any responsibility for their education/degree. My advice would be to explain the appeal process, and the students would usually be on their way, still angry. I was even challenged to a brawl by one student and offered a bribe by another.

The other student with the same issue approaches the problem more professionally. How can I fix this? What are my options? My preceptor thought I had met the requirement in transfer. In this case, my approach would be to ask the same questions, but my advice would be much more thorough. First, I would explain the appeal process and offer a strategy for preparing the appeal, specifically to present an educational rationale for why and how the intent of the requirement has been met. The rationale can include personal circumstances, but the reason to grant an appeal must be on academic grounds. If appropriate, I would have the student validate the preceptor’s oversight, but everything was conditional—no promises.

Marc tutored me on four fundamental ethical ideals that come into conflict rather frequently. Thus, I began to understand *why* I was troubled by my own conflicting behaviors. Those conversations evolved into what we think was the first article on ethics in academic advising (Lowenstein & Grites, 1993) and, subsequently, into numerous workshops and conference presentations. I use what I have learned from Marc in my class every semester by introducing the four

ideals and using examples in educational contexts to illustrate why and how individuals encounter ethical dilemmas.

The real strength in our relationship grew out of the many conversations we had about the meaning, the process, the potential, and the value of academic advising in higher education. Our conversations were often at odds philosophically but always respectful. We both saw the importance of academic advising in the grand scheme of the higher education enterprise, and we both advocated for its improvement and values at every opportunity we had.

Our differences reflected our different academic backgrounds—mine in education and the social sciences and his in the humanities. We often debated my developmental, academic advising approach (Grites, 2013) vs. his learning-centered approach (Lowenstein, 2005). We differed in the scope of what academic advising should include, the theoretical underpinnings of our respective approaches, and even the research methodologies that might be used to determine the effectiveness of our approaches to academic advising.

Perhaps the most controversial conversations we had were about theory. My theory and research training were in the social sciences, so I was looking for data to prove a theory; Marc’s humanities background offered different ways of defining theories and different research strategies to support them. In a way, we might have been debating quantitative vs. qualitative research methods before the understanding and value of both became acceptable in much higher education research. Our fundamental difference was between my holistic approach (academic, personal, and career) to academic advising and his focus on the “academic” part of academic advising.

As we continued our discussions, we also planned several conference presentations, hoping to engage other academic advisors and advising administrators to think more deeply about the value of this process in students’ lives. Consequently, we listened to each other and began to come much closer together in our respective approaches. I began using the “Advising is Teaching” philosophy quite early in my academic advising career, and Marc clarified *what* we teach.

We frequently continued our discussions over coffee at a local Starbucks (and even in an airport on our way to a NACADA annual conference) after Marc retired from Stockton in 2012. We often exchanged manuscripts or simply emails to seek each other’s thoughts on something we were

considering for publication. We nominated each other for different NACADA Awards and were named the recipients. Marc was awarded the 2014 Virginia N. Gordon Award for Excellence in the Field of Advising, and I was given the Bobbie Flaherty Service to NACADA Award in 2016. These awards serve as testimony to our respect for each other's differences, our willingness to share our ideas openly, and our collective ability to engage others in the purpose, value, and bright future for academic advising in higher education.

References

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Author's Note

Thomas J. Grites, Ph.D. (Ret.), served as Assistant Provost for Academic Support, among

other administrative positions, in his nearly 43 years at Stockton University. He was a founding member of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and served as its second President. He continues to serve as Senior Editor of the *NACADA Journal*. Dr. Grites has written over 50 professional publications, delivered more than 120 presentations, and conducted academic advising workshops and program reviews on over 100 campuses.

Dr. Grites earned his B.S. and M.S. degrees from Illinois State University and his Ph.D. from the University of Maryland. Both institutions have awarded him Distinguished Alumni Awards. He was inducted into the Illinois State University College of Education Hall of Fame in 2007. He was recognized as a Transfer Champion by the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students in 2015. Most recently, he received the 2021 NACADA Region 2 award for his Outstanding Contribution to Scholarship. Additionally, in 2021, Region 2 awarded the Thomas J. Grites Service to Region 2 Award in his name. He may be contacted at thomasgrites@gmail.com.