The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”
“Watch your head! We get a lot of basketball players with these low ceilings,” Mike Shingle chuckles as we move into the basement of Bates House, a victorian house nestled between verdant trees and mossy bricks. Mike’s office is a safe space for all students, nestled in a nook around a few sharp corners from the stairs, decorated with inspiring quotes and nerdy touches like a marvel calendar, an Avenger’s coffee mug, and an Oregon local ‘Hillsboro Hops’ lunchbox. I casually ask about his work, and he laughs and retorts that he’s “knee deep” in focal studies, a set of academic requirements for undergraduate students at Pacific University. As an adviser, his job is to help students plan personalized schedules to ensure they graduate as fast as is possible.

“My heart is with the transfer students,” he explains, “because I went to community college, and worked as an advisor at P.C.C for a number of years, I understand both sides of it.” He wants to set reasonable expectations for those students and ensure that they take the classes they need to graduate in the time they have. He focuses on time management and spacing out the workload in a realistic manner so that students, and especially student athletes don’t burn out too soon into their academic career.

“You can’t win them all,” Mike explains. Students come in with a lot of credits that don’t transfer and still expect to graduate in two years, but because of Pacific’s prerequisite or mandatory class requirements, Mike must often break the news to them that it’s going to be
more than two years to graduate. If a student has failed a class or has issues with attendance, it can be many years, possibly more than they can afford. Mike does as much as he can to help those students, but only some requirements can be waived. However, despite the occasional outlier, the majority of students find a good (or at least decent) schedule that works for them.

Outside of work, Mike is a devoted sports fan having played basketball, baseball, football and soccer in school as well as regularly attending games with his wife, who he met while she was attending Oregon State University. He’s most proud of his newfound ability to “adult,” given that he’s now coming up on his one year “workaversary,” has consistently made his house payments, married his wife, and is about to become a proud father.

True to his office decor, he’s also a nerd, the beaming owner of a retro video game collection (all classic titles of the 80’s and 90’s, with a flair for Zelda). His favorite superhero? “No contest,” he says immediately. “Iron-Man, for his whimsical nature and his wit, like when the first movie came out? I mean, come on!

“My heart is with the transfer students because I went to community college…I understand both sides of it.”
So cool.” Although he didn’t read the original comic books, he claims to have made up for it with the time he invested playing their spin-off video games when he was younger.

Growing up in eastern Oregon and then later moving to the greater Portland area, Mike recalls his childhood ambitions. Early in his college career he had focused on Pharmacy, wanting to follow in his mother’s footsteps. However, a series of conversations with his academic adviser changed his mind. He realized he did not want to process death and grieving as closely as his mother had through her job as a pharmacist, but he did still want to help as many people as he could. Listening to both his own personal needs as well as his adviser’s recommendation, Mike changed paths to focus on student aid, earning degrees in Biology and Spanish before graduating with a master’s degree in collegiate student services. Now he remembers the conversations he was having with his adviser when he was a student “in need of having his head screwed on straight” and hopes that he can be that same guiding force for the newest generations of college students.