

## A Brief Overview of Student Development Theories

Student development (how students grow and change during their time in college related to identity development, learning, meaning making, and more) has been researched for decades. Psychology and education researchers have identified theories which are studied by graduate students and professionals in student support roles at college campuses across the country and around the world.

These theories serve as the foundation on which the work of any student-focused staff member stands. They help us to better understand how a student thinks and evolves over the course of these formative years.

Below are some theories that the Career and Employment Services advising team has used to better understand our student population. It is a sample list, but not an exhaustive one. There is a whole range of gender development theories, racial/ethnic identity theories, LGBTQA developmental theories, and more that also play a part.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Maslow's theory suggests that motivation is driven by the satisfaction of a scale of needs. The hierarchy consists of five categories: Physiological; Safety/Security; Love/Belongingness; Self Esteem; and finally Self Actualization. During the first six weeks of college, a great deal of focus is spent on the first 3 categories; particularly the connection the student has with peers and mentors. The theory suggests that higher level needs cannot receive focus until lower level needs are met.

When working with students, it is helpful to understand the importance of basic needs. Students who have a need for income to provide food, water, and shelter, for example, may be forced to pursue a part-time job rather than an unpaid internship that would provide relevant experience.

### Krumboltz's Theory of Planned Happenstance

<https://www.careers.govt.nz/resources/career-practice/career-theory-models/krumboltzs-theory/>

This emerging theory addresses the need for people to deal with change within a rapidly developing job market. New jobs and fields of work are popping-up all over while other jobs are being replaced or changed, so this theory addresses the need for people to be flexible and open to new opportunities. According to this theory, it is the career adviser's role to foster in students:

1. **Curiosity** to explore learning opportunities
2. **Persistence** to deal with obstacles
3. **Flexibility** to address a variety of circumstances and events
4. **Optimism** to maximize benefits from unplanned events

Students benefit from hearing how these aspects of an alum's personality have helped to foster positive development in their careers. Students are often looking for linear paths into a job, so hearing about these aspects of the alumni experience help them to understand that one's career path is filled with exciting twists and turns.

\*This theory was mentioned in the 2014 Cruzvergara, Dey article [10 Future Trends in College Career Services](#) and may be foundational to some of the Industry Cluster work the committee seeks to build.

### Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support

<https://imjoeboe.wordpress.com/2011/04/28/challenge-support/>

College is a time of significant development for students, both socially and academically. Sanford's theory of challenge and support addresses the environment in which students need to develop. He talks about creating "optimal dissonance" which is a blend of challenge and support so that students can grow (provided students are ready to grow). Too much challenge and

students may become overwhelmed, frustrated, and shut down. Too much support and students may never be pushed to learn what they need to learn. Behind this theory is the notion that students need an equal balance of challenge and support, appropriate to the task or situation, to foster growth and development.

### Chickering's 7 Vectors of Student Development

<https://studentdevelopmenttheory.wordpress.com/chickerings-seven-vectors/>

Based off the work of Erik Erikson, Chickering's theory addresses identity development of the "typical" 18-25 year old college student. These vectors do not occur linearly, but rather in various directions and at various times. Chickering's 7 vectors are generally divided into 3 groups.

1. The first group, consisting of **Developing Competence**, **Managing Emotions**, and **Developing Autonomy**, are pursued simultaneously typically during the first and second years of college.
2. The fourth vector, **Establishing Identity**, commonly occurs during the sophomore and junior years.
3. Students usually move through the final three vectors (**Freeing Interpersonal Relationships**, **Developing Purpose**, and **Developing Integrity**) during the junior and senior years.

Alumni working with students benefit from understanding that students are experiencing change and growth in many ways, at different times, and in a variety of stages.

### Schlossberg's Transition Theory

<http://www.unthsc.edu/students/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/Schlossberg.pdf>

Schlossberg's theory helps us to understand how students deal with transitions through college. These transitions include anticipated (i.e. graduation), unanticipated (i.e. divorce, sudden death of a loved one), and non-events (events that are expected but ultimately do not occur, i.e. not landing a particular job).

Factors that influence a person's ability to cope with transition are represented by the 4 S's: **Situation**, **Self**, **Support**, and **Strategies**. College personnel and alumni can be seen in the **support** and **strategy** aspects of this model, providing guidance as things happen and change (or don't) and considering practical next steps. Many of these transitions are new, such as being turned down for a job, so the support of familiar professionals will be helpful to add perspective.

### Baxter-Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship

<http://tarheeldiversity.blogspot.com/2006/09/who-heel-am-i-self-authorship.html>

Baxter-Magolda's (2001) theory suggests that intellectual development is made up of 4 distinct phases.

1. The first phase involves following **formulas**. It's where what you believe, how you define yourself, and what is important in the relationships you have is determined by an "authority" (i.e. parent, teacher).
2. The second phase is called the **crossroads**. As the title suggests, this is the point where the person might start to wonder if the things they "believe" are the things they really believe.
3. The third phase is where a person **becomes the author** of one's life; when s/he starts to choose beliefs, values, and identity that feel "real" to them. In relationships, we look to negotiate ways that both individual's needs can be met.
4. Finally, a person develops an **internal foundation** where s/he feels comfortable and grounded in their identity.

Understanding this theory leads to alumni understanding our students' approach to issues and opportunities as they arise. A student in the first phase is more likely to take an alum's advice at face value without critiquing the advice, seeing that alum as an authority figure. As students progress through these phases, they develop a better sense of the authority they have over their own decisions and take more ownership of them. The term self-authorship may be appropriate as students begin to author their own future.