Understanding the Ecosystem of Institutional Change: How Colleges are Leveraging Technology to Provide Holistic Student Support

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Learning Objectives

- The ecosystem of institutional change at the *macro-, exo-, meso-* and *micro-* levels

- Approaches to technology-mediated reforms to advising and student support

- Advising technologies including degree planning tools, early alert systems, and case management platforms

- Student experiences and preferences related to advising

- Barriers to and facilitators of institutional change

- Practical recommendations from two- and four-year colleges undertaking technology-mediated advising reforms

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Agenda

- What we know about advising redesign
- Potential theory to explain how reforms move through the institution
- Activity
- Case Study
- Lessons

About CCRC

CCRC has been a leader in the field of community college research and reform for over 20 years. Our work provides a foundation for innovations in policy and practice that help give every community college student the best chance of success.

Our areas of research include:

- College readiness and dual enrollment programs, and the transition from high school to college
- Developmental education and adult basic skills
- Non-academic support services, financial aid, and student engagement
- Online education and instructional technology
- Student persistence and completion, and transfer to four-year colleges
- Guided pathways, institutional reform, and performance funding
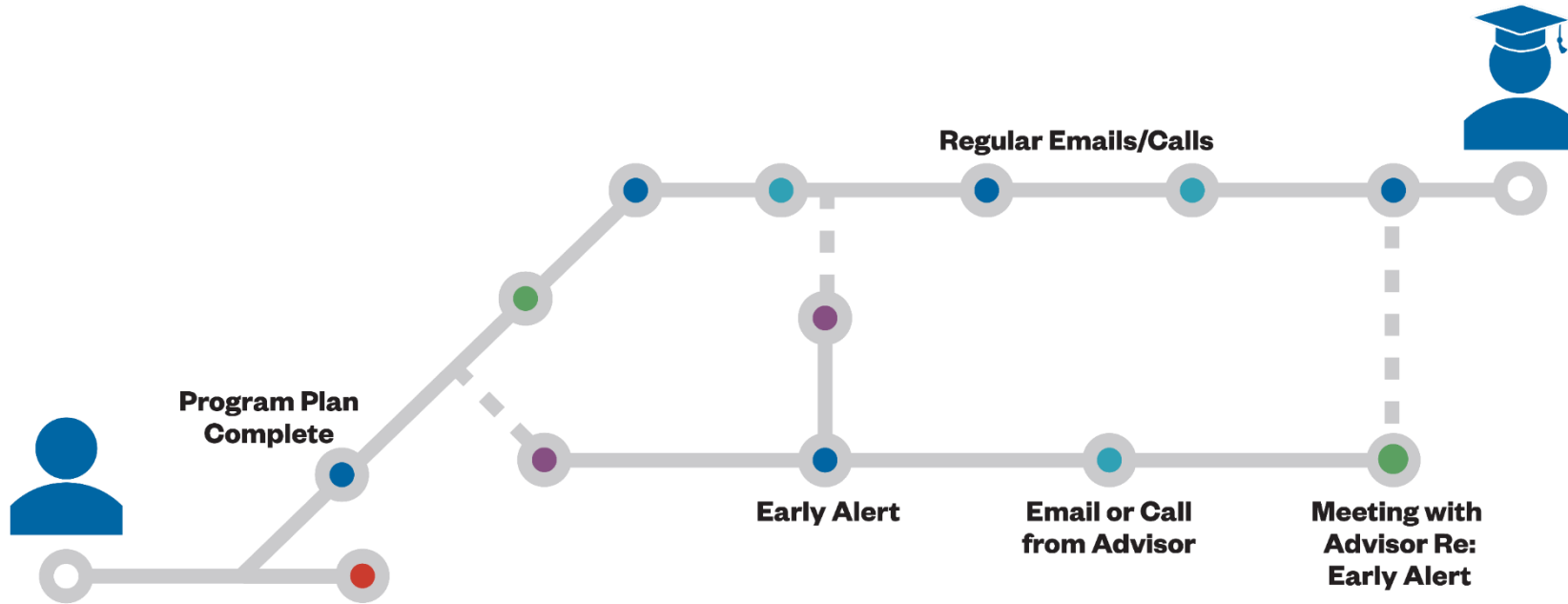- Workforce education and training and the economic returns to higher education

Technology-Mediated Advising

Definition of Technology-Mediated Advising and Student Support

Use of technology to promote, support, and sustain long-term, holistic advising relationships. Technology enables personnel throughout the college to engage in advising and student support relationships that:
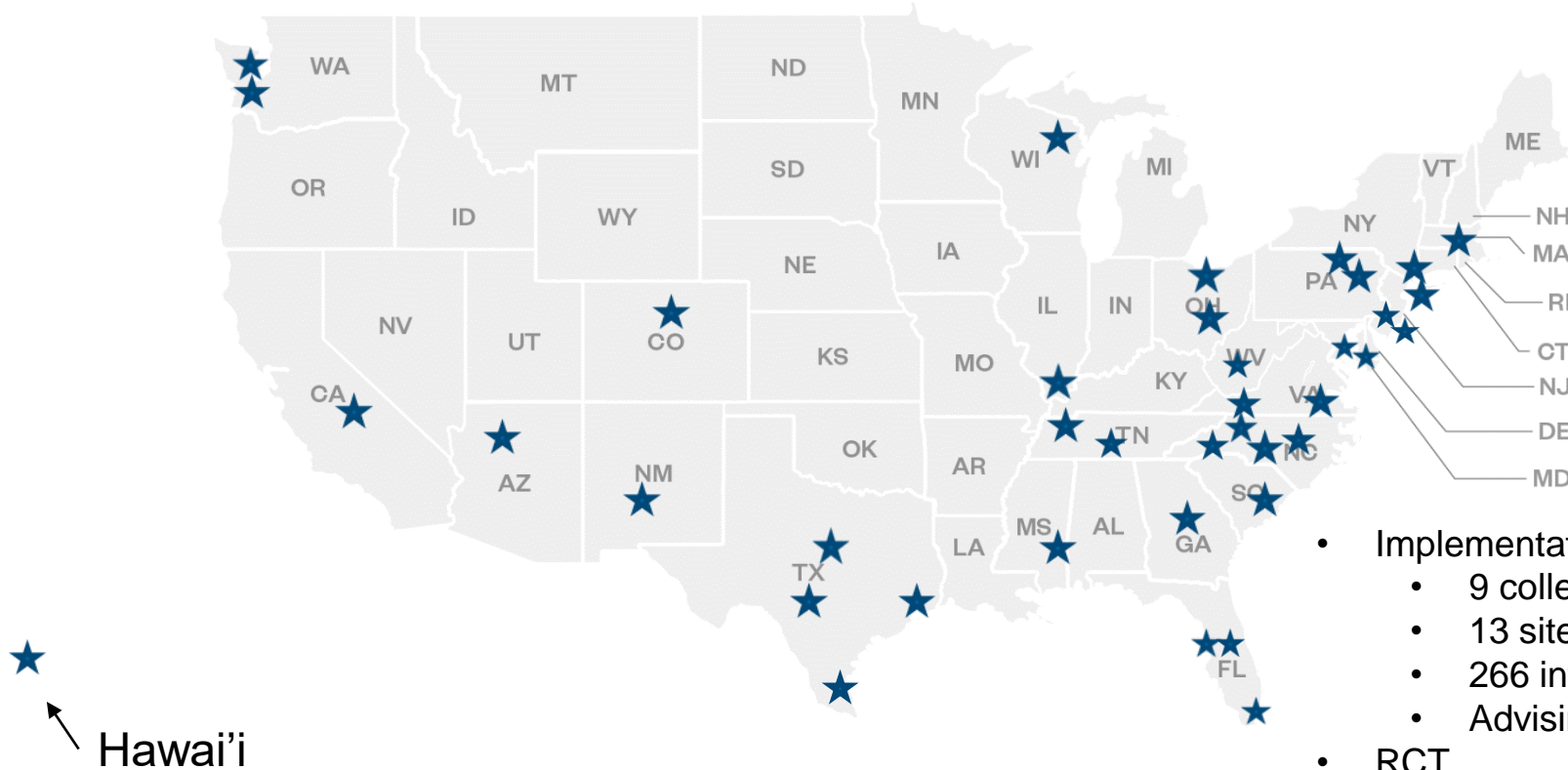
- approach student support as a teaching function,

- touch students on a regular basis, and

- connect them to the information and services they need when they need them, in order to keep students on track to graduation.

(Karp, Kalamkarian, Klempin, & Fletcher, 2016)

Advising Redesign Can Enable Holistic Student Support

Regular Emails/Calls

Program Plan Complete

Early Alert

Email or Call from Advisor

Meeting with Advisor Re: Early Alert

CCRC Fieldwork and Research

Fieldwork and Research Details

Hawai'i

*Community colleges and broad access universities

- Implementation Fieldwork
  - 9 colleges*
  - 13 site visits
  - 266 interviews
  - Advising staff, key personnel, administrators, students
- RCT
  - 3 colleges*
  - 6 site visits
  - 231 interviews
  - Advising staff, key personnel, administrators, students
- 38 colleges total

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Rationale for Our Approach

Our Previous Research

- Examine institutional structures and processes
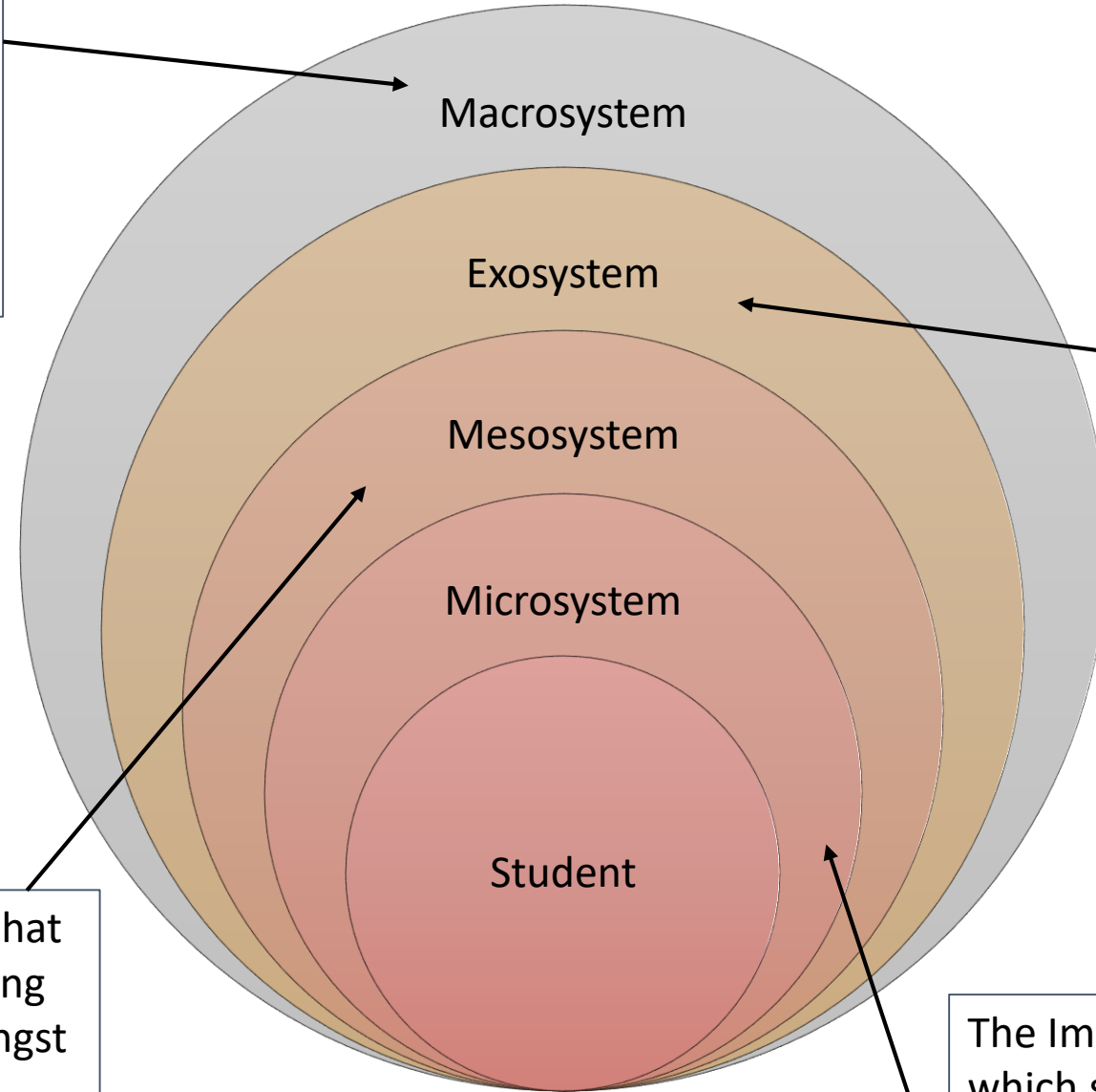
Our Current Study

- Understand perspectives of those most directly affected

Ecological Systems Theory

McLinden, M. (2017). Examining proximal and distal influences on the part-time student experience through an ecological systems theory. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *22*(3), 373–388.

The Ecosystem

Broad political and cultural environment in which institutions operate (completion agenda, performance funding, labor market demands, etc.). Often drives change.

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Student

'Exists outside of the student's direct agency" but determines the structures through which students engage with the institution (funding decisions, strategic priorities) (McLinden, p. 380). Institutionally-based.
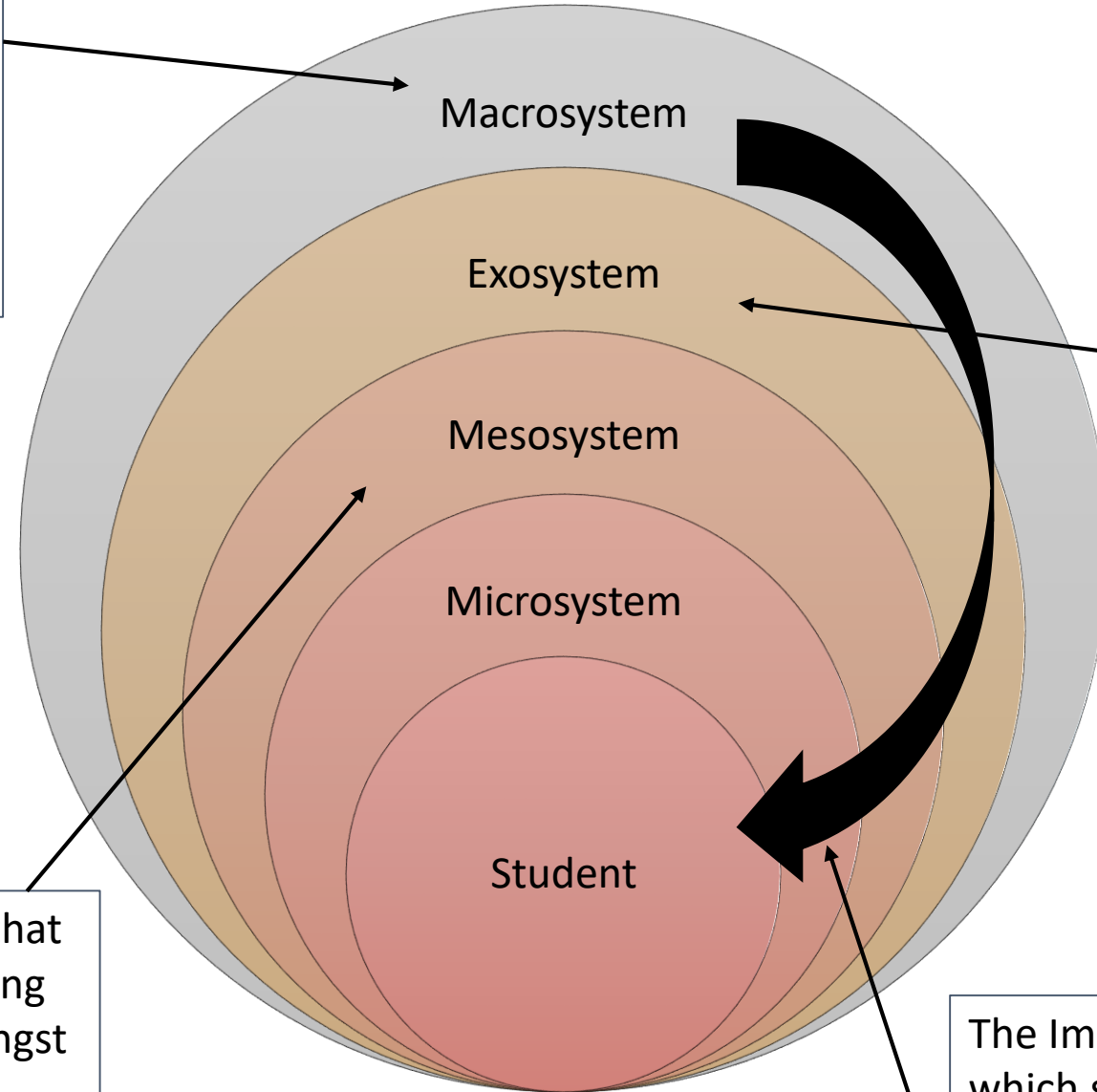
The "behind the scenes" work that is being done to facilitate learning and the interrelationships amongst these entities (tutoring, library support, DSS, curricular/course updates) (McLinden, p. 380)

*Bronfenbrenner (as cited in McLinden, 2017)

The Immediate settings in which student interact (classroom, advisors, faculty, home/work life)

Idealized Implementation

Broad political and cultural environment in which institutions operate (completion agenda, performance funding, labor market demands, etc.). Often drives change.

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Exosystem

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Macrosystem

Barriers	Facilitators
State funding cuts to higher education	National and local focus on retention and completion
Demographic changes resulting in fewer high school students and smaller college-age going population	

Exosystem

Barriers	Facilitators
Challenges implementing technologies and/or integrating with existing technologies	Theory of change connecting reforms to student success agenda and linking to student outcomes
Lack of clarity concerning how technology-mediated advising reforms relate to other initiatives	

Mesosystem

Barriers	Facilitators
Lack of communication from administration / project leaders to advisors and faculty	Cross-functional, cross-hierarchical implementation team
Limited inclusion of advisors and faculty on implementation team	

Microsystem

Barriers	Facilitators

• Limited awareness of and receptivity to reforms among those with whom students interact most closely
   o Haven't received enough training on technology
   o Initiative fatigue
   o Don't see the value
	• Significant awareness of and receptivity to reforms among those with whom students interact most closely
	   o Training and skills
	   o Capacity
	   o Closely involved in planning team

Students

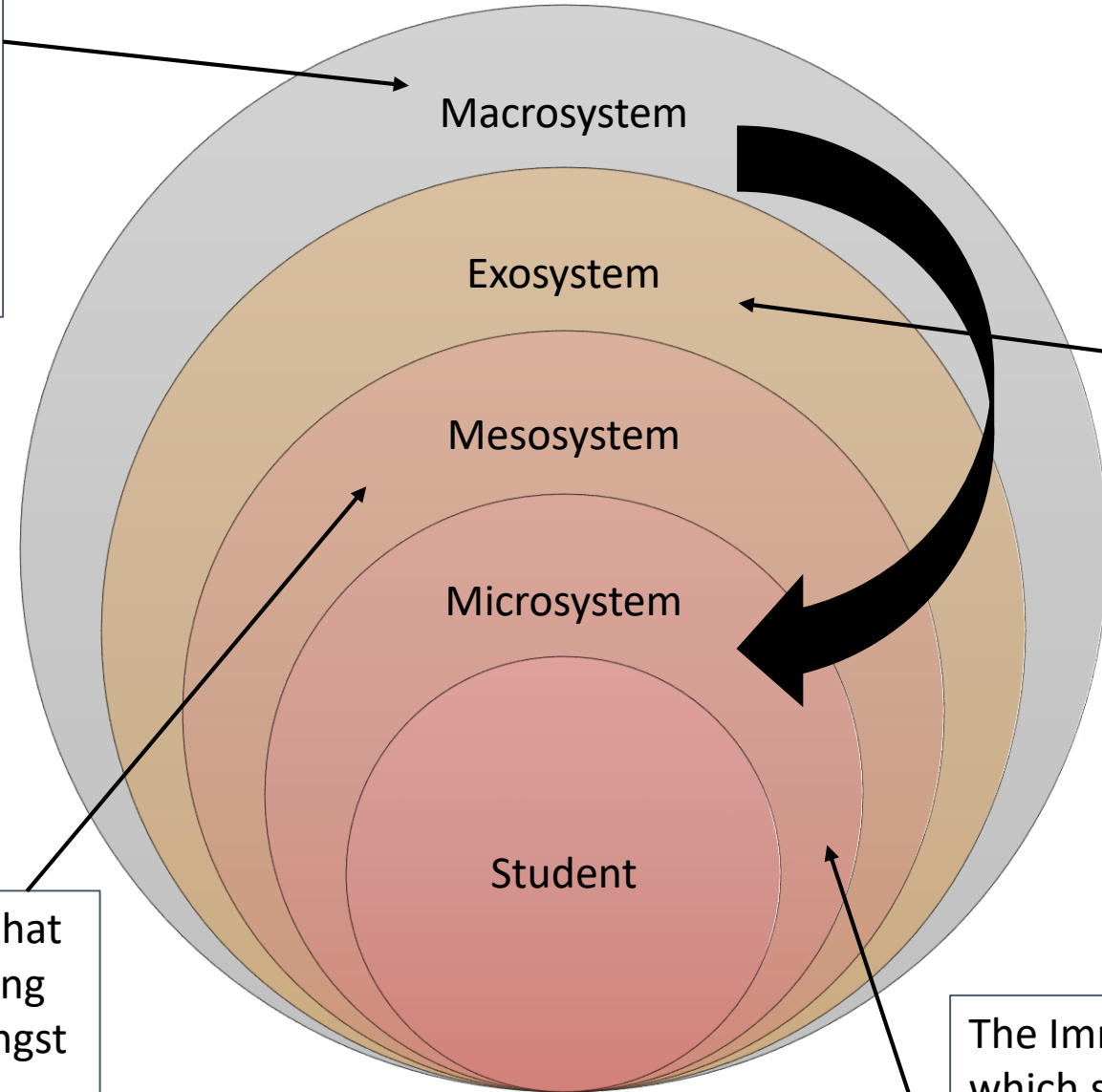| Barriers	Facilitators
Limited time / challenges outside of school	Being a "traditional" student with few outside responsibilities and time to engage with support services
Lack of knowledge about the purpose of advising	Comfortable seeking help
	Know peers who have benefitted from services

Chronosystem

I don't think students are clued in at all. I don't think we've gotten that far down into the project for them to have a significant awareness, if any at all.
                                                    - Key project leader, Fall 2016

Activity

Type 1

Broad political and cultural environment in which institutions operate (completion agenda, performance funding, labor market demands, etc.). Often drives change.
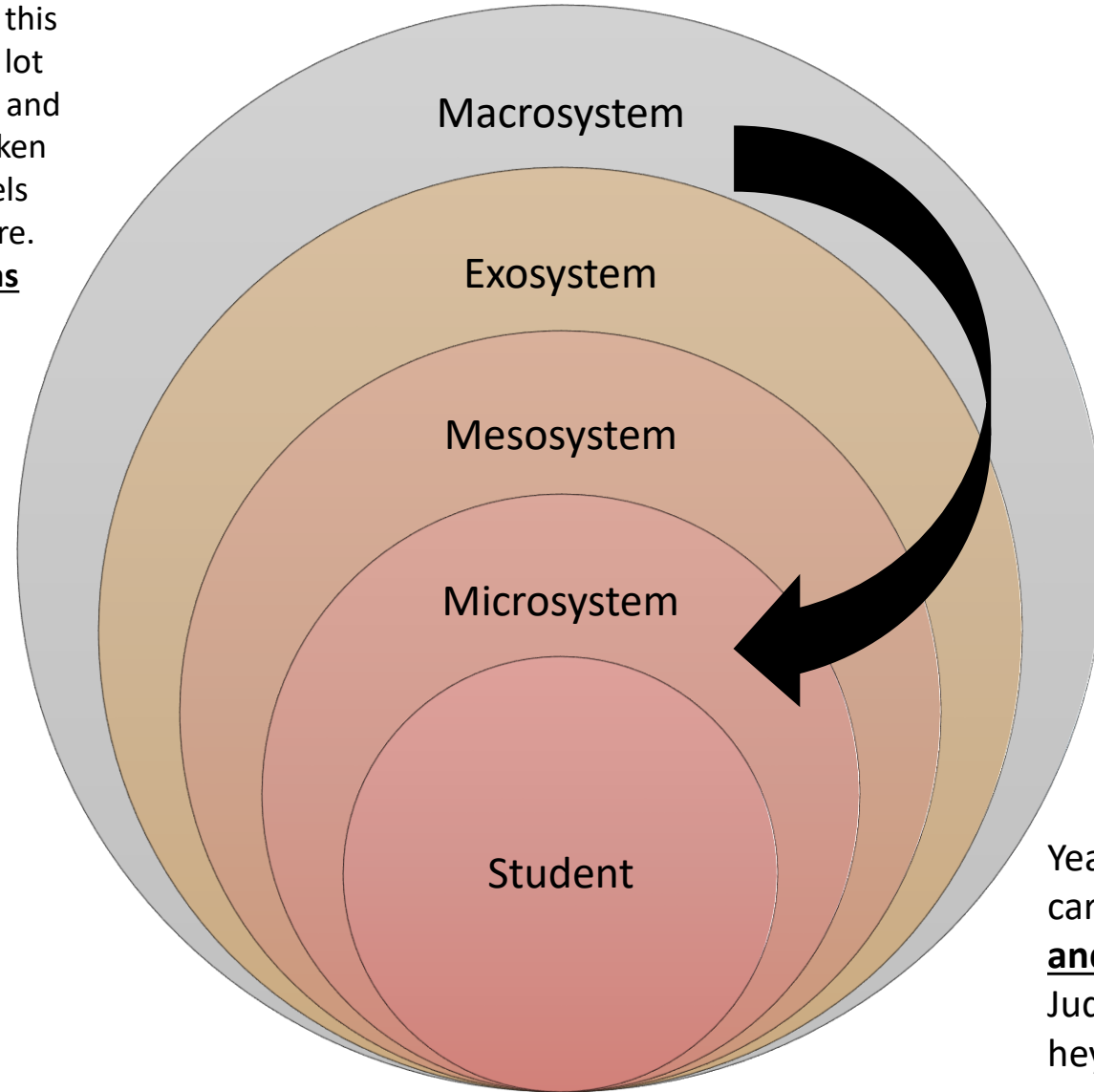
Macrosystem

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Microsystem

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The Immediate settings in which student interact (classroom, advisors, faculty, home/work life)

Honestly, it feels very rushed. It's about 15 minutes. Basically, she has a lot of people and I can't blame her for that and it's been like this with every advisor as well. They all have a lot of students so it's hard to remember them and remember what classes they've already taken and what classes they need. It honestly feels like there is a little bit of waste of time there. Um, I don't' know, I just feel like it is not as personal as it probably could be.
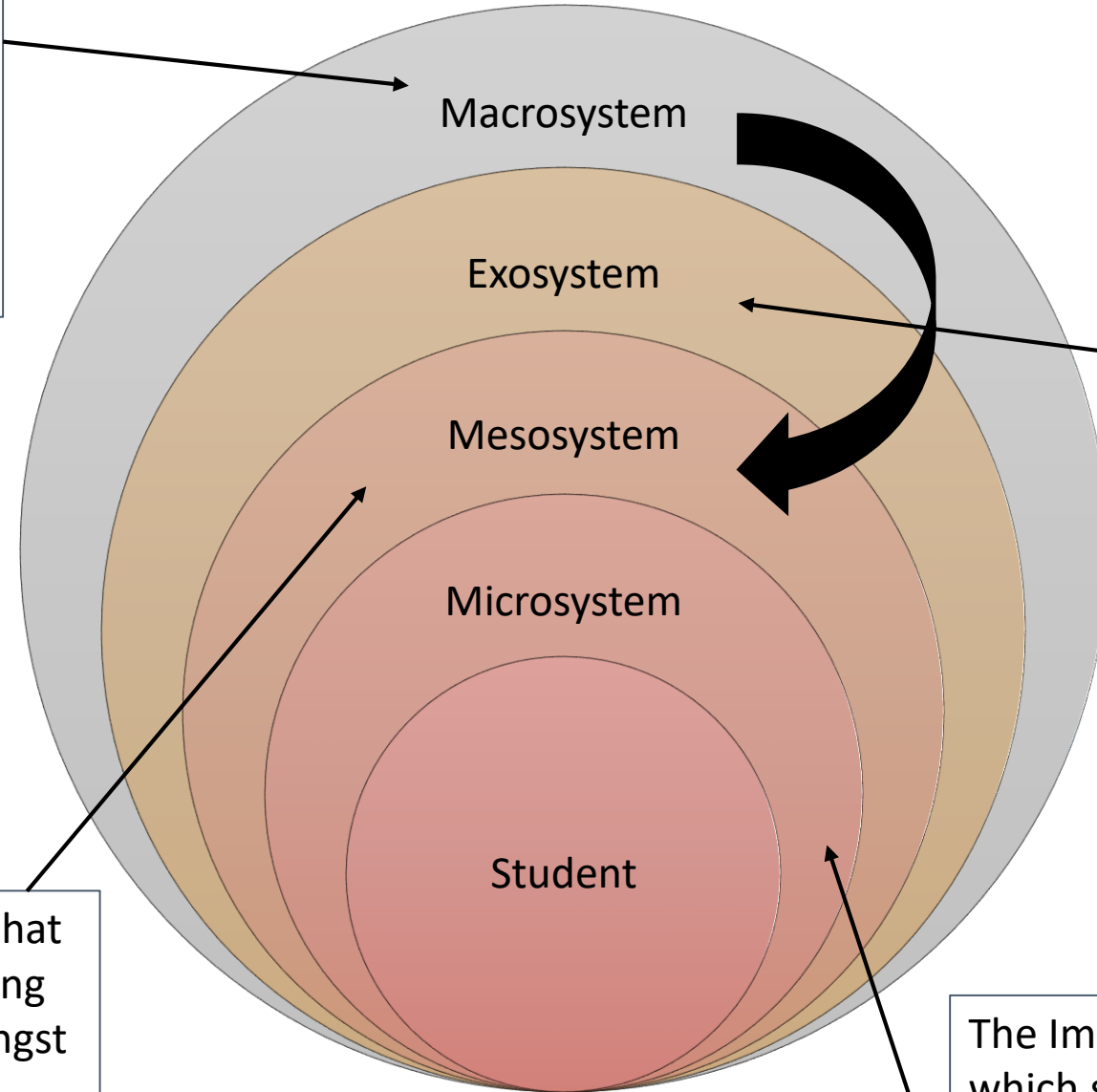
Type 1

Yeah, she's not only helping me with the career, my advisor is also encouraging, and she is also a support system. I'll go to Judy and I'll just talk to her and I'll be like hey this is what I'm dealing with. She was really good about that. She cares about the individuals, she cares about the student.

Type 2

Broad political and cultural environment in which institutions operate (completion agenda, performance funding, labor market demands, etc.). Often drives change.

'Exists outside of the student's direct agency" but determines the structures through which students engage with the institution (funding decisions, strategic priorities) (McLinden, p. 380). Institutionally-based.
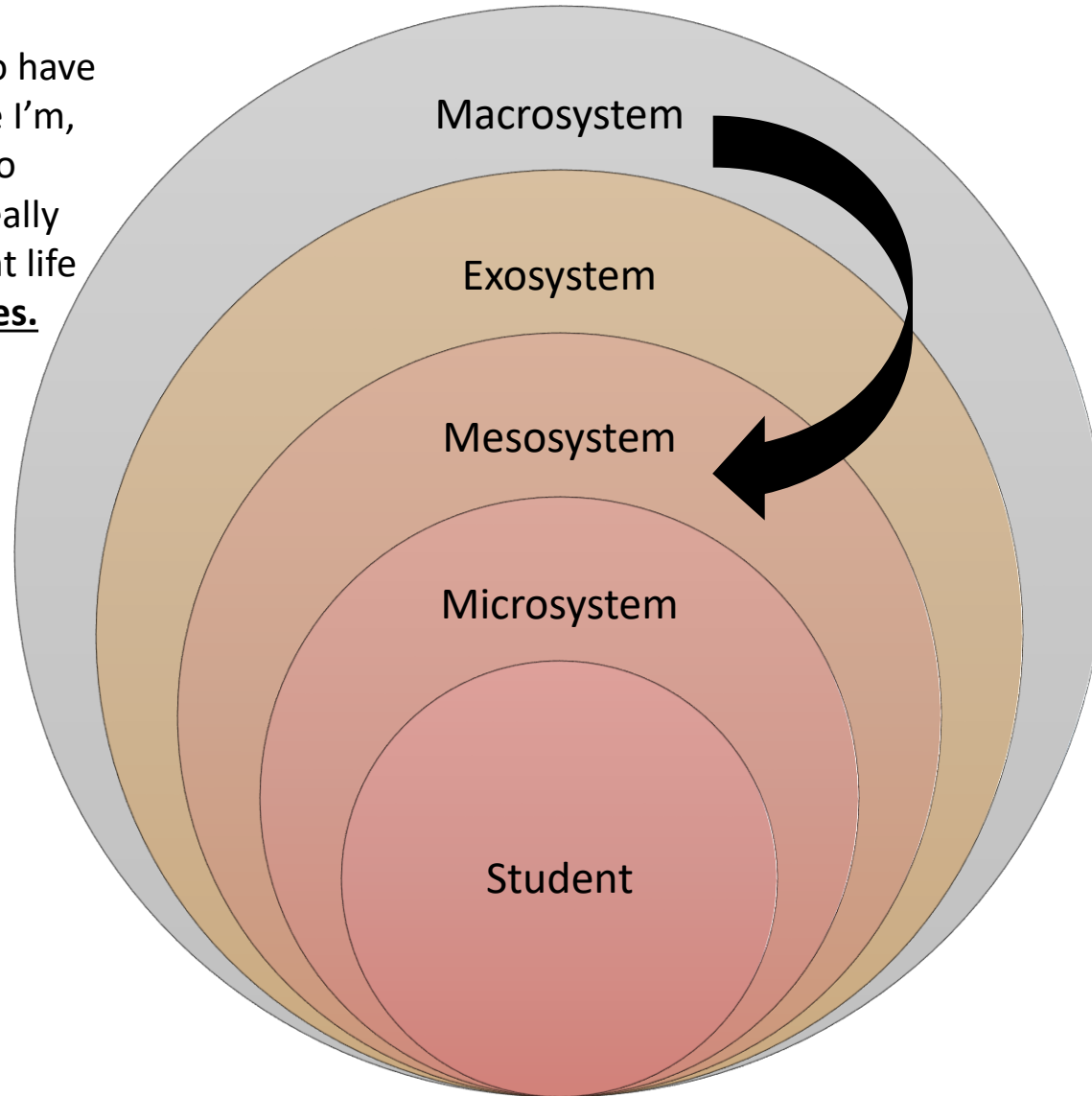
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The Immediate settings in which student interact (classroom, advisors, faculty, home/work life)

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Student

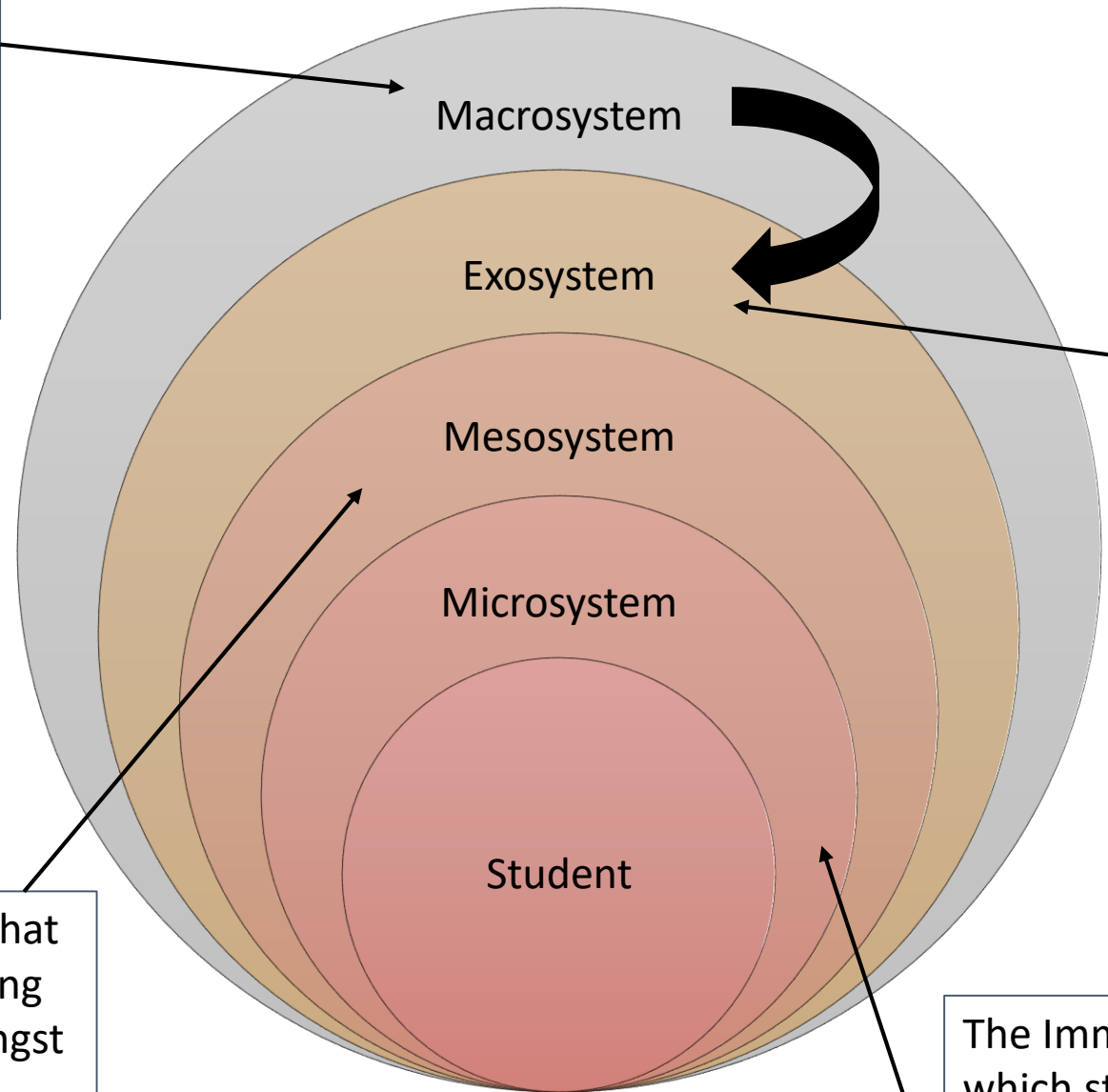So how often are you meeting with her like as your advisor?

Like not that often. I'm probably going to have to see her sometime this week just cause I'm, she's has to override some rules for me to register for a class, but other than that really I'm not, she's not a big part of the student life for me. **She's just there to register classes.**

Type 2

Types 3

Broad political and cultural environment in which institutions operate (completion agenda, performance funding, labor market demands, etc.). Often drives change.
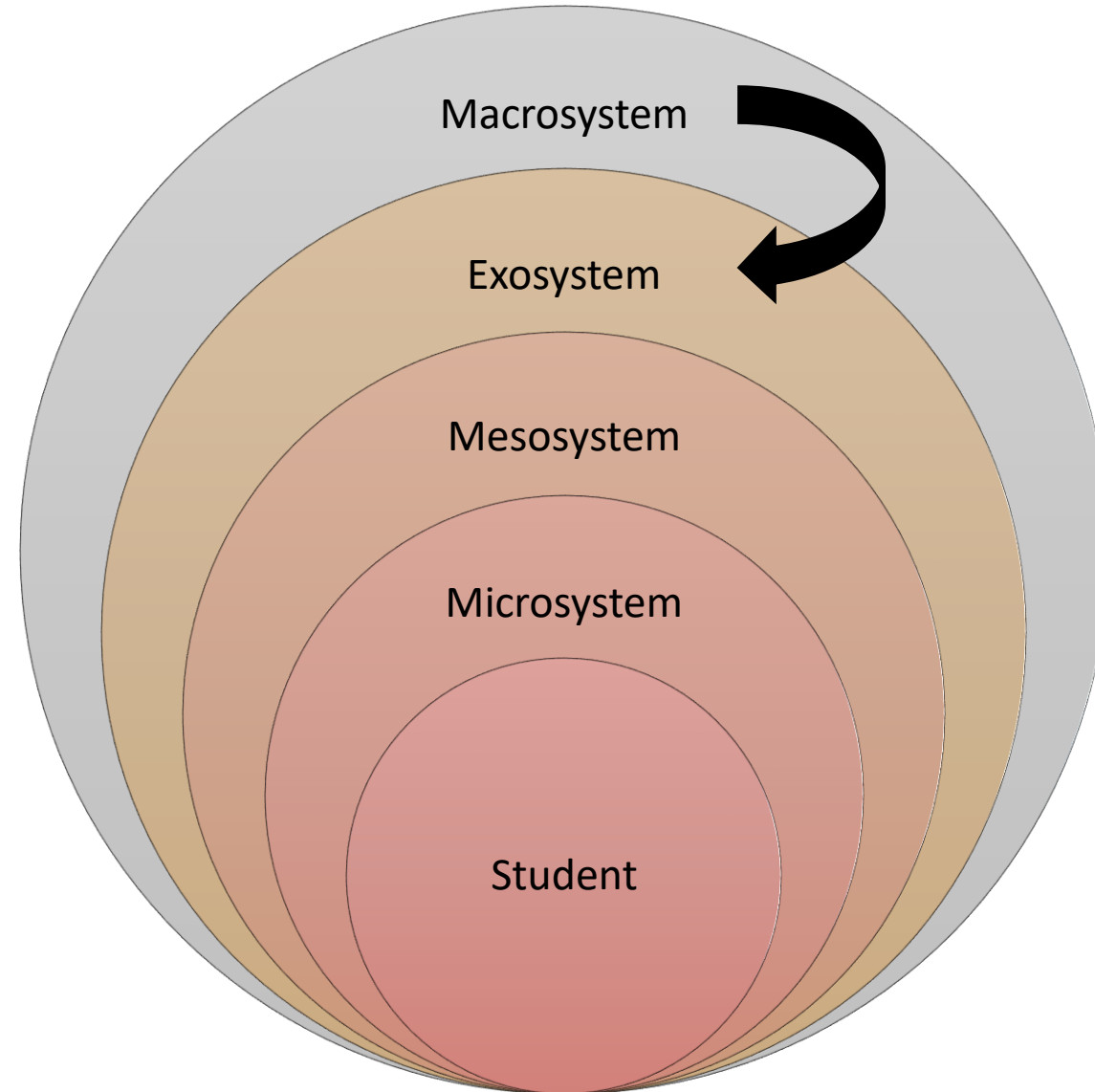
Macrosystem

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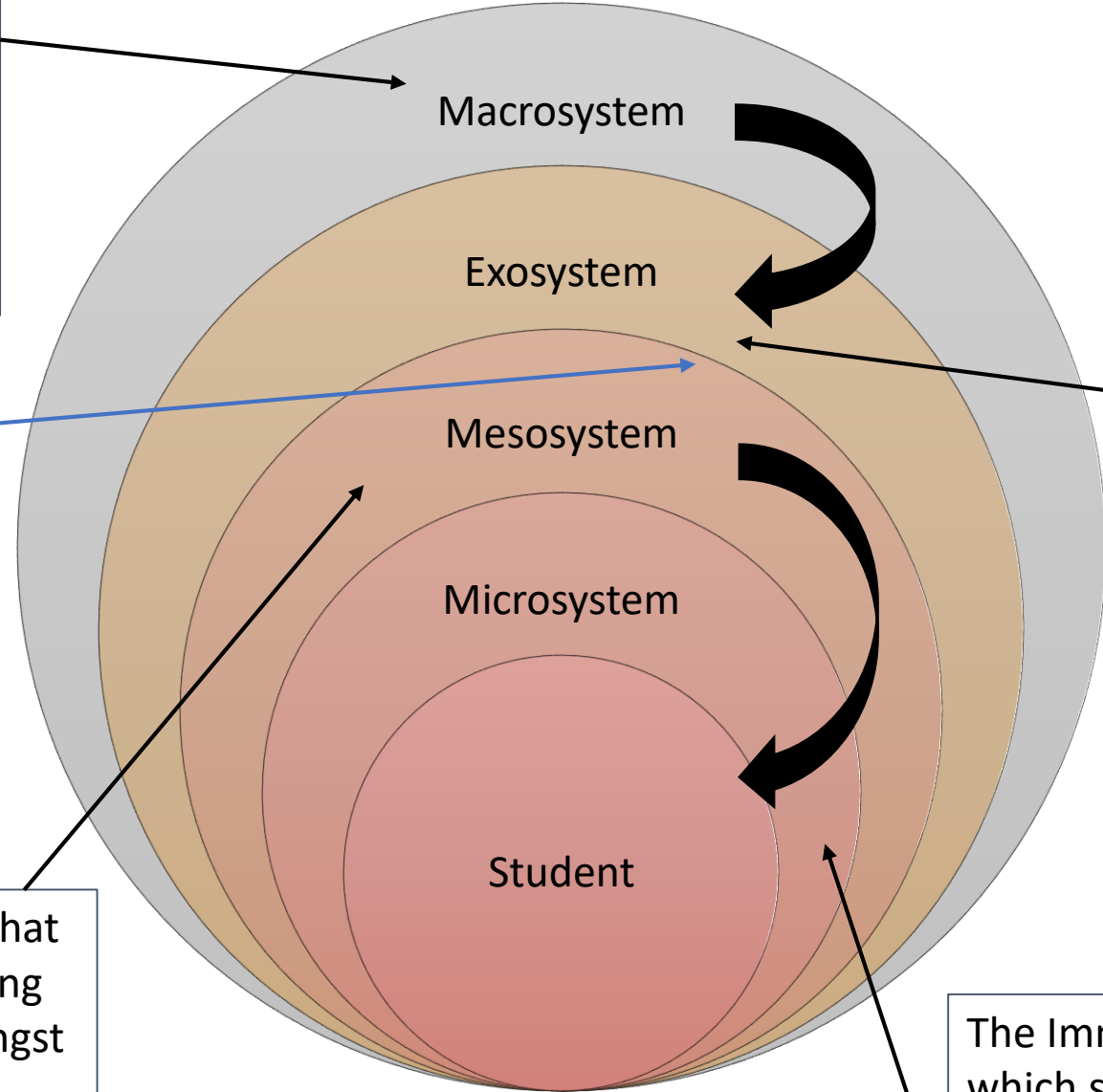
Type 3

With my parents, but not with advisor. Cause I have architecture advisor and I think it's very early in the semester to make an important decision like that. **I mean I think if I tell them they're going to stop helping me because they're from the architecture department.**

Type 4

Broad political and cultural environment in which institutions operate (completion agenda, performance funding, labor market demands, etc.). Often drives change.
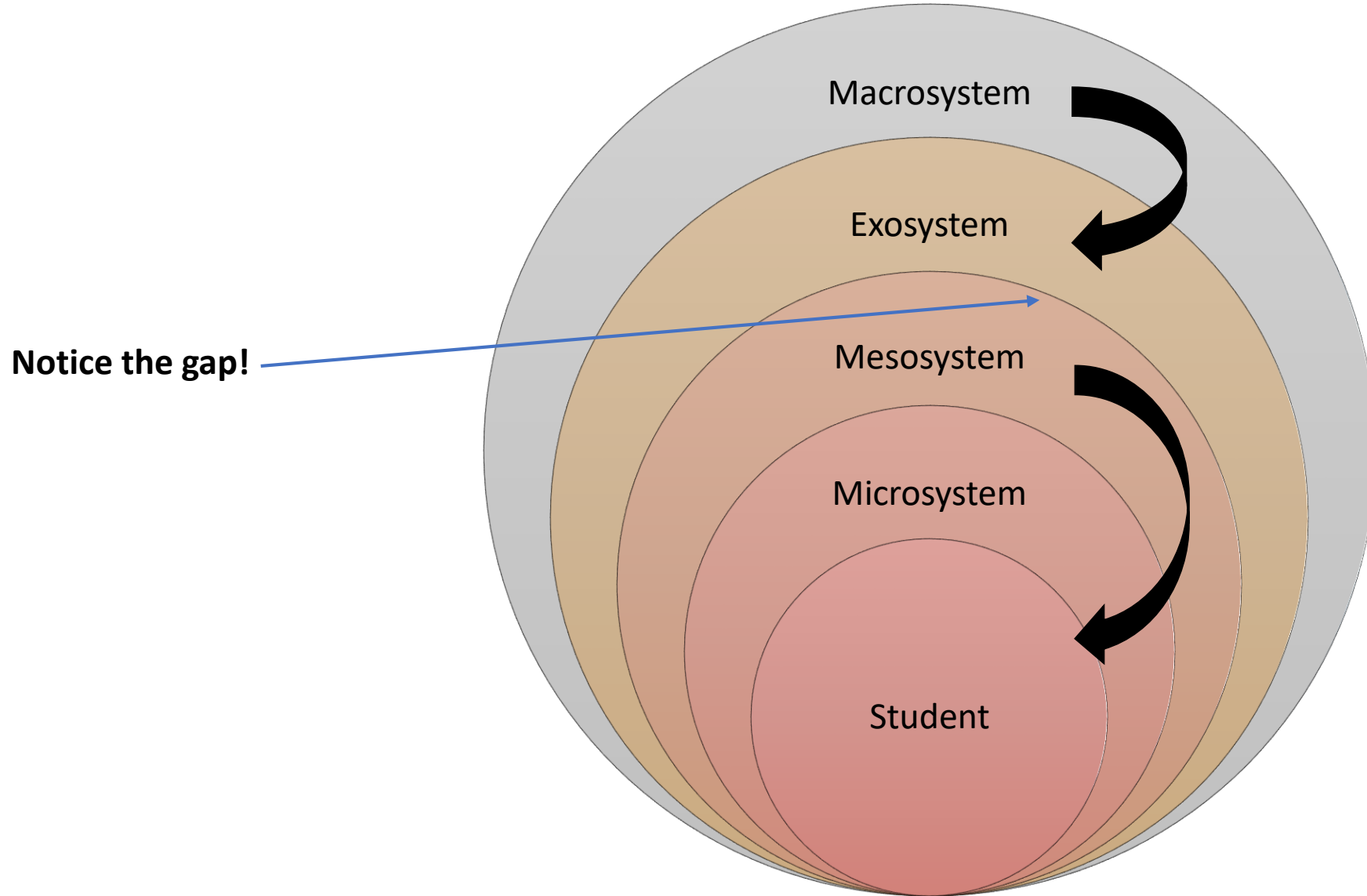
Macrosystem

Exosystem

Notice the gap!

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Student

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The Immediate settings in which student interact (classroom, advisors, faculty, home/work life)

Type 4

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Student

Notice the gap!

About a faculty advisor:

A scale, one to five, definitely a five. As many students as he advises, he still made me feel like he knew who I was, and like I said, **he recognizes me when I see him**. So that, that tells me a lot. **Probably he really cares**. He enjoys his job so. I really like that.
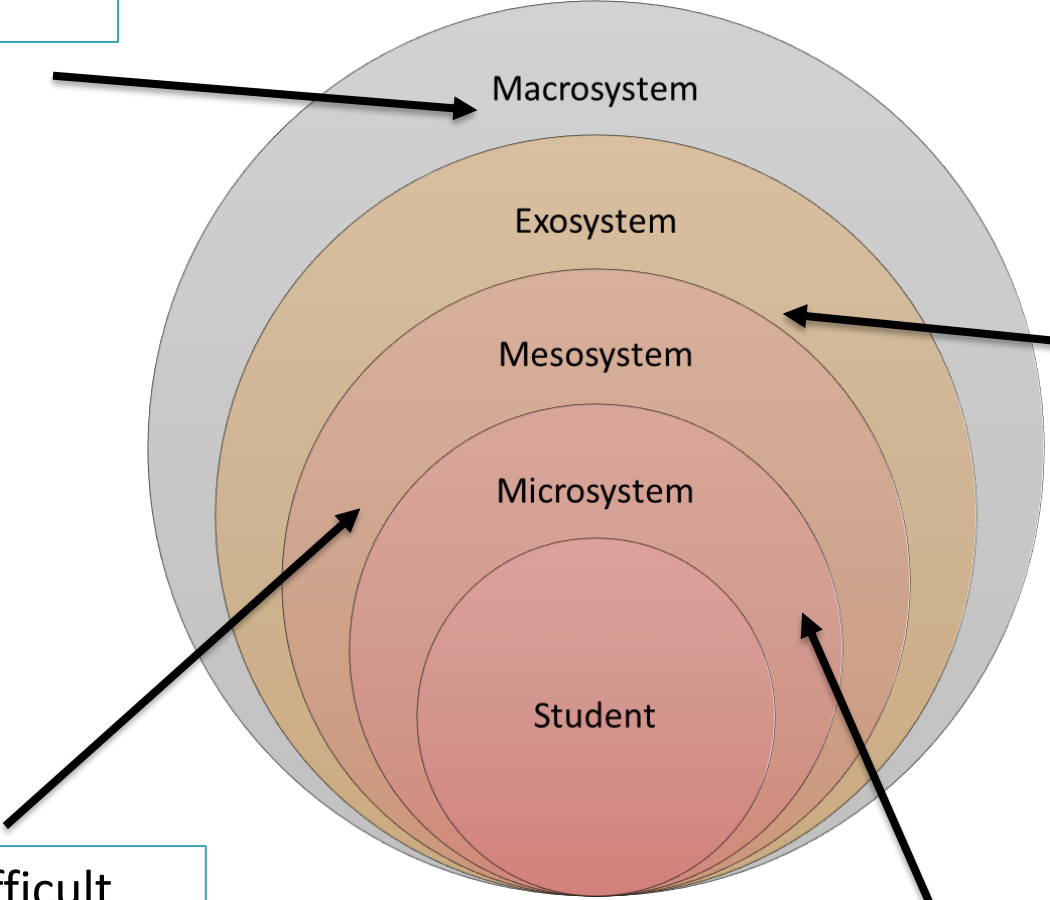
Case Study

Riverbend Community College*

- Region: Mid-West

- Campus setting: Small town

- Student population: 2,500

* Pseudonym

Barriers to Change

Population decline

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

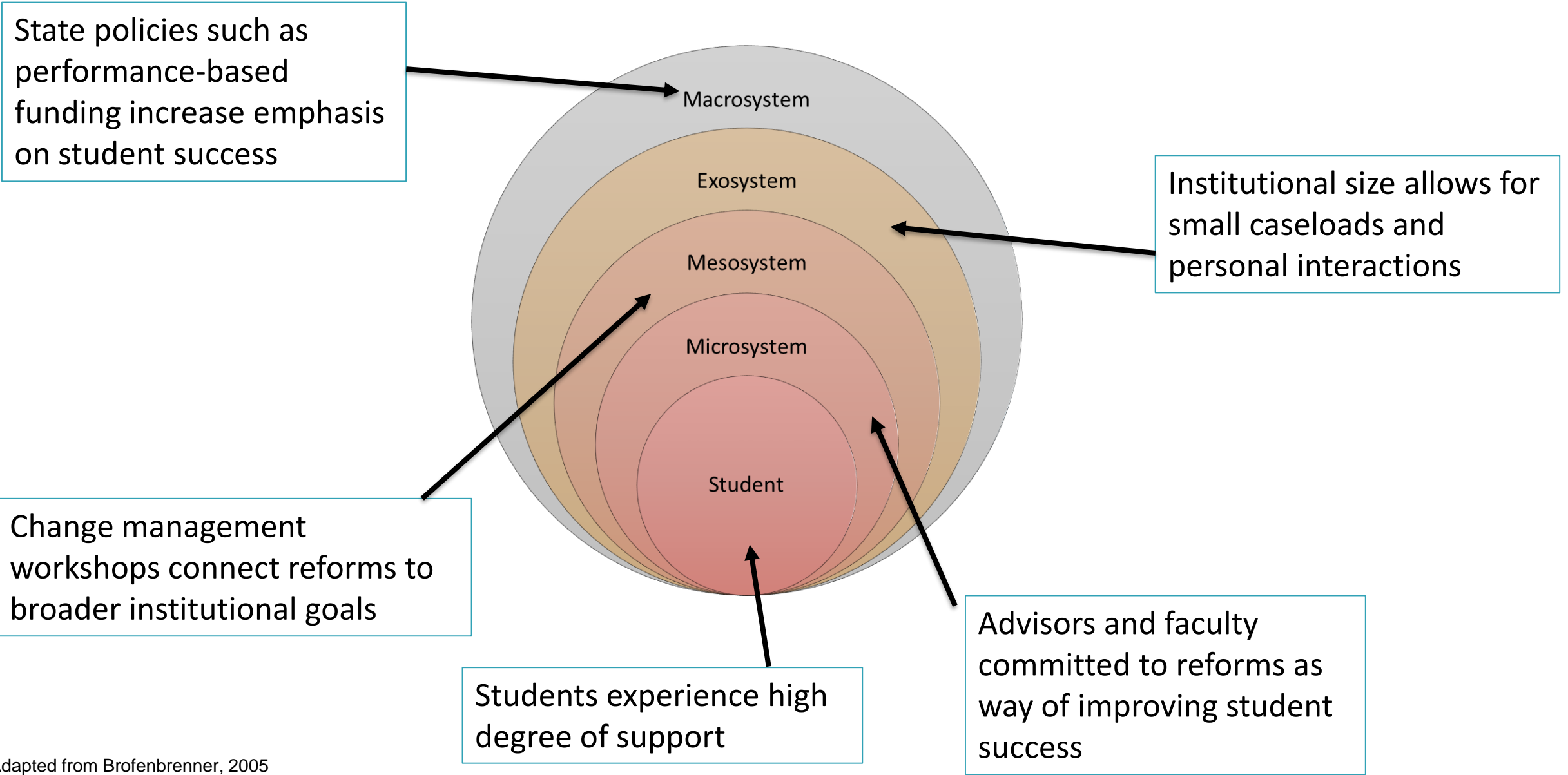Microsystem

Student

*Adapted from Brofenbrenner, 2005

- Declines in enrollment and revenue
- Staffing cuts
- Limited technology budget

Administration has a difficult time justifying expenses for reforms to faculty and staff

Declines in morale among faculty and staff

Facilitators of Change

State policies such as performance-based funding increase emphasis on student success

Institutional size allows for small caseloads and personal interactions

Change management workshops connect reforms to broader institutional goals

Students experience high degree of support

Advisors and faculty committed to reforms as way of improving student success

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Student

*Adapted from Brofenbrenner, 2005

Final Thoughts

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Key Takeaways

- Institutional context matters.

- Faculty and advisors are students' microsystem – involve them early.

- Talk to students.

- Regardless of what's happening in the ecosystem, students just want people.

- Change is a non-linear, iterative process.

Thank you!

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