

# Client Engagement Reflection Journal

**Practicum Site:** First Year Experience (FYE) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Office, Southern Adventist University

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## Week 1: First Impressions and Foundations

### **Focus:**

This week, I focused on building initial trust during one-on-one academic advising sessions. My goal was to make students feel safe, heard, and welcomed from the beginning, recognizing that the way we start relationships matters in building long-term engagement.

### **Person-in-Environment (PIE) Application:**

Instead of focusing only on academic issues, I asked students about their lives outside of school — like work schedules, family responsibilities, and adjustment to campus life. This helped me see students in the full context of their environments.

### **Culturally Responsive Communication:**

I made sure to ask students how they wanted to be addressed and practiced open body language and affirming responses. I also avoided assuming that all students had the same resources or experiences transitioning to college.

### **Challenge:**

Some students were very shy or gave short answers, and it was hard to know if they were feeling comfortable.

### **Supervision Feedback:**

My supervisor encouraged me to use open-ended "story" questions rather than checklist-style ones to create more natural conversations.

### **Strategy to Improve:**

I began each meeting with a relaxed, open check-in ("Tell me a little about how your week's been — outside of classes") instead of diving straight into school topics.

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## Week 2: Listening Deeper and Empowering Students

### **Focus:**

This week, I really worked on strengthening my active listening skills — staying fully present,

paraphrasing what students shared, and validating their feelings. I wanted students to feel heard, not just advised.

**Person-in-Environment (PIE) Application:**

Many students opened up about how jobs, financial stress, and family issues made it difficult to prioritize schoolwork. Instead of viewing late assignments as irresponsibility, I understood them as symptoms of bigger environmental pressures.

**Culturally Responsive Communication:**

I made sure not to judge students' choices and emphasized that everyone's path through college can look different depending on their unique circumstances.

**Challenge:**

It was sometimes hard balancing empathy with the need to encourage academic accountability. I didn't want to minimize their struggles, but I also didn't want to leave students stuck feeling overwhelmed.

**Supervision Feedback:**

I was reminded that strength-based communication is powerful — helping students see what they *are* doing well can fuel their motivation for change.

**Strategy to Improve:**

I started affirming strengths first ("It's amazing that you're working full-time and still showing up for classes"), and then collaborating with students to brainstorm manageable next steps.

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## **Week 3: Emotional Regulation and Self-Awareness**

**Focus:**

This week, a particularly emotional advising session reminded me how important emotional regulation is in client engagement. A student disclosed feeling immense pressure from her family and fears about disappointing them, which was deeply affecting her academic performance.

**Person-in-Environment (PIE) Application:**

I immediately connected her experience not just to her study habits but to her broader emotional and cultural environment. It helped me frame our conversation more compassionately and without judgment.

**Culturally Responsive Communication:**

I stayed grounded, validated her feelings ("It makes sense that you'd feel so much pressure in that situation"), and avoided giving quick-fix advice. Instead, I listened carefully and made sure she knew her feelings were valid.

**Challenge:**

Emotionally heavy sessions like this one left me feeling drained and a little overwhelmed afterward.

**Supervision Feedback:**

My supervisor emphasized the importance of self-care between client meetings and taught me simple grounding exercises (like breathing deeply, stretching, or stepping outside for a few minutes).

**Strategy to Improve:**

After emotionally intense sessions, I started taking two-minute reflection breaks to reset my mind and body. I also practiced mindful breathing before beginning my next meeting, helping me stay fully present for each student without carrying over emotional fatigue.