Scholarly Advising and the Scholarship of Advising

Wendy G. Troxel

Using the "advising is teaching" framework, this chapter addresses the bases for the study of academic advising both from an approach to the work involved ("scholarly advising") and as an area of inquiry ("scholarship of advising"). Emerging research trends and critical issues are explored, including implications for collaborative inquiry related to student success.

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Academic advising has its roots in learning (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016), so the study of learning and development is integral to its future in higher education. Research has increasingly played a role in the exploration of the strategies, influences, and outcomes of the academic advising relationship with students (Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, & Barkemeyer, 2015). While the overarching purpose of academic advising is generally agreed upon (to assist in the academic journey of students), the scope of responsibilities and roles related to the specific interactions with students remains inconsistent across institutional and disciplinary contexts (Lowenstein, 2013; White, 2015).

Though the status of academic advising has been debated over the years, it is now considered a "profession" for those who work in that primary role on campuses based on its growing literature base, graduate-level preparation program offerings, and documentable theory-based strategies to improve student learning (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Shaffer, Zalewski, & Leveille, 2010). The designation has implications, too, for faculty members who may or may not view their specific role in academic advising as an area for systematic inquiry and for academic leaders who vary in their view of the intended outcomes of academic advising overall. This chapter addresses the bases for the study of academic advising as both an *approach* to the work involved ("scholarly advising") and as an *area of inquiry* ("scholarship of advising").

The Role of the Advisor as Professional Educator

Examining the role of the advisor from the context of the scholarly base does not require distinction between the work of primary-role advisors and faculty advisors but rather the scope of responsibilities required of them. An institution (or even an academic department or service unit) generally determines the tasks advisors must do for and with students, ranging from purely transactional (course scheduling and degree-audit checking, for example) to deeper developmental, outcomes-based interactions (goal setting, academic planning, and self-regulated learning, for example). Lowenstein (2013) presented a framework through which advising might be envisioned toward a "locus of learning" (p. 245) where advisors help students make sense of the curricula across their educational journey. This movement toward a more transformational academic relationship encourages further alignment with the learning-based work of faculty (White, 2015).

This framework is not new. O'Banion (1972) described advising as "a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment" (p. 62). Yet, there remains inconsistency in the advising approaches, structures, and practices used across the higher education landscape (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). This results in variance in the designs and strategies used to explore the impact of academic advising on students, the context through which advisors do their work, and the theoretical underpinnings of the instructional and developmental approaches to this academic relationship. The approach to the study of academic advising is continually explored by the members of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA).

NACADA's research philosophy dates back to 2008 and results from the work of a Task Force on Infusion of Research in Advising:

> NACADA views research as scholarly inquiry into all aspects of the advising interaction, the role of advising in higher education, and the effects that advising can have on students. The approach builds upon and extends the Ernest L. Boyer scholarships of discovery, integration, application, and teaching. The extension is toward praxis where research, theory, and practice in academic advising represent *inter-related processes for understanding and advancing student development and success* [emphasis added]. It regards consuming and producing research as the collective responsibility of all members of the higher education advising community, including advisors, faculty, administrators, and students. (NACADA, 2008, p. 1)

As a result of that effort, the term "scholarly inquiry" is used to refer not only to traditional research but also to new knowledge explored through practice (Hagen, 2010). The NACADA Research Committee has articulated a three-pronged research agenda through which advising-related inquiry can be situated. The first is the *impact* of advising. Here researchers seek to explore evidence related to advising's influence on the learning and development of particular student populations or related to program initiatives. The second is the *context* of advising. It is important to consider institutional and cultural conditions that affect academic decision-making, the roles that advisors play, and to learn more about the development and implementation of advising approaches and structures from a global perspective. The *theoretical basis* of advising development and practice constitute the third critical area for inquiry. This important area takes into account perspectives informed by a variety of disciplines. Establishing the conceptual underpinnings of the work will continue to advance the role of academic advising in the broader mission of education (NACADA, n.d.).

Persistence Versus Retention

As the lens through which inquiry on the *impact* of advising is considered, it is necessary to address the metrics often used to evaluate institutional effectiveness both internally and in the public arena. Funding and resource allocations are often attached to the clear and reportable data related to retention and graduation rates (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). In Chapter 3 of this issue, Lawton addresses issues of equity in institutional policy, and in Chapter 6, Lynch and Lungren caution academic leaders to acknowledge the developmental aspects of exploration for deciding students. Unintentional consequences of institutional policies and procedures often have a negative impact on retention. But retention is not a learning outcome. It is a binary number (a one or a zero) that indicates whether a particular student is or is not still enrolled at the institution at a particular point in time. It does not indicate whether the student is enrolled at *another* institution or whether the student has taken a temporary break from higher education. It also does not take into account the factors that influenced the student to stay or leave.

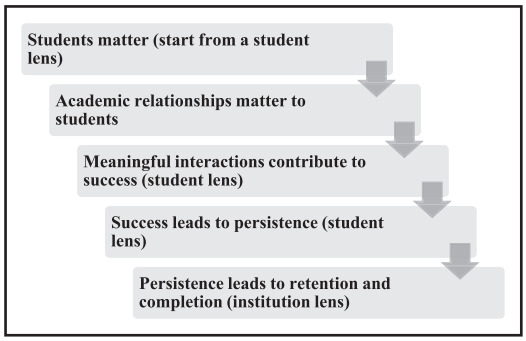
Research on college students has suggested for decades that there is a complex relationship between student-related factors (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993) and institution-related interventions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). More specifically, research on the influence of academic relationships point to the critical role that faculty and staff play in support of student success (Bain, 2004; Light, 2001).

Advising represents an academic relationship (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). Academic advisors interact with students, by design, while they are still enrolled at the institution. Therefore, they have influence on the academic journey of students, including their decisions and situations related to remaining enrolled or not.

While persistence and retention are not synonymous, they are related. Students persist; institutions retain (Hagedorn, 2005). Figure 1 represents the links between academic relationships and student success, which contribute to persistence, thereby resulting in the metrics used by institutions to evaluate their programs and services.

Institutional indicators operate through a deductive construct (aggregated data reported for accountability purposes), and yet academic advisors (both faculty and primary-role advisors) operate in an inductive environment—one student at a time. Viewing *retention* as a metric only evident after a student decides to remain enrolled (or is involuntarily withdrawn as in the case of

Figure 1. Relationship between persistence and retention



academic failure) limits the scope of inquiry available for the study of academic advising.

The Scope of Inquiry in Academic Advising

The Boyer (1990) model of scholarship has long been used to advance and inform the scope of inquiry among the professoriate, and the same can be used to both situate current literature and point to the gaps in the literature related to academic advising. It can also be used as a professional development tool for academic advisors (both those whose primary role is advising and faculty) to gain in their understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the work and as a toolbox for instructional and developmental strategies in their interactions with students.

Boyer's (1990) description of the four areas of inquiry (discovery, integration, application, and teaching) represented a critically important expansion of traditionally considered areas of research in the academy. Even before this pivotal report, some academic disciplines published peer-reviewed research that addressed practiced-based research (Shulman, 2004). Taken together, Boyer's (1990) model of scholarship and Shulman's (2004) construct of *pedagogical content knowledge,* as well as the growing literature in what is known about learning, have strengthened and validated the area of inquiry known as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The elements within SoTL have direct connections with the Scholarship of Advising.

Connections with the SoTL

What is good teaching? Kathleen McKinney (2007), an expert in SoTL, says that "Good teaching is that which promotes student learning and other desired student outcomes" (p. 8). As with the discussion about persistence, this value-laden view of teaching represents a *learning* lens (student-focused) rather than a *teaching* lens (instructor-focused). This naturally results in an approach to teaching that brings with it an acknowledgement of place in a larger professional area of work; one worthy of systematic reflection. McKinney (2004) articulates a definition of *scholarly teaching*:

> Scholarly teaching involves taking a scholarly approach to teaching just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. Scholarly teachers view teaching as a profession and the knowledge base on teaching and learning as a second discipline in which to develop expertise. Thus, scholarly teachers do things such as reflect on their teaching, use classroom assessment techniques, discuss teaching issues with colleagues, try new things, and read and apply the literature on teaching and learning, and perhaps, more generally. (p. 8)

This term represents an inward-facing and personal approach to the work. It suggests that the decision to teach in a scholarly way is a dispositional issue. Those who teach with this lens recognize that it is a dynamic, ever-evolving activity with both intrinsic motivations and external accountabilities at play. Articulation of this approach may come in the form of publicly shared scholarship or internally shared reflections (like in annual performance review documents), but the decision to view the role of teacher in a deeper, more reflective way is a personal one.

Given that definition, what if the term "advising" is substituted for "teaching"? The statement then becomes:

> Scholarly [advising] involves taking a scholarly approach to [advising] just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. Scholarly [advisors] view [advising] as a profession and the knowledge base on teaching and learning as a second discipline in which to develop expertise. Thus, scholarly [advisors] reflect on their [advising], use assessment techniques [appropriate to advising interactions and initiatives], discuss

> [advising] issues with colleagues, try new things, and apply the literature on teaching and learning [and how academic advising relates to student success]. (Adapted from McKinney, 2004, p. 8)

Academic advisors (both faculty and primary-role advisors) who approach their work with students in a scholarly way satisfy the call to become critical consumers of research (NACADA, 2008). They are also more likely to engage in professional development and to consider their work as a career to be nurtured. Focusing on student learning as key to the strategic development of advising-related skills leads to informed decisions about the nature of the work and an increased awareness of the theoretical underpinnings that support individualized approaches across academic journeys.

SoTL/Scholarship of Advising

The Scholarship of Advising, then, can be examined through the lens of the SoTL. McKinney (2004) explains that SoTL "goes beyond scholarly teaching and involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications or performances" (p. 8). Peer-reviewed scholarship related to academic advising is not limited to the publication venues sponsored by NACADA. A recent search of literature across academic journals revealed over 9,000 articles with the word "advising" or "advisor" in the title, across virtually every discipline, in many different countries. An ongoing content analysis of the last 15 years of advising-related scholarship is under way, which explores the trends and scope of designs, theoretical frameworks, and disciplinary perspectives across global contexts (Troxel, Grey, Rubin, McIntosh, & Campbell, 2018). Many of these scholarly works are authored not just by faculty members but by advising practitioners.

Practitioner Involvement in Research

Faculty members generally operate under an expectation to contribute to the literature in their field and have increasingly wide latitude to engage in creative forms of scholarship (O'Meara & Rice, 2005). To what extent, though, are primary-role advisors involved in either consuming or producing scholarly literature on academic advising? The literature on involvement in educational research suggests that practitioners and researchers have different views of the literature, as well as their use of it. Kezar (2000) found that practitioners search for direct applicability to the work they do and conclude that most educational research lacks insight into the real world of higher education.

Faculty who do social science research tend to engage deeper in critique and theoretical analyses, though there is an increasing body of literature in action-oriented and pragmatic research, particularly in educationally related areas (Huisman & Tight, 2017). Practitioners tend to be less comfortable with the reflective nature of critical analysis and, in the case of humanities-based research, philosophical discourse and argumentation. Their work is often time-sensitive and demanding as they are expected to be available to a large number of students throughout an already busy administrative day.

There also tends to be a lack of collaboration and communication between the academics who typically produce the work and the full-time staff members who have a more holistic view of students (Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010). Primary-role advisors who have a desire to get involved with the literature related to their work often cite a lack of confidence in their understanding of research paradigms and designs, as well as of the skills necessary to engage in scholarly inquiry. Kezar (2000) suggested long ago that research in higher education would benefit from collaborations between researchers who are most familiar with appropriate designs and approaches to inquiry and practitioners who, from their unique viewpoint, ask the best research questions. This aspirational approach to further scholarship of advising falls short when considering the realities of expectations and rewards structures in both two-year and four-year institutions.

Expectations and Rewards

There are challenges related to expectations and rewards for scholarly inquiry in academic advising by practitioners and faculty. The type of research conducted by faculty varies across disciplines and institution type. Increasingly, pedagogical research is accepted as relevant and important but not to the exclusion of "traditional" content-based research (Booth & Woollacott, 2018). As mentioned, higher educators are encouraging wide institutional commitment to SoTL research across disciplinary

contexts (Vithal, 2018). Yet such research is often conducted after tenure and promotion have been achieved.

Similarly, academic advising "is a time-intensive endeavor and most advisors are not expected to conduct research, write papers, or engage in scholarly discourse" (Padak, Kuhn, Gordon, Steele, & Robbins, 2005, p. 7). Even those institutions that have a structure for acknowledging varying roles and responsibilities of advisors across a campus in place, such as "career ladders" (McClellan, 2016), rarely include making contributions to the scholarly literature in advising as an expectation. Since peer-reviewed publications highlight not only the expertise of the author(s) but the reputation of the institution, it would be valuable for academic advising administrators and academic leaders to encourage practitioner-based research.

In addition to contributing to the theoretical underpinnings of the work by advancing knowledge, research can also enhance the knowledge and skills of academic advisors. Involvement in research in other practitioner-oriented fields, such as dietetics, has been shown to help improve transferrable skills, such as critical thinking, time management, and self-directed learning (Desbrow, Leveritt, Palmer, & Hughes, 2014). Involvement in research at any level has implications for professional and personal goals and growth.

The Research Involvement Framework

A framework for involvement in research for academic advisors is being developed, based on the work of Newell (2015), Whelan, Copeland, Oladitan, Murrells, and Gandy (2013), and Wylie-Rosett, Wheeler, Krueger, and Halford (1990). The framework consists of four levels: (1) evidence-based practice, (2) active involvement in research through collaboration, (3) leading research projects, and (4) leadership and supervision of the research of others. For the purposes of this discussion, levels one and two are relevant for reflection, particularly for primary-role academic advisors. The framework may be used as a linear one, where each level is achieved before moving to the next one. For example, primary-role academic advisors are asked to indicate their level of involvement in research along this continuum, both their current position and their aspirational goals.

The statement on research as articulated by NACADA (2008) is first read. Individuals are then asked to review the components of research experience and involvement on the framework. Figure 2 presents the involvement framework for academic advisors.

Primary-role advisors, in particular, can use the framework to articulate their understanding and development of these components. The framework allows reflection on their current and future levels of involvement and experience with research. Faculty advisors have the opportunity not only to reflect on their research skills, which can be used to conduct inquiry on advising-related topics, but also to acknowledge their commitment to the scholarly nature of advising interactions and processes. Accordingly, NACADA has identified scholarly inquiry as a strategic goal for the association and as a core competency for academic advisors who have a professional responsibility to students and to higher education (NACADA, 2017).

Academic leaders can support widespread involvement in the scholarship of advising and encourage practitioners to engage in deeper exploration of their work with students (who may also be involved in undergraduate and graduate research on important topics in this area). Approaching academic advising from a scholarly lens across an institution will influence student success and their intent to persist, which results in higher institutional reputation, retention, and graduation rates. Practical and conceptual recommendations include:

- Reward collaborative research (faculty and practitioners) through the internal grant processes and support toward external funding (McClellan, 2016).
- Encourage professional development and mentoring toward deeper knowledge of the wide range of research paradigms and designs relevant to advising-related inquiry (Champlin-Scharff, 2010; Troxel & Campbell, 2010; Vithal, 2018).
- Provide mentoring and release time to primary-role advisors to engage in the scholarship of advising.
- Provide intellectual space for primary-role academic advisors to become experts on campus and to lead others to grow in their strategic development of skills and abilities.
- Align academic advising within the teaching and learning mission of the institution, structurally and pedagogically, and

Figure 2. Framework of research involvement for academic advisors

NACADA views research as scholarly inquiry into all aspects of the advising interaction, the role of advising in higher education, and the effects that advising can have on students. It regards consuming and producing research as the collective responsibility of all members of the higher education advising community, including advisors, faculty, administrators, and students. (NACADA, 2008)

LEVEL 1: Evidence-based Practice: Foundational Level (professional commitment)

1.1 I agree with the statement above (NACADA, 2008) and understand that evidence informs practice, which leads to deeper knowledge about the components of student success and/or the context and theoretical bases of academic advising.

1.2 I agree with the statement above (NACADA, 2008) and occasionally (or even regularly) read articles and consult resources related to student success or some aspect of academic advising.

1.3 Occasionally (or even regularly) I implement what I've learned from the scholarly literature in my role with students. (May also be part of a team approach)

1.4 I am interested in conducting some type of research study, even a small-scale one, but am not sure how to go about the process of scholarly inquiry. I would like to be introduced to all components of the research process and possibly collaborate with others in some way.

LEVEL 2: Evidence-based Practice: Collaborative Level (active involvement)

2.1 Observatory Level—I have been involved with a research study, but only as an interested observer, such as a:

- (a) Participant—so I have seen how the data collection and analysis process works …
- (b) Student (undergrad or grad) assistant—but not as the primary investigator …

2.2 Conceptual Level—Still up for discussion, but I have:

- A general area of interest that has been identified …
- Possible research questions (if a social science design) …
- A theoretical framework in mind …
- Been thinking about possible research designs …
- Read relevant research articles related to my topic …

2.3 Operational Level—I'm set:

2.3.1 Proposed Study:

- A purpose of the study has been identified and research questions have been articulated …
- I have a theoretical framework in mind for this study …
- My research design has been identified and proposed …
- I have conducted a review of related literature …

2.3.2 Completed Study:

- I have conducted a research study and am ready for more!

Note. Adapted from Wylie-Rossett, J., et al. (1990) as cited in Whelan, K., et al. (2013).

document the connections in strategic planning documents, institutional websites, and marketing materials.

Inquiry is at the foundation of academic advising. Those involved with the complex and rewarding work of advising students are critical to the success of institutional learning and developmental missions. The processes and outcomes are demonstrable and subject to critical analysis. There is a place for the scholarship of advising within the body of knowledge in higher education.

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