

NACADA Journal 7(2), 1987, pp. 57–63; 8(1), 1988, pp. 89–95; 8(2), 1988, pp. 65–76

An Interview with Harvey W. Wall Personal Perspectives on the History of Academic Advising

Dr. Harvey Wall began his career in clinical psychology in the early 1950s. In March 1986, Dr. Wall retired from his position as director of the Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), an advising unit at Penn State University that enrolls freshmen and sophomores exploring a variety of majors and advanced students needing advising assistance with changes in their academic plans. Dr. Wall was the first director of DUS, which started in 1973. In many ways Dr. Wall's professional experiences parallel the development of academic advising nationwide. For those new to advising, Dr. Wall's remembrances of things past, although personal and local, should provide powerful insights into the present status and procedures of advising, regardless of location or type of institution. The interview was conducted by NACADA Journal Editor Ed Danis.

ED: How and when did you enter the field of academic advising?

HWW: In varying degrees academic advising has been an important part of my entire professional career at Penn State. My first position with the University came in 1954, at the beginning of my third year of graduate school. When my G.I. benefits ran out I needed help to continue my studies and to support a young family simultaneously. Consequently, I was offered work with an administrative unit called the Division of Intermediate Registration (DIR) which provided counseling and advising to students.

ED: From its name alone, DIR sounds very similar to units now given such names as university college, general college, or general studies. How did DIR differ from these types of academic units, and from the Division of Undergraduate Studies, which you directed?

HWW: Quite considerably. DIR had been created in 1948 solely for students encountering severe academic difficulty. You see, after World War II, Penn State, like colleges and universities throughout the United States, experienced a very heavy influx of veterans—of which I was one—taking advantage of the G.I. Bill. Many, if not most, of these students were first-generation college atten-

dees, and most had very little knowledge about academic requirements—and I was one of these, too. But quite a few also had very poor study habits, many academic skill deficiencies, and great uncertainty about the purposes of college and about their career choices. You could say DIR really grew from the needs of these returning veterans, but our doors were open to any student who came to us or was sent to us for help. As it happened, once the generation of returning veterans had mostly gone, we still had plenty of students to help.

ED: Why did they hire you specifically?

HWW: DIR was set up and run mainly by people from the psychology department, some of whom were my graduate professors. I guess they thought I showed a glimmer of promise for this type of work.

ED: What type of work was it?

HWW: My responsibilities consisted primarily in helping these students find academic programs that might offer better chances for academic success. In reality, DIR was viewed as an academic salvage unit because students were given a limited time, a year at most, to overcome their academic difficulties. If they did not show promise for eventual graduation, they were dismissed for poor scholarship. While most of my work involved personal or remedial academic counseling, it did have some components of what we would now consider academic advising. I stayed with DIR until I received my Ph.D. in psychology, and then I assumed a position with a newly established unit at Penn State, the Division of Counseling (DOC), where I worked for six years as a clinical psychologist.

ED: An hiatus in your academic advising career?

HWW: Not as it turned out in the long run. Although many DOC students were experiencing psychological difficulties, it soon became apparent to me that many of these problems could be traced to academic concerns. These concerns were related not only to poor academic progress but also to appropriateness of program choice as well as future job activities.

ED: Could you elaborate more on the latter part of your statement about appropriateness of program and future job choice?

HWW: By that I mean that many students complained about parents requiring them to enroll in a specific major for specific career reasons, while the students had other interests and preferences. . . . I began to see a paradox that many of these students were not deficient psychologically or academically; they had just chosen the wrong majors for the wrong reasons.

ED: It seems that at this point you were personally beginning to develop a distinction between counseling and advising. Yet, you were working primarily as a clinical psychologist with a *counseling* unit. How did you resolve this apparent dichotomy of functions?

HWW: I guess you might say that I did experience some cognitive dissonance. However, in retrospect it wasn't terribly difficult, and please don't get the impression that I was alone in my thinking. You have to understand that many of us viewed the mission of DOC very pragmatically. By that I mean, if it worked for the good of our students we did it.

ED: What worked and how were you involved in it?

HWW: Because I was becoming so interested in the need for more attention to academic advising, eventually I assumed some responsibility for a program that DOC offered, which was labeled "The Preregistration Counseling Program," and which involved the testing, counseling, and advising of all entering freshmen. It took place prior to the students' first attendance of classes. We not only counseled the students on their initial program choice, but we worked with the parents of students. You see, we did learn from earlier experience that many of the problems that students might later encounter could often be traced to the parents' lack of knowledge about university life.

ED: You're still talking about counseling. Where did academic advising enter the picture?

HWW: I agree that many of the specific activities of the Preregistration Counseling Program would be more correctly labeled as personal counseling, especially as it applied to adjustment to college life. But we did engage in academic advising in the sense that we provided information about the university's program requirements, its academic standards, general education, and distribution requirements, and we did address course schedule development and change of major issues. We also coordinated the counseling component of the program, which took place in the morning, with advising activities in each of the university's primary academic units, which took place in the afternoon. This enabled new freshmen and parents, on the

same day, to meet with the administrative and faculty representatives of the college in which they planned to enroll. Because this coordination effort was partly my responsibility, it helped to further my interest in academic advising.

ED: Before you continue, what time frame are you talking about? When was this?

HWW: I was appointed assistant director of DOC, in charge of the Preregistration Counseling Program, in 1962 or '63, but the Program had been in existence since 1956.

ED: From the perspective of the late 1980s, it seems that differentiating between advising and counseling in the late 1950s to the mid-60s was rather forward thinking. What types of obstacles, if that's the proper word, administratively or philosophically did you encounter?

HWW: . . . We were a comprehensive counseling unit. Even though we were all expected to work with personal and career counseling and academic advising simultaneously, we all naturally moved toward our own preferences. I guess you can say we were beginning to specialize.

ED: How did your specialization take place within this context?

HWW: As time went on I was assigned increasing responsibilities, for the Preregistration Counseling Program and for several other DOC programs related to advising. This included a special function of DOC that allowed students to enroll and register in our counseling unit as if it were an academic college. The students could then take classes toward graduating, while addressing problems and uncertainties of a purely academic nature. When the university established DOC in 1955, it (DOC) had subsumed this academic responsibility from the defunct DIR. Still, the entire focus of DOC would perhaps be more properly seen as counseling, even though many of our day-to-day responsibilities related closely to what could be defined as academic advising.

ED: When did the advising/counseling split finally and officially take place?

HWW: . . . it was decided in 1973 that a modified form of a university college, the Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), should be established to serve many of the academic advising and informational needs of students, particularly freshmen and sophomores. The activities of this unit could be properly defined almost exclusively as advising. It was of special significance that the Faculty Senate and the University administration mandated that DUS be assigned to Academic Affairs rather than Student Affairs, which is where DOC

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had been housed administratively.

ED: . . . How would you describe advising in the early 1950s?

HWW: . . . I would have to say that teaching was the priority faculty activity, and advising, of course, fell within the exclusive domain of the faculty.

ED: . . . What means were employed to make sure that students were appropriately assigned?

HWW: It was quite simple and not unlike many present situations at other institutions. As part of the admissions process, students were required to choose from among the 50 to 60 majors then offered by the University. Students uncertain about a major were encouraged by the Admissions staff to enroll in General Liberal Arts. But even in this area, the course requirements were highly structured, and students had very little opportunity to explore or make an informed decision about an academic program. Moreover, once admitted to a major, students found it very difficult to change majors if the initial choice turned out to be inappropriate.

ED: What options did the students have when they wanted to or had to change majors?

HWW: Very limited ones . . . students could only transfer to DIR at the pleasure of the dean of the college in which the student was enrolled. Typically, this was after a year or more of study when a student's performance clearly indicated that graduation in that original choice of major was not possible, and, by the time many students arrived in DIR, they already were in severe academic difficulty. . . .

ED: . . . Academic advisors and student services professionals today have similar observations about lack of remedial services. What was the difference 35 years ago?

HWW: Day and night. Some departments, for instance mathematics, offered evening review work and peer tutoring. But in general, all students began their college careers with essentially the same courses and were expected to succeed or fail without much support from other agencies. . . . Other support services that we take for granted today were nonexistent. . . .

ED: Who helped them with appropriate academic choices?

HWW: Besides DIR, the psychology department provided students, particularly freshmen, a variety of interest, personality, and aptitude tests. The test results were interpreted by graduate students in psychology who were planning to enter clinical and counseling fields. . . . It was an excellent beginning for academic advising and career development support systems at Penn State.

ED: Getting to the case of the normal or average students—as defined by the Penn State of the early 50s—could you be more specific in describing the kind of advising offered to them?

HWW: First, there is no question that advising in the early 1950s was *authoritative* and *directive*. In my memory, there was little of the phenomenon, common today, in which the student plays a major role in the advising process. Students were told what to do and had very little voice in contesting whatever decisions were made regarding their educational plans. Second, the process of advising was typically carried out through a process of *prescription*. From the very first to the final semester, students' course requirements were clearly defined. In a given semester, students could neither exceed the number of credits specified, nor schedule fewer. There was little room for electives or for courses outside of the student's discipline. A good part of the advising consisted of interpretation of rules and policies and the identification of current or future problems, but little attention was paid to resolving the problems identified. Authority and responsibility for advising rested solidly with the dean of the college in which the student was enrolled, and with the departments and faculty of that college.

ED: Generally speaking, if it's at all fair to ask, how would you describe the quality of advising that students *did* receive?

HWW: . . . University-wide advising tended to be fragmented, inequitable, and inconsistent. . . . I have to be fair and say that . . . there was excellent advising performed by concerned deans and faculty in every college and department. Nevertheless, advising in many ways was quite parochial and students had very little opportunity to learn about or understand programs beyond the college in which they happened to be enrolled. I must reemphasize that advising was generally effective for students well-prepared for college. . . .

ED: Are you saying that an advising support system as we know it today was unnecessary or thought to be unnecessary?

HWW: Yes, exactly. Advising consisted mainly of the faculty helping students with employment or graduate plans, plus the purely administrative functions that I previously described. Helping students with decisions about curricular choice or choices of courses other than those prescribed by the student's major was in most cases not even a consideration. . . . The question of academic uncertainty, even among freshmen, was viewed as a problem and, unlike today, not as a component of normal aca-

demetic and educational development.

ED: Advisors today still have difficulty dealing with misguided value judgments about uncertainty. Why was it any different then?

HWW: If you mean the view of uncertainty as a personal weakness, it was by far much worse and more prevalent. . . . There were few "authority" figures saying it was natural to be undecided. There was no DUS, no pre-major advising centers, no talk of university college, little flexible thinking about curricular choices, and little thoughtful discussion about the freshman year—at Penn State or at any other institution as far as I know. Parents, who had little knowledge of university life, frequently decided what their children should study. . . . remember that most students considered the academic and parental authority as a given and did not make demands regarding their own educational needs, demands that students began to make in the '60s and that today are unquestioned.

ED: What [advising] changes or innovations do you see as significant, not only from your vantage point, but also from the vantage point of advising on the national scene?

HWW: A major development that I saw at Penn State came in 1955 with the establishment of the Division of Counseling (DOC) under the direction of Dr. Robert G. Bernreuter, a nationally known pioneer in personality theory and testing. A few years earlier he had set up the Psychological Educational Clinic within the Department of Psychology. The Clinic offered students a battery of interest, personality, and aptitude testing with follow-up interpretation. DOC took charge of this testing program and made it available to all students in a more comprehensive counseling and academic support package.

ED: Was this the origin of the FTCAP (Freshman Testing, Counseling, and Advising Program)?

HWW: Exactly. . . . It was designed to identify potential academic and adjustment problems early and to help students enter a program perhaps more in keeping with their underlying abilities and interests. The FTCAP now focuses purely on academic issues and its success has drawn favorable attention in the field of advising. . . . Additionally, we included the beginnings of a personal counseling and psychotherapeutic activity. . . . I realize this latter function might be seen as an historical cause of the blurred distinction between advising and counseling, but it did represent a step forward. We provided students encountering personal difficulties with support and assistance within the University, rather

than expelling them in the hope that they would secure treatment outside.

ED: The people that you worked with in DIR and DOC were focused on counseling and advising issues by nature of their training and profession. But what about the rest of the University? What was happening in the larger arena?

HWW: . . . At this time, administrators, deans, and faculty were becoming aware that new students needed an exploratory period within their chosen college, so freshmen were asked to enter a general year rather than a specific major within one of the colleges of the University. . . . The [DUS] unit allows students the option to begin their studies as officially "exploratory" rather than enrolling in a specific college. Students are given specialized advising and informational services, as well as time and opportunity, to explore and to discover programs. . . . Simultaneously, it became apparent that a commonality existed among freshmen schedules across the University, so this opened up the concept that changes in academic plans could be realistically accommodated.

ED: Under this new admissions policy, how did students know which college to choose within the University?

HWW: This choice was not too sophisticated on the students' part. Similar to today, they chose educational programs based on influence from parents, high school teachers, and peers. . . . By the mid-1950s admissions standards had become more sophisticated, as most colleges and universities began to use high school grades and ranking and college boards (SATs & ACTs) to design reasonably effective admissions formulae. These changes were of enormous value to those of us working with freshmen, because we could show them how a change in plans might be a consideration—in the beginning or later on—if they showed potential deficiencies in certain academic areas. Of greatest importance, we could explain to students that a change in initial plans or choice in no way indicated failure, especially if they did not have a true interest or realistic abilities in their first choice of college or major.

ED: What effect did the work of DIR and DOC have on this structural or attitude change?

HWW: I would like to believe that our work had some impact on the University's concept of the freshman year as one of commonality and exploration. . . . I think historians of education in the distant future will speak of the latter half of the twentieth century as a "revolutionary" period. . . . It may sound a little self-serving, but we counseling types (don't forget, we were all grounded in the

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discipline of psychology) were in the front lines. That is, we were dealing with academic advising and counseling problems, daily and intensely, problems that heretofore had not really been recognized as appropriate within the context of higher education. We were the ones not only with the experience but also with the data and the studies. Thus, in all fairness, I would say that administrators, deans, and faculty did listen to us and especially to visionaries like Bob Bernreuter and Don Ford when making changes to meet the needs of a new student population. I could say they did not listen as intently as we wished, but the fact remains that Penn State basically supported the mission of DIR and expanded that support when it created DOC, which led to the evolution of DUS, a pure academic advising unit.

ED: What about students beyond the freshman year? What thought was given to their advising concerns?

HWW: Experience in DIR and DOC enabled us to allow for this important contingency, so students beyond the freshman year can enroll in DUS for a fixed period of time. These are students in the process of changing from one program to another who need the time and advice to sort out appropriate courses and appropriate majors. But they enter DUS at the discretion of the director, because Faculty Senate policy allows a student only two semesters in DUS after the freshman year.

ED: With your mention of the Faculty Senate, perhaps you could describe how the faculty relate to the role of DUS.

HWW: This is a very complex issue, but the relationship of the faculty to DUS reflects quite directly the entire scope of academic advising not only at Penn State, but also at colleges and universities nationally. I must emphasize that a significant number of influential faculty had a great deal to do with the development of DUS. From the very beginning the academic community insisted that the new unit be assigned to an academic officer in contrast to an office in student affairs. By identifying DUS as an *academic unit*, the administration and Faculty Senate perceived the unit as an integral part of the academic structure. As a result, DUS has assumed an active role in the development of administrative and academic policies and procedures related to academic advising, academic information, and to the academic welfare of the student body.

ED: . . . How much friction did such an active advising unit raise within the faculty community?

HWW: DUS as a relatively new concept naturally caused much debate, but this is a normal pro-

cess in academe. . . . It has been able to give specialized attention to students making critical decisions about their academic plans, allowing faculty more time and opportunity to address the advising and educational needs of students enrolled in the faculty member's discipline. Also, the academic information mission of DUS has helped its image considerably, because it has facilitated the flow of accurate and timely information, a necessity at an institution as large and complex as Penn State and an extremely important commodity for good academic advising anywhere.

ED: Historically, we may have just made a rather large leap. You have just alluded to the notion of specialization between major and pre-major advising, which many of us today take for granted. When did this distinction begin to make an appearance?

HWW: The early 1960s would be a fair estimate, although obviously we saw the need much earlier in DOC because of our close involvement with undecided students. This *Journal* has published numerous articles and many studies have appeared dealing with pre-major advising, but from the late 1950s throughout the 1960s the concept was embryonic. . . . An improved role of the faculty in academic governance, which began in the 1960s, gave more prominence to the whole process of academic advising.

ED: How did the increasing role of the faculty affect academic advising?

HWW: Quite directly. The stronger faculty voice resulted in a clearer definition of the responsibilities and activities of the faculty advisor. While questions remained as to the extent and the quality of advising services, students were provided in formal terms with expectations of the duties of their faculty advisors. However, as happened almost everywhere in the early 1960s, the numbers of students attending the University increased dramatically. As a result, advising assignments became excessive in many programs, making it difficult for faculty to discharge effectively their advising responsibilities, especially when working with undecided students.

ED: With your mention of the 1960s, there is almost no one in America who has not heard about student activism during this period. What role did students play in academic advising at this time?

HWW: . . . By the late 1960s and early 1970s student rights had become a very visible issue, and, although demands and protests reached excessive stages, I would say that the outcome was generally positive in terms of academic advising. Student rules became more flexible and greater

concern and compassion was expressed toward students with special kinds of problems. A much greater flexibility appeared in course scheduling and for permitting students to change from one program to another. Most important perhaps was the voice given to students in determining their own academic welfare and career future.

Tangentially, parents became more sophisticated about the nature of higher education. In many ways their demands became better informed and they gave increased recognition to their students for making their own decisions and pursuing their own line of study. And, not so tangentially, at some point I must address technological innovations that affected University procedures, because they almost simultaneously resulted from *and* alleviated many of the concerns of students, parents, and faculty. Moreover, the technology of the past 10-15 years had an enormous direct impact on advising.

ED: Now is as good a time as any. In what ways did you see technology improving or assisting advising?

HWW: . . . Advisors, advising centers, and/or deans' offices now have immediate access to data and information that took days and even weeks to obtain in the early 1950s. I would bet that every advisor reading this has felt frustration when the office or campus computer was "down" for half a day, or even half an hour. Conversely, how many advisors take it for granted when they are able to give significant help to a student simply because they can instantly call up critical data and information?

ED: Besides the computer, what other advances have you seen in the tools of the trade, as it were?

HWW: . . . Advisors today can buy or sometimes easily create audio or visual programs that are of great help to students in choosing courses, majors, and careers, and can alleviate repetitious tasks such as explaining registration or drop/add procedures to intimidated new students. But I can't overlook the print medium, which is still a major source of information and which has improved immensely because of technological advances. All of these technological advances help not only the average student with choice of appropriate courses and majors, but also provide quick identification of students in need of specialized services. The sooner an advisor enables a student to recognize his or her difficulty, the sooner that student can begin working on a solution.

ED: What innovations in this area, i.e., the so-called problem or high risk student, have you witnessed over the past 35 years?

HWW: Enormous ones, although there's certainly no doubt that we still are far from Utopia. . . It's important to understand that higher education 35 to 40 years ago simply did not deal with certain issues. These by definition were outside of the purview of colleges and universities. I'm talking about the undecided student, the student with deficiencies in writing and mathematics, the student with personal adjustment difficulties—even minor ones. Looking at the structure of higher education today, you will see offices that deal with basic skills, psychological and career counseling, financial aid, housing problems—whether personal or logistical, veterans, women, minorities, returning adults, and so forth. In some cases these offices are directly combined with advising centers, and in others they are under a separate dean or vice president. But the important point is that in most instances they have become a permanent fixture within the higher education setting. . . . Study after study show[s] the importance of good academic advising to the so-called high risk student. These studies also point to the positive effect of good academic advising for such populations as returning adults, minorities, and other students with special concerns.

ED: . . . You literally lived this progress or evolution at Penn State, on a local scale. With your experiences do you feel comfortable generalizing about the national scene?

HWW: I'm fairly certain that many of your readers could relate developments parallel or analogous at their own institutions. From what I see reflected by the growth and activities of NACADA, I feel comfortable enough to say that academic advising has advanced considerably in academe throughout the country—as it most certainly is light years improved at Penn State compared to my experiences in the 1950s. I think it's further safe to say that this advancement came from a cooperative effort among faculty, central administrators, and advisors. I lean heavily on the word "cooperation" and an attitude of mutual respect because, regardless of the great strides that have been made, there's still a long way to go. If the progress and evolution are to continue, cooperation, along with good will and dedication to a mutual cause, will be the key.

ED: In looking to the future, where do you see advising going, and is it going in the proper direction? More specifically, what role do you see developing for faculty advisors? Do you see an increased role for so-called professional advisors? Can you envision professional advising receiving greater

acceptance within the academic community?

HWW: I'll take those questions one at a time. I think it's a fairly universal belief throughout academe in this country that faculty advisors feel most comfortable and do their best work with students interested in the faculty member's area of expertise, especially students at the junior-senior level who are enrolled in the faculty member's major. . . . Conversely, these faculty indicated discomfort working with premajor students, especially those whose interests and abilities were nowhere near the faculty member's. I personally believe that it's extremely critical for students to identify with faculty, especially once the student has chosen a major. I hope that the pressures placed on faculty in the late twentieth century do not force them totally out of academic advising. . . .

ED: What about so-called professional advisors? How do you see their status within academe?

HWW: Professional advisors are here to stay. Higher education and the choices confronting students have grown so complex as to demand specialists who can help students sort out what they want to do and what they do best. The institutions need this specialized expertise and so do the faculty, whose expertise and specialization has moved them in other directions. Look at the growth of NACADA. . . . The phenomenon of the advising center has become so commonplace that, from my perspective, colleges and universities without some type of advising center have become a dwindling minority. If you check the Chronicle of Higher Education on a regular basis, you will notice ads for academic advisors, directors of advising, coordinators of advising centers, and so forth. As late as five years ago I don't remember seeing this.

ED: But does the growth of NACADA and advising centers relate directly to so-called professional advising? After all, many members of the organization and much of the staffing of advising centers come from the ranks of the faculty.

HWW: That's as it should be. I hope I have sufficiently emphasized that faculty must not be divorced from academic advising. . . .

ED: How would you describe professional advisors?

HWW: . . . Simply, as persons whose contract or job description calls for them primarily to advise students, rather than to devote most of their professional energies to teaching and research. Of course, the job description need not rule out teaching and research, nor should advising centers rule out faculty members. . . .

ED: If professional advising, as you define it,

is currently entrenched in academe, what about the future? What vision do you have regarding its further acceptance within the academic community?

HWW: . . . At present it seems that many administrators are favorably disposed toward effective advising systems—in widely varying degrees and depending on exigencies of location and personality. They see the need for good advising and they see the dedication of the people doing it. Advisors must keep up this good work, but they must do more. They cannot sit back and let the students come to them, and expect to be rewarded automatically. Professional advisors must, with all the energy and creativity at their disposal, stress that they are performing a function inextricably bound with the academic mission of the institution. With the creation of DUS by the Faculty Senate and its placement under a high-ranking academic office, Penn State made that statement, and I strongly believe that advising, the institution, and the students were better for it. Nevertheless, organizational structure and quality work alone were not enough and won't be enough. From DUS I can extend the idea to advising centers and advisors everywhere. I think two concepts are key to the growth and development of the profession of advising: visibility and accountability.

ED: Visibility and accountability in what sense?

HWW: I guess you might say I'm calling for creative public relations efforts. It's amazing how much good will can be gained from a short seminar or session for faculty on academic information and advising, organized by advisors or an advising center. . . .

I think professional advisors, wherever possible, should be involved in teaching a course or two within their area of academic expertise. They should serve on important committees, such as curricular affairs, general education, or retention to show they can provide valuable insights into improving academic quality. Also, wherever possible, advisors should engage in research in their own disciplines or on projects related to the academic mission of the institution. . . .

ED: That seems to cover visibility. What about accountability?

HWW: Bluntly stated, advising systems cost money and the higher echelons want to know that they are allocating their limited resources effectively. Internal studies that show good advising helps recruitment, retention, and student satisfaction with the institution are one obvious tactic. Remember that satisfied students who become satisfied alumni (ae) are critical to the future. Appropriate studies that

show faculty are grateful for the presence and activities of an organized advising system can help, too. Faculty who perceive—even if it is not true—that an advising system works against their welfare must somehow be convinced otherwise. . . . Visibility and accountability actually are very closely related. Advisors and advising systems must do quality work and show the whole academic community—administrators, faculty, and students—that they are doing it, and they must prove that their presence on the institution's budget ledgers is not only worth maintaining but also worth increasing.

ED: . . . What if the institution must retrench and the administrators draw the red line through advising centers and their staffs?

HWW: Then it happens. I started out by stating that external forces have some say in the future of advising. The task for advising is to make sure that negative external forces are not turned in its direction. . . . It [advising] must put itself in a position whereby, if dark days come, administrators will be as reluctant to reduce the quality of their advising system as they are to reduce the quality of their faculty.

ED: . . . How do you define academic advising?

HWW: . . . Advising is part of the teaching mission of higher education. It helps students gain maximum benefit from the college or university they attend by teaching them to appreciate the goals of higher education and the ultimate purpose of education for its own sake and for good citizenship.

Advising teaches students the mission of their particular institution and the purpose of its general education. In the true sense of education, advising draws students out. It teaches them how to direct themselves toward a field of study, where they can best apply their abilities in the most satisfactory manner, and it shows them how best to continue these studies toward graduation and into life-long learning. It draws out of students a solid understanding of their true interests and their academic strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis higher education, and the institution in which they are enrolled. Ultimately it helps to teach students the most effective use of their intellectual capabilities in confronting an uncertain future.

Of necessity, the academic advising function will include schedule planning, appropriate choice of major, and explanation of the curriculum requirements for that major. It will involve teaching students the proper clerical functions to effect their favorable progress through the institution. It will

touch on, but not primarily or exclusively, personal adjustment and career choice issues. Finally, good academic advising will teach the student how to locate appropriate specialized services, such as financial aid, career development, and personal counseling, when these services are deemed necessary.

ED: What effect can a federated group of advisors [such as NACADA] have on top echelon administrators at a particular institution?

HWW: I can't answer that exactly, but the fact that a national statement has been made can give local advisors something with which to work, something from which to form their own local definition, a goal with which they can fashion the best advising system possible at their institution. If NACADA doesn't do it, someone else will. If administrators have nothing to work with, they will make up their own definitions and job descriptions, and, if they work in a vacuum, they will probably end up way off base. That's why I strongly believe they have to see academic advisors as part of the teaching mission of the institution. If they see you as hand-holders, that's what you'll do. If they see you as clinical psychologists or career counselors, you will become specialists in those areas. If they see you as clerks and schedule-planners, filling out check sheets, you'll be out of jobs by the end of the next decade, because technology will replace you. Already machines are doing the bulk of registration and course enrollment at many institutions. Advising must begin to lay emphasis on itself as a teaching art, which can be improved but can never be removed from the academy that wants to see itself in the business of education.

ED: Assuming your definition of advising, what qualities would you look for in the ideal advisor? Making this more concrete, what credentials should a director of advising look for when hiring?

HWW: Interest in working with students, all types of students whether they're traditional or nontraditional, remedial students or honors students. A prospective advisor with the most impeccable, outstanding paper credentials who doesn't really want to work with students in an academic advising capacity will very quickly become dissatisfied and will end up as a drain on the rest of the advising staff. . . . Demonstrated experience within the context of interest, and an education at least at the master's level. The latter would show me that a candidate has a stronger-than-average commitment to higher education and a perspective that you normally cannot receive as an undergraduate. Besides, across campus the academic departments

require at least the master's level for their faculty, and this requirement will go a long way in helping the advising center's image as being "one of us." The prospective advisor should have minimal credentials equivalent to those expected from the rest of the academic community.

ED: Why not the doctorate? . . .

HWW: The doctoral credential does not hold for all fields in all places. . . . First, that's probably not feasible from a supply, demand, resources position. Second, by including only doctoral-level people in your initial screening, you might be eliminating automatically some very good people. . . .

ED: On the subject of degree as credential, what *type* of degree did you have in mind?

HWW: . . . Frankly, I don't think academic advising should attach itself to any one discipline. . . . An advising center. . . benefits from a staff with a wide range of academic backgrounds, because most centers deal with students with a wide range of interests. If an advisor runs into a subtle or fine-tuning situation outside of his/her area of expertise, it's extremely helpful to have a colleague to turn to who might have personal knowledge in that discipline.

ED: Would you require advisors to have courses in such subjects as interviewing?

HWW: That would not be a bad idea, but again I don't think formal courses in counseling skills are necessary. There are many ways of gaining and proving this experience other than credits on an academic transcript, and I'm sure that your readers can come up with as many instances as I can.

ED: What if NACADA were to draw up minimal credentials or expectations for advisors, and individual institutions do not pay attention?

HWW: Then they don't. But they would be aware that they do not even meet the minimal criteria for advisors requested by a consensus of national experts in the field. Realistically, NACADA or any group speaking for advising cannot dictate to an institution that has its particular needs and constraints. Nevertheless, NACADA—or whoever—can set up the target at which the institution can aim. Frankly, I think most institutions would be grateful for guidelines in hiring advisors.

ED: . . . What else would you like to see in a candidate for an advising position?

HWW: Good communication skills in speaking and writing, and good interpersonal skills in dealing with students and colleagues in the academic community. A candidate may have had specific courses in one or all of these. If not, just like deter-

mining interest, there are other ways to determine a person's experience and competency in these areas, imperfect though they may be.

ED: What about a knowledge of statistics and testing?

HWW: Very helpful, if for no other reason than to be able to avoid bad conclusions through improper use of statistics and testing evaluation. Again, courses taken and listed on the resume would be ideal. However, I don't think this is entirely necessary . . . a person . . . can learn very quickly how to interpret properly any objective test or statistical norms that the institution might use in advising students.

ED: So, you would lean on the old military method of OJT (on-the-job-training)?

HWW: Yes, because that's happening now, and for those interested in advising and willing to learn, it seems to be working quite well. The ideal candidate for an advising job would 1) demonstrate interest and prior experience in the field, or related fields, 2) have at least one advanced degree, 3) have proven skills in speaking and writing, 4) have proven interpersonal skills, 5) have a basic understanding of testing evaluation, and 6) have a general knowledge of the history and philosophy of higher education in the United States. However, very seldom in my 35 years with advising can I remember anyone who perfectly fit this description. They may have come close, but usually some type of specific, localized training was necessary.

ED: What if your above six criteria were somehow established and local institutions wanted to set up routine training programs to reach that ideal?

HWW: That would be *the ideal* and I can see from reading this *Journal* that a variety of training models exist at institutions. Why, therefore, could there not be a general, national model for training advisors that could be adapted at local levels?

ED: What elements do you see as critical to an advisor orientation or training program?

HWW: I think any model should include some discussion on the history and philosophy of higher education in this country and advising's relationship thereto. It should discuss the history, educational mission, and general education philosophy of the particular institution. Following that, it must necessarily cover curricula, overall requirements, and nuts-and-bolts procedural and scheduling issues. Then the session or sessions could move into practical or hands-on application of statistics and testing evaluation as used locally. The trainee should have the opportunity to meet and interact with concerned, veteran faculty advisors and key colleagues

in such offices as admissions, financial aid, the career and personal counseling centers—if these people will not be part of the trainee's day-to-day activities. As we all know, we learn best by doing, so the next step would be on-the-job training supervised by a senior staff member. After that, you might even require a probationary period of three to six months.

ED: Who should develop such a model?

HWW: Any number of organizations related to higher education could, and with some amount of determination NACADA has as much expertise as any group could have. Nevertheless, somebody should do this for the sake of giving advising the appearance of a national, unified position. I've made the points that advisors know what they do and should come up with a consensus definition, and should make a statement about minimal credentials. The next logical step seems to be a flexible, sensible, national model that can be adapted locally for training advisors. With this much unity or apparently clear focus, advising can make a much better case for recognized status within academe. . . . compare the current status of advising to where it stood twenty years ago, and you might see my logic that there is some cause for optimism. However, for the optimism to become reality, there has to be vision, dedication, and hard work.

ED: Besides this consensus definition of advising, advising credentials, and a training model, what else do you incorporate in this vision?

HWW: A broad research base. . . I'd like to see more studies on academic advising's connection to general education or advising's importance to imparting the role of higher education. Much more work can be done on how students approach the decision-making process. In other words, I'd like to see advising research that goes beyond particular procedures or the efficacies of a specific program or advising strategy at a particular institution. . . .

Because advisors come from so many different backgrounds, the research can be richly interdisciplinary. . . . The variety, the richness, the simultaneous breadth and depth we presently find in advisors could be lost if that would happen.

ED: Who has the time, energy, and resources for such activity?

HWW: That's the key problem that advising struggles with at the moment. Advisors are given

X number of students, always too many, "other duties as assigned," and are expected to go from there, with no stipulation made for growth and development, or advancement . . . I think there should be more studies on just how much an advisor can take, or how sabbaticals and larger advising staffs are in the best fiscal and educational interests of the institution. . . . Somehow released-time should be found for advisors to serve on meaningful committees and to teach in their academic areas. I can extend this to finding time for research or writing research grants . . . I strongly believe that most advisors day after day, year after year, can't sit at their desks and deal with students who come to them. It's not good for most advisors, and neither is it good for advising, because this focused activity keeps advising isolated from the academic community.

ED: If advising nationally and institutions locally can have expectations of advising candidates, should not candidates have some guarantee of their working conditions?

HWW: Although the guidelines would need to be very flexible, I don't think it hurts advising here and now to begin considering general norms such as minimal advising loads for certain situations, suggested clerical support, working conditions and work space, job security, and even such benefits as sabbaticals, released time, and pay scales. It presently happens in academic areas like engineering, education, psychology, journalism, and social work; so advising, if it wants to be a recognized part of the academic community, can certainly start thinking along these lines. On its own, or jointly with appropriate agencies, it could come up with certain minimal standards for advising necessary for departmental or institutional accreditation.

Advising can influence its own future. However, to do this, advisors cannot sit back passively, go about doing good work, and expect automatic rewards. They have to make their case actively—and carefully. From the relatively safe position of retirement I can offer suggestions based on 20/20 hindsight and uncounted mistakes. But, like Wes Habley in Chicago, I can urge your readers to "seize the day," because I am confident that what academic advising should be and where it wants to go both depend on the actions of the advisors themselves.