

From the Co-Editors: What Makes Research Important?

As co-editors we are asked occasionally questions such as “Why isn’t the *NACADA Journal* more relevant?” “Who reads the *NACADA Journal*?” “Can’t the articles be written so that a normal person can understand them?” “Why isn’t the research rigor higher?” Without directly addressing any of those questions but with an aim to illuminate all of them a bit, we decided to put forth some ideas about the question “what makes research useful and important?”

We recognize that the usefulness of research depends upon who is asking the question about its applicability. The “applicability to practice” mantra is raised against the “procedural fidelity to a research canon” mantra. We tend to get one set of expectations from practicing advisors and another set of expectations from researchers.

Kezar (2006) conducted a qualitative inquiry in which focus groups were studied at the national conference of five higher-education associations. Participants were selected by stratified random sampling from conference participant lists. Participants were identified as researchers or practitioners. She found that researchers and practitioners had very different expectations regarding the usefulness and relevance of the professional journals they read.

Kezar (2006) found that as journals attempt to publish for one audience or the other, a polarization is created. On one hand, researchers typically expect the literature to push theoretical boundaries or to question commonly held assumptions. On the other hand, practitioners typically expect literature to provide new perspectives for understanding day-to-day problems. Researchers emphasize *raising* questions. Practitioners emphasize *answering* questions.

According to Kezar (2006), practitioners tend to prefer literature that is short, concise, and summative. They favor increasing readability by using bullet points and readily accessible language. In their view research articles should include a lengthy section on implications for practice as well as a synthesis of information. Researchers favor lengthy theory and methodology sections and formats that emphasize critiquing. Researchers tend to like formalized language so they can precisely hone meanings that convey the essence of variables and operational definitions. However, practitioners tend to favor everyday language that communicates readily with standard dictionary definitions.

The *NACADA Journal* has tried to represent both interests in an attempt to advance scholarly discourse about the research, theory, and practice of academic advising in higher education. We believe that advancing the place of academic advising in the university community will require the amalgamation of research inquiry and practice. We think this amalgamation can only occur if collaborative inquiry is conducted by teams of practicing advisors and faculty researchers. We hope that by working together practicing advisors and faculty researchers will be able to expand the body of scholarly literature as they form a praxis of academic advising—a profession in which research and practice form a continuum instead of a dichotomy.

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Reference

- Kezar, A. (2006). Higher education research at the millennium: Still trees without fruit? *The Review of Higher Education*, 23(4), 443–68.