From the Guest Editor

Theory Building in Academic Advising

> *It is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates every thing to itself, as proper nourishment; and, from the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by every thing you see, hear, read, or understand. This is of great use.*
>
> —Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*

On the Nature of Theory

When we set out to make sense of the world around us, we humans tend to be unaware that we have chosen a particular theoretical framework from among the many that may be available to us. We tend to think (if we think about it at all) that the theoretical framework by which we make sense of the world around us is the only one. We lull ourselves into thinking that we perceive reality itself, and are doing so unaided by theory. Such blindness is efficient, because by electing blindness we don't have to expend much effort analyzing the modes by which we observe reality. Even if we are aware of a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives, we tend to latch onto one and not let go. This is of great use, as Shandy says, but there is a cost to this efficiency. The cost is more or less unknowable: It is what we unknowingly surrender by leaving some of the reality in front of us unobserved—or observed myopically—due to the presbyopia in our theoretical perspective. Theory is like a lens through which we see the world. Just as it is difficult to focus on the surface of the lenses by which means we see, so it is hard to "see" theory. From the Greek *theoreuein*, meaning "to observe" or "to be a spectator," our word "theory" has tended to lose the visual aspect of its meaning and has come instead to mean the ghost in the machine, the spirit that drives the body, or the ethical standard by which we judge reality. Folks who view theory in this last way often get theory mixed up with model, as though theory were some sort of Platonic ideal that our more worldly manifestations and practices should tend toward. There are normative theories, as we will see, but the theory itself is not a norm.

Theory need not be thought of as anything more complicated than our point of view. It is this point of view, our worldview, our *Weltanschauung*, our ideology, that is theory. Theory is also very much akin to the way that Kuhn (1970) used the word *paradigm* in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Paradigms are

> coherent traditions of scientific research. These are the traditions which the historian describes under such rubrics as "Ptolemaic astronomy" (or "Copernican"), "Aristotelian dynamics" (or "Newtonian"), "corpuscular optics" (or "wave optics"), and so on. . . . [Scientists] whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. (Kuhn, 1970, pp. 10–11)

We make claims about things, persons, or processes in the world according to our point of view. Even a person claiming to have no use for theory is still using a theory to claim that ideas are invalid until tested in the crucible of experience. The ideas that we use to make and validate claims make up the theory that we espouse. So for our purposes, we can think of theory as *a set of statements, principles, or ideas by which authority we make claims about things, persons, or processes in the world*. It is salutary to examine our theory in academic advising, in spite of the difficulty in doing so.

Academic advising is a relatively new field that is going through some important transitions. We are experiencing rapid growth. New practitioners rise up daily, and they now come to the field of academic advising from every conceivable academic background. Within the last few years we have seen a movement toward graduate-level programs: a sure sign that advising is evolving into a field that can call itself a field of academic inquiry in addition to what it has always been, a field of practice. Because advising is still in a formative developmental stage as a field, we should not be blind with respect to theory. We should not put blinders on ourselves, lest in our zeal to see clearly what is right in front of us, we miss seeing things in a new way, or the way they really are, or the way they could be, or in an undistorted way, or yet again, miss seeing peripheral obstructions that impinge upon our field of focus and thus our perception.

Seldom do those in new fields have the opportunity to create theory ex nihilo. When new fields emerge, theoretical statements are usually borrowed from other fields that are already familiar and cognate. When the field of psychology arose in the 19th century, for example, it trailed clouds of borrowed theory from natural science and philos-

ophy. Biochemistry is not wholly different from either biology or chemistry. When academic advising emerged as a field, it, too, was not so radically new that theory had to be invented.

In academic advising, we borrowed our start-up theory wholesale from the academic fields of student development or student counseling, and this has served us well, grounding research, journal articles, conference presentations, and campus discussions for decades. (See Frost [2000], p. 12 and Creamer [2000], pp. 18–31.) Without that start-up theory, advising would not be where it is as a field today. Known as *developmental theory*, this viewpoint regards the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of a student as paramount considerations with regard to practice. The focus is on the development of the whole person toward realizing that person's fullest potential. Who could argue with such a noble goal?

Development theory was an efficient choice for advising. Many of the original professional advising practitioners came from a student development background. However, the cost of this efficiency has been pervasive and largely unknowable until recently. For example, the choice of developmental theory has tended to marginalize other dedicated practitioners and researchers—the faculty—who often come to academic advising with entirely different sets of values and perspectives—that is, theories. Even a cursory glance at previous issues of the *NACADA Journal* reveals that the valorized theories and methodologies are usually associated with the social sciences. Many of the authors of previous *Journal* articles used the hypothetico-deductive method and quantitative research strategies. This state of affairs has arisen because development theory and many of our finest researchers come from social science traditions. This has even governed the choice of style manual used to edit the *Journal*. Most important, we may have missed out on other kinds of research that would have beneficially informed the theory and practice of academic advising.

Yet change is inevitable in any field; old ideologies are replaced by new ones. In the sciences, when new, seemingly anomalous events occur that are inadequately explained by the ruling paradigm, a shift in that paradigm is likely.

> Scientific revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, again often restricted to a narrow subdivision of the scientific community, that an existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way. (Kuhn, 1970, p. 92)

Although change is inevitable, problems arise whenever theories or paradigms clash. This is due to the natural incommensurability of any two paradigms. Any two competing theories lack a common language and structure. "When paradigms enter, as they must, into a debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 94).

And so it is with academic advising. Within the last decade, there have been cogent challenges to what the challengers regard as a hegemonic ideology; they argue that researchers and practitioners who only see the world of academic advising through the "lens" of developmental theory have created a situation where there is only one acceptable way to "see." "This has been of great use," to paraphrase Tristram Shandy. The alarms sounded by the challengers are clear: We risk being blinded to the greater scope of possibilities by our single-minded vision. The newcomers regard themselves as promoting a *learning-centered paradigm* where learning is paramount in the determination of what constitutes good academic-advising practice. In keeping with the mission of this special issue, some of these strong new voices are presented herein.

This controversy makes for some exciting times in academic advising theory. Paradigms are clashing. It means that people are thinking about theory, an important thing to do. However, how do we avoid the circularity trap in which "each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 94)? Can we find a common theoretical ground or an ideology broad enough to allow for discourse between proponents of warring theories? Probably not. But we *can* change the ways in which theories interact. Unlike the scientists about which Kuhn writes, we in academic advising do not need to subscribe to only one paradigm and relegate all unsuccessful competitors to the trash heaps of natural selection. Kuhn talks only about replacing one theory (paradigm) with another when the adherents of the second theory prove the inadequacy of the first. New theory statements then replace the old ones in the approved body of theory statements for the field, but there are other ways in which theories can interact: *peaceful coexistence*, where adherents of one theory acknowledge the existence of the others but remain uninfluenced by them; *argument*, where adherents of conflicting theories never resolve differences, but all serious theorists have access to the main outlets for theory statements in the field;

evolution, where adherents of one theory acknowledge the explanatory power of other, perhaps related bodies of theory, continually incorporating new theory statements to the approved body of theory statements for the field; and *collaboration*, where differences of perspective are encouraged and supported and each perspective is potentially enriched by others.

These modes of theory interaction, of course, are found in the arts and humanities, and to some extent, in the social sciences as well. We can probably reject peaceful coexistence as a sterile, uninteresting approach. However, argument, evolution, and collaboration characterize the modes of theory interaction in those fields of academic inquiry that have never been strongly affected by the mandate of the hard sciences: objective truth.

Knowledge claims are expressed differently in the arts and humanities. No self-respecting literary critic would imagine that his or her claims about the meanings of a text are objectively true. Operating from within her or his paradigm, the critic knows that objective truth is a will o' the wisp and is instead after poetic truth. The scientist, operating from within his or her paradigm, discounts the critic's claims of knowledge. "After all," the scientist might say, "how can it be knowledge if it cannot be predicted, tested, controlled, and replicated?" Which one is right? Well, it depends on your point of view.

Academic advising, as a field of academic inquiry, having inherited its start-up theories from student development, student counseling, and higher education, has thus inherited the theoretical and methodological preferences of the social sciences, which by their very names betray the yearning for scientific validity. However, social science theories and methodologies are not an inextricable part of advising's genetic makeup. How might our theoretical base be enriched if we open ourselves to the theoretical modes, methodologies, and knowledge claims of the arts and humanities? How might this, in turn, enrich our practice?

Here is but one example, taken from the humanistic field of hermeneutics, the study of interpretation. Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1989), first published in 1960 in German, is a landmark statement on hermeneutics. Take this taste of Gadamer (1989, p. 269) to see how readily the findings of hermeneutics might enrich the theory and practice of academic advising:

> A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings.

Once the metaphorical leap is made to view the student before you as a "text," then all of the truth-claims of hermeneutics become available for your use. Viewing the student as a "text," we can be guided by Gadamer's (1989) injunction to have the proper attitude toward the student before us.

Advising theory would have been impoverished if we had shut ourselves off from the wisdom of student development theory. Advising theory and practice will become impoverished if we do not open ourselves to the theories and knowledge claims of other areas. Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. Rhetoric, the cultivation of wisdom and eloquence. Narrative theory, crucial to both literature and ethnography. Epistemology, the study of how we come to know what we know. Cultural studies, feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and the other various ways in which we strive to understand the perspectives and lived experiences of the Other. Aesthetics, yes, we can even talk of an aesthetics of academic advising. All of these approaches to knowledge arising out of the arts and the humanities have the potential for bounteous knowledge about academic advising. Several of the articles in this issue lead the way by making metaphorical leaps, seeing advising in terms of something else.

Academic advising—especially because its practitioners come from a wealth of academic backgrounds—can exist with more than one paradigm, more than one set of theory statements. I believe advising must embrace more than one set of theory statements if it is to survive as a field of academic inquiry. I urge that collaboration between theoretical perspectives is possible, desirable, and necessary in our field. However, to provide for the

possibility of collaboration, we need to engage in some speculations that transcend any one theory.

Metatheoretical Speculations

When we speculate on matters that transcend a single theory (which we do when we consider either paradigm shifts or concurrently held multiple theories), we are speaking in terms of theories of theory or *metatheory*. From this vantage point, we can categorize two broad types of theory: analogic and normative.

Analogic theories are characterized by an analogic, metaphoric, or translative relationship between the phenomenon under study and some other phenomenon for which theory statements already exist and have gained some acceptance. Consider, for example, Goffman's (1965) use of drama to explain personality in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Drawing upon what we already know about drama, Goffman makes persuasive claims about personality, that the way we conduct ourselves with other people is analogous to the way actors present characters on stage. Drawing upon the power of analogy and metaphor, analogic theories generally have tremendous explanatory power. Remember the way you learned about atoms in primary school? You were told that an atom (something nearly impossible to visualize) looked like a small solar system (something merely difficult to visualize). Like I did, you probably regarded that analogy as descriptive of reality. We *translated* from something that was familiar to something that was unfamiliar. We thought: "This is the way things are." But, of course, we can't see the way things really are. We cannot see naked reality, the *ding an sich*. No theory can describe reality without abstraction, foreshortening, comparison, and so forth. There is no practical difference between "is" and "is like," no real difference between metaphor and simile—metaphor being but a simile for simile.

An analogic theorist says, "This thing that we wish to explain is more clearly understood in terms of that other thing about which we already have some understanding." At any given time, a field can hold more than one analogic theory, even if battles royal rage between proponents of different theories. Six papers in this issue put forward analogic theories, viewing advising, or a portion of it, in terms of something else.

Normative theories describe an ideal, desirable state toward which practice should tend; they do not fully describe the reality under scrutiny. By their nature, many normative theories can be concurrently present in a field and fully satisfy a given segment of thinkers in that field. For the most part, such theories are found in the arts and humanities. For example reader-response theory in literature (where the response of the reader is regarded as more important than the intentions of the author) is just one of many normative theories, each one of which argues "this is the way we should read," now prominent in the field of literary criticism. A normative theorist says, "This is the way things could be or should be." Three of the papers in this issue put forward normative theories.

Academic Advising Theories

In academic advising, we are in a phase of theory building. We have a wonderful opportunity to get it right. By "get it right" I mean we should realize that a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives could only be a good thing for the field. As an adolescent field that cut its wisdom teeth in the postmodern age, our field should be especially wary of the blindness that adherence to a hegemonic ideology can cause. I believe (it can be said that this is my theory about theory) that in academic advising we should go the route of collaboration, where differences in theoretical perspectives are not only *tolerated* but are *supported*, because that is the high road to the whole truth about academic advising. Moreover, we are not limited to choosing only one type of theory—normative or analogic. There is nothing intrinsic to normative or analogic theories that require us to espouse only one type of theory; they are not mutually exclusive.

This *Journal* issue is intended as an example of how different perspectives on advising can flourish together in the same place. Taken singly, each essay is an example of how one might theorize about advising. My hope is that future researchers will find much richness here and use these essays as a springboard to future insights. None of them taken singly nor all in combination can be regarded as a complete theory of advising. There is still much labor ahead for future theorists.

These essays represent a broad range of theoretical stances, both analogic and normative, from the old, familiar student development perspectives, to some radically new approaches. Six of the articles found herein could be labeled analogic theory statements.

Academic Advising as Friendship is a crystal-clear example of how one can use one field to shed light on another. William K. Rawlins is a world-renowned theorist of friendship and is Stocker Professor of Communication Studies at Ohio University. His colleague and co-author, Sandy P.

Rawlins, has been a professional academic advisor for many years, currently at Ohio University. This essay represents a marriage of true minds. Rawlins and Rawlins show us how good theory building in academic advising can be done.

Laurie Schreiner, of Azusa Pacific University, and the late Edward "Chip" Anderson (Strengths-Based Advising: A New Lens for Higher Education) have drawn upon research in social work, psychology, and business to show us how we might shift our focus in advising from the remediation of shortcomings to the building upon strengths. They have splendidly used theory from other fields to illuminate academic advising.

Rodger L. Jackson, associate professor of Philosophy at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, gives us a way of drawing on the deepest taproot of all—philosophy—to nourish academic advising theory and practice. Among the other claims he makes in Academic Advising and Philosophy is that all who practice academic advising would be well served if schooled, at least to some extent, in philosophy.

Marlene Kuhtmann (Socratic Self-examination and Its Application to Academic Advising) also looks at how philosophy can enlighten academic advising. Kuhtmann, a doctoral candidate in Higher Education Administration at Boston College, shows how the Socratic method can be readily transferred to academic advising practice. She provides a very balanced account, taking care to subject the Socratic method to the scrutiny of feminist and postcolonial critique before advancing it, or at least a form of it, as a desirable method of interaction between students and advisors.

Cynthia Demetriou (Potential Applications of Social Norms Theory to Academic Advising) is a doctoral candidate in Arts and Humanities Education at New York University. Her article takes something we thought we knew—student development theory—and finds a new application to aspects of academic advising.

Jeffrey McClellan, of Utah Valley State College, reasoning correctly that one important aspect of academic advising practice is to manage conflict, draws upon the literature of conflict studies in Increasing Advisor Effectiveness by Understanding Conflict and Conflict Resolution.

Three articles put forward what I have called "normative theories." Taken together, these three comprise a major push toward viewing advising as educating. For years we have heard claims that we should regard advising as teaching. With these authors, we are taken beyond mere claims; they offer a curriculum, a pedagogy, a syllabus, and outcomes to be assessed.

Marc Lowenstein, a familiar name in the literature of advising theory, is Dean of Professional Studies at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. In If Advising is Teaching, What do Advisors Teach? he moves us away from simile (advising is like teaching) to identity (advising is teaching) and explains all that is entailed by that claim. He offers a radically new statement about an advising curriculum. In Lowenstein's view, advising is not some special case or marginal example of teaching. It is directly linked to the central tenets of what constitutes good teaching and learning.

Martha K. Hemwall, Dean of Student Academic Services of Lawrence University, and Kent Trachte, Dean of the College at Franklin and Marshall College, have, throughout the many years of their scholarly collaboration, given strong meaning to the word *academic* in the phrase *academic advising*. Together, this writing team has offered viable advising theory alternatives. In Academic Advising as Learning: 10 Organizing Principles, they once again link advising to the most central processes and purposes in academe: teaching and learning.

E. R. Melander spent many years fostering advising at The Pennsylvania State University in his role as Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. Now enjoying emeritus status, he has approached the fostering of academic advising with renewed intensity as Faculty Affiliate with the Center for the Study of Higher Education there. In Advising as Educating: A Framework for Organizing Advising Systems, he shows us how one can be an *educative advisor*. He gives us a language with which to speak of advising as educating and a mandate to do so.

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