

Enhancing Student Belonging and Mattering

Key Role of Academic Advisor's Attitude & Flexibility

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Student Belonging and Mattering – Definition

Students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling of sensation or connectedness (**belonging**), and the experience of **mattering** or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (Strayhorn, 2018)



Student Belonging and Mattering – Pillars & Actors

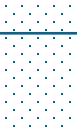
Pillar	Student End (Sensation Perceived by)	← Institutional End (Valued By)
Attention 	People notice me when I'm here, and they miss me when I'm gone.	Faculty notice ongoing absences, peers and Academic Advisors check in when a student goes out of radar.
Importance 	My thoughts, feedback, and presence carry actual weight.	Student voices actively shaping campus policy and curriculum development. Academic Advisors are actively listening to their advisees.
Ego-Extension 	Someone else shares my joys and feels my disappointments.	Academic Advisors celebrating a student's win. Academic Advisors offer <u>genuine</u> comfort and support in difficult times.
Dependence 	Other people rely on my contributions.	Being a <u>key</u> part of a peer study group, research lab, student union committee, or campus organization. Academic Advisors ask for participation in events.

Table 1 : Four Core Pillars of Student Mattering (France and Finney, 2009)

Academic Advisor's Attitude – Definition

Academic advisors act as central "relationship managers" for higher education institutions. In this context, an advisor's attitude is defined by the quality of the psychological and emotional bonds they create. A positive interpersonal attitude fosters student self-efficacy, a stronger sense of belonging and mattering, and subsequent student loyalty and persistence toward graduation (Vianden & Barlow, 2015).



Academic Advisor's Attitude – Dimensions

Dimension	Definition
Empathy (Relational Mindset)	Empathy is the ability to <u>emotionally and intellectually understand</u> what a student is experiencing. An empathetic orientation requires treating students as “ <u>equal partners rather than inferiors (lower in status)</u> ” and respecting their perspectives (McGill et al, 2020).
Approachability & Responsiveness	An advisor's active behavioural character - <u>such as being friendly, easy to talk to, and responsive to student needs is critical</u> (McGill et al., 2020). This encourages psychological safety, making students trust the advisor. Conversely, an <u>indifferent or dismissive attitude</u> , or making them <u>feel insecure</u> discourages help-seeking behaviour.
Being Non-Judgmental and Compassionate	Effective developmental advising shifts away from <u>a cold, transactional approach</u> toward being <u>compassionate</u> (Saiyad & Mahajan, 2023). A <u>positive advisor attitude</u> is characterized by being tactful and avoiding <u>rushing to conclusions</u> regarding a student's struggles, poor grades, or personal obstacles (McGill et al, 2020).
Cultural Sensitivity	Modern higher education requires advisors to view students through a lens of <u>inclusivity</u> . An inclusive attitude entails <u>appreciating diverse student backgrounds, adapting to individual barriers, and practicing cultural sensitivity</u> to ensure all students feel they legitimately belong to the academic community (McGill et al., 2020).

Table 2 : Dimensions of Academic Advisor’s Attitude

Student's Perceived Matterings vs. Academic Advisor's Attitude

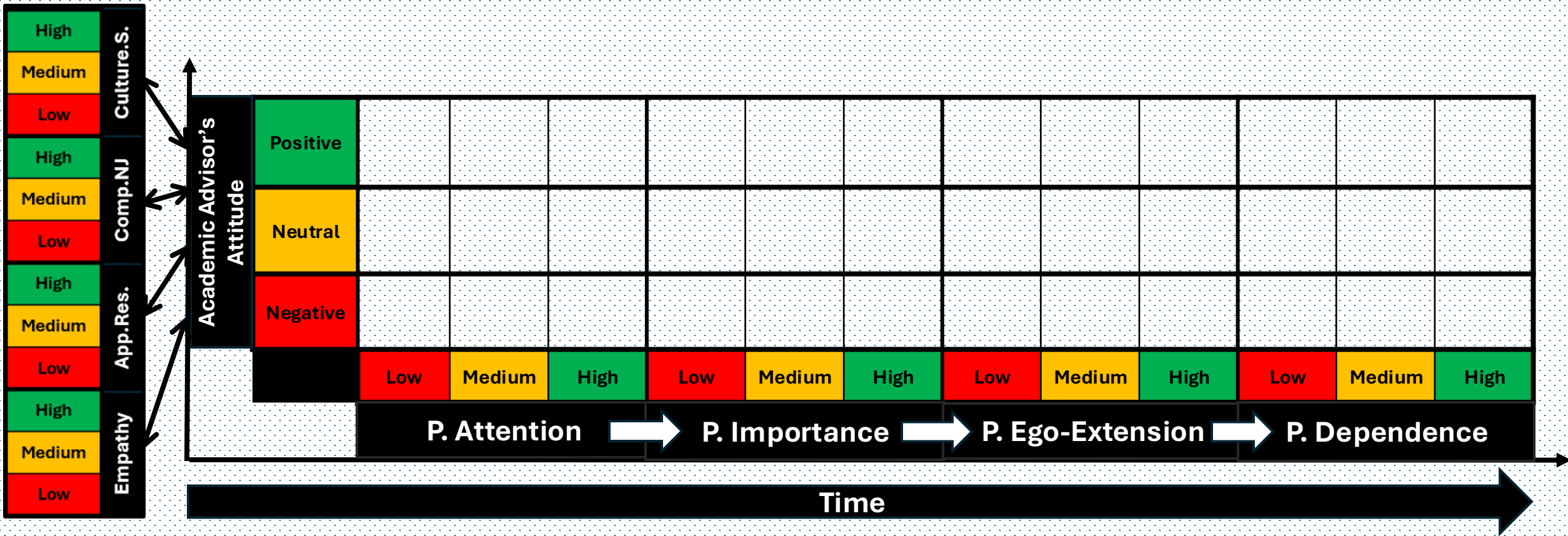
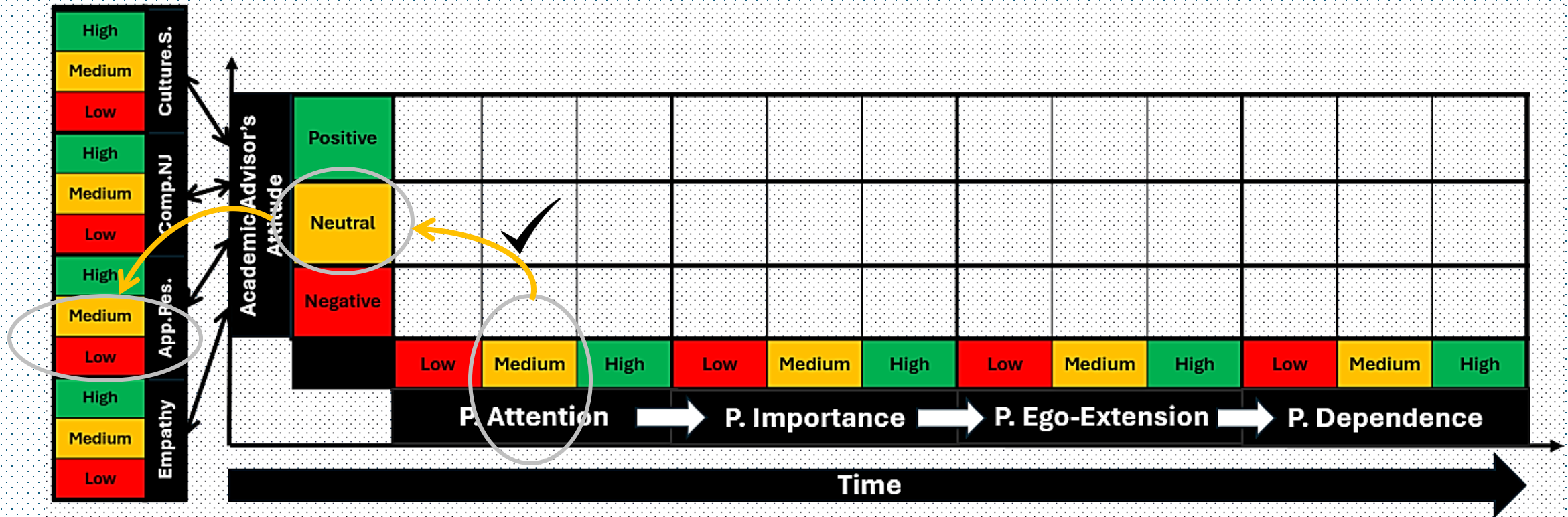


Figure 1 : Student's Perceived (P.) Matterings Mapped Against Academic Advisor's Attitude (Author, 2026)

Scenario 1 – Short Academic Advising Session

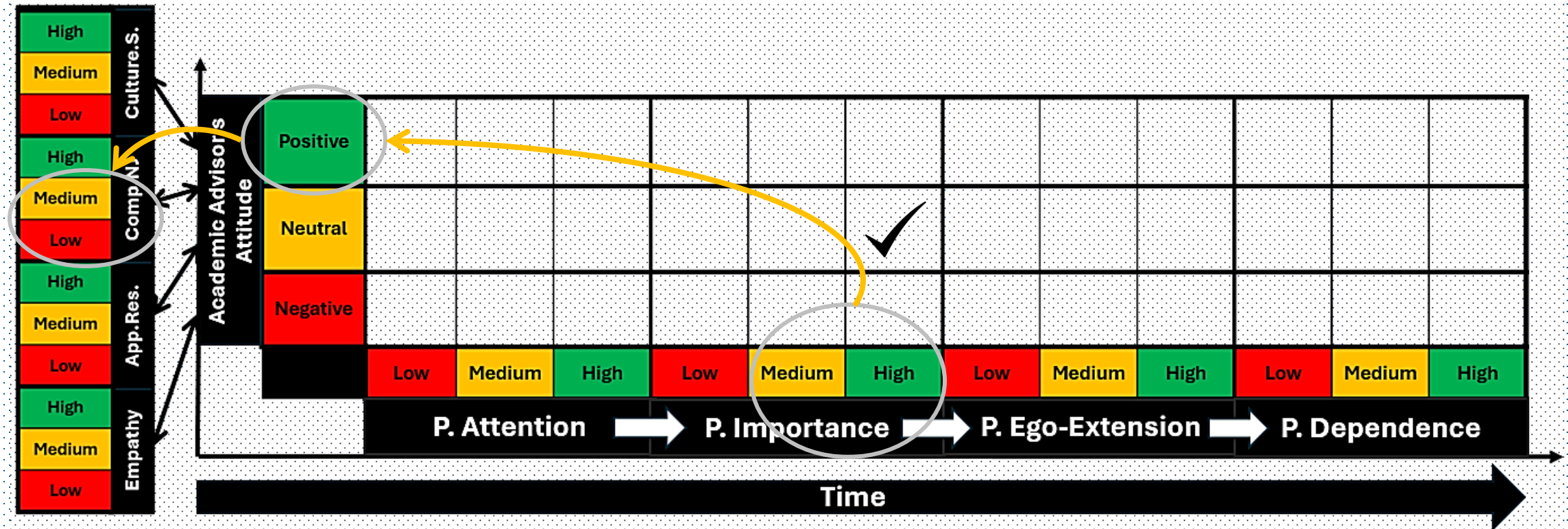
A student attended an individual academic advising session around the end of semester and his session took less than 5 minutes. Student mentioned that there was nothing specific the academic advisor asked about. So, the session finished soon.



Potential Improvement Action for the Academic Advisor – having a check list of items/questions in hand to ask about in any individual academic advising session.

Scenario 2 – Advice on English Language

A student talks with their academic advisor about English language problems they experience during lectures, and the academic advisor just refers them to the English language centre.



Potential Improvement Action for the Academic Advisor – try to investigate the issue and see if anything else can be done first, before referring them to the language centre.

Summary

- A significant part of **students' sense of belonging** on campus comes from the **value** given by their **academic advisors**.
- Students' perceived mattering (which contributes to the sense of belonging) is measured by four pillars. These pillars are **linked** and they can be viewed from an evolutionary process - in which each pillar can **evolve** over time, and (if managed effectively) it can facilitate a **positive move/progression** to a higher-level pillar.



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Summary

- An academic advisor's attitude significantly contributes to students' perceived **matter**ing and **value**. This attitude can be broken down into **four factors/dimensions**, which together shape the way the advisor interacts with the student. These factors can vary in **quality**, and the **overall quality** of the advisor's attitude may change depending on these factors.
- Mapping the **student mattering pillars** against the **dimensions of academic advisor's attitude** gives the opportunity to **systematically analyse** the students' comments (perceptions) on their advisors. This can contribute to **identification** of **problematic dimension(s)** and **provision** of **actionable insights** for improvement.

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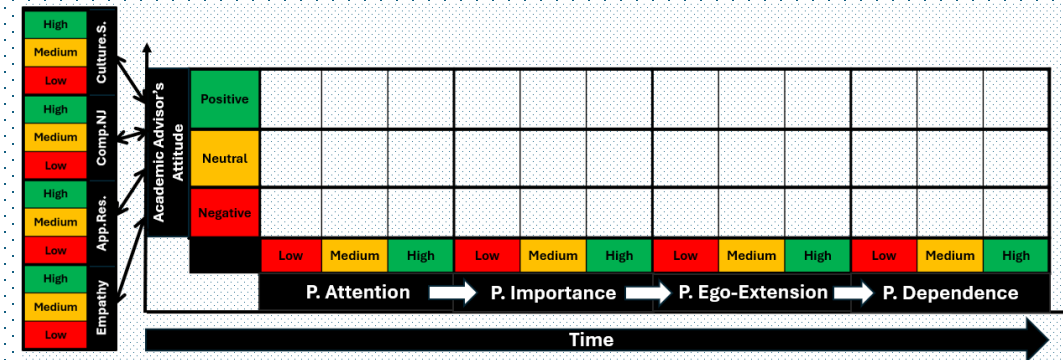


Figure 1 : Student's Perceived (P.) Mattering Mapped Against Academic Advisor's Attitude (Author, 2026)

References

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Many Thanks for Your Attention!