*Virginia N. Gordon*
*Ruth W. Swenson*
*LaVona Spencer*
*Diane I. Kline*
*Margie Bogenschutz*
*Brian Seeger*

# ADVISING AS A PROFESSION

*This summary has been adapted from a report of a* ***NACADA*** *Task Force focusing on the particular issue of advising as a profession. The authors are members of the appointed Task Force which presented its findings to the* ***NACADA*** *membership in October 1987.*

Since its founding, NACADA has identified many of the issues and concerns involved in academic advising and has supported individual advisers and institutions as they have identified, analyzed, and solved these problems. The most recent issue to appear of national interest is the concern of full-time professionals who enter advising as a career path. Although nationally faculty members still provide the primary delivery system for academic advising, the number of full-time professional advisers serving in this capacity has increased. While some institutions have used non-faculty advisers for many years, the growing number of advisers in this category has initiated a new professional identity. Full-time advisers are legitimately concerned about opportunities to expand and deepen their expertise and grow professionally.

There is little information available to provide an accurate profile of professional advisers, the tasks they perform, and their perceptions of what "professional" advising means. In response to this growing interest and concern, NACADA's president appointed a Task Force to gather information about the current state of full-time professional advising through the attitudes and experiences of NACADA members.

A questionnaire was mailed to 1,000 NACADA members (the entire membership at that time). The questionnaire included questions about titles; salaries; other responsibilities; contractual rights; criteria for promotion and evaluation; posting of and criteria for new adviser positions; attitudes toward advising as a profession; certification and credentialing of advisers; training; and the degree of awareness and interest in advising on individual campuses. Seventy-two percent of the membership responded, indicating to the Task Force that the state of professional advising was indeed an important topic to begin studying.

attempt was made to define "profession" as it is generally perceived. Many definitions emerged, but two in particular seemed relevant to this effort. In 1949, Wrenn and Darley set out **eight traditional criteria** in an effort to determine whether the field of student affairs was a profession:

1. *the application of standards of selection and training;*
2. *the definition of job titles and functions;*
3. *the self-imposition of standards of admission and performance;*
4. *the legal recognition of the vocation;*
5. *the development of a professional consciousness and of professional groups;*
6. *the performance of a socially necessary function;*
7. *the possession of a body of specialized knowledge and skills; and*
8. *high moral and personal integrity in lieu of the development of a code of ethics.*

It is interesting to note that in 1949 Wrenn and Darley found that student affairs did not measure up to their definition when judged by these criteria:

1. *application of standards of selection and training;*
2. *definition of job titles and functions;*
3. *self-imposition of standards of admission and performance; and*
4. *the legal recognition of the vocation.*

Since the setting for academic advising is American higher education, Myron Lieberman's (1956) criteria for a profession in an educational setting seem applicable. According to Lieberman, a profession in its nature and significance involves the following:

1. *unique, definite, and essential social services;*
2. *an emphasis upon intellectual techniques in performing its services;*
3. *a long period of specialized training;*
4. *a broad range of autonomy for both the individual practitiows and for the occupational group as a whole;*
5. *an acceptance by the practitiows of broad personal responsibility for judgments made and acts performed within the scope of professional autonomy;*
6. *an emphasis upon the service to be rendered, rather than the economic gain to the practitiows, as the basis for the organization and performance of the social service delegated to the occupational group;*
7. *a comprehensive self-governing organization of practitioners; and*
8. *a code of ethics which has been clarified and interpreted at ambiguous and doubtful points by cowete cases.*

Wrenn and Darley's and Lieberman's definitions contain several common elements regarding a profession. A profession has standards for admission and training, is legally recognized, has a specialized body of knowledge and skills, and has developed both a professional consciousness and a self-governing professional organization. A profession must have a unique social service to perform. Professionals who perform these services must be dedicated to moral standards that obligate them to put the good of the recipient above their own self-interest. The values of morality and dedication are instilled through specialized training.

NACADA President Wes Habley focused on several of the basic characteristics of advising as a profession in his keynote address delivered at the Region 7 Conference in Kansas City in 1986. These characteristics were as follows:

1. *a set of standards, commonly held expectations which are applied to advising activity;*
2. *a conceptual base, a set of commonly held concepts, theories, and practices which guide actions;*
3. *a method of entry into the profession or a core of learning experiences expected of those who enter the field;*
4. *a significant number of individuals who have both a length of commitment to and the depth of understanding of the field; and*
5. *an identifiable group of clients for advising (these are the students).*

The questionnaire sent to NACADA members sought to gather information about the perceptions and attitudes of advisers on these issues. Caution must be exercised when drawing generalizations from the results of the survey, however. Survey data were gathered from NACADA members only, not from academic advisers at large. Respondents represented many types of advisers (i.e., full-time professional advisers, faculty members, student affairs professionals, and administrators). Therefore, the respondents taken as a group reflect the diversity of backgrounds and experiences within advising personnel. The detailed Task Force report is available, thus, only a summary of the results is presented below.*

*Survey Results*

The largest group of respondents (57%) were from four-year public institutions, while 27% were from four-year private colleges or universities. The respondents represented many types of advising systems from combinations of central offices and academic units (28%), to combinations of academic units and faculty (24%), to faculty-only systems (15%), to central-offices-only systems (8%). Most respondents reported to academic affairs (58%). Respondents' titles ranged from Director of Advising (31%) or Academic Adviser (22%) to Vice-President for Academic Affairs (2%) or Director of Counseling (4%).

One striking finding was the majority of respondents held responsibilities in addition to advising. These included teaching, administration, student affairs duties (orientation, counseling, residence hall management, career planning and counseling), retention directors, or admissions and testing. Another interesting finding was that many respondents had been in advising for many years. Almost 60% had been in their positions from four to over ten years.

When respondents were asked what attracted them to the field of advising, many commonalities were forthcoming. These included the opportunity to help students; liking student contact and interaction; enjoying the academic environment; belief in the intrinsic value of higher education; liking to solve problems; or deriving personal satisfaction from seeing students succeed. A surprising 87% indicated they planned

The survey succeeded in confirming the great variety in titles and salaries associated with advising. While the largest group indicated that "Academic Adviser" was the title used for full-time advisers on their campus (42%), other commonly used titles included Academic Counselor, Senior Adviser, or just Counselor or Adviser. Most had permanent (tenure-type) contracts (21%)or annual contracts with notice of non-renewal (22%).The salary issue was confounded by the diverse group of respondents and the differences in salaries even on individual campuses. The most frequently reported range was from $15,000 to $25,000 for full-time professional advisers, with larger salaries ($25,000 to over $30,000) indicated for titles including Coordinator or Director for Advising, Senior Adviser, Dean of Student Advisement, or Assistant Dean. There did not seem to be salary consistency across individual campuses since 44% indicated this to be a problem.

Surprisingly, the minimum educational level reported by 48% of the respondents for entry-level advising positions was the bachelor's degree. The Master's degree was the minimum reported by 43% of the campuses, and 2% responded that the doctorate was required. Seventy-nine percent reported that the Master's was preferred, with 10% preferring the doctorate. A degree in the area the person is advising was preferred on 19% of the campuses, while 25% reported that a student personnel degree was preferred. The degree made no difference according to 27% of those responding. Advising, teaching, or counseling experience were listed as requirements for entry-level positions. There was low turnover for advising positions on the campuses of 58% of the respondents, with 37% reporting an average turnover. When asked to account for this low turnover, reasons given were location of college, excellent administration, job satisfaction, commitment to the institution, poor economy, or spouses were there.

When respondents were asked if they considered advising a profession, 84% indicated they did. Many reasons were given for their perception: advising has a body of knowledge and a professional organization; professional training is required; and certain knowledge and skills are required. Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated they favor national certification of full-time professional advisers. Those who did not favor certification indicated it would limit the use of advisers on their campuses, it would be too cumbersome; advising is too institution-specific; and certificates don't make good advisers. Those who did favor national certification were in agreement about the criteria to be used: advanced degree; specified number of years experience; and specified number of in-service training hours were seen as important. Nine percent of the responses were in favor of a national test that would assess general advising knowledge and skills. Sixteen percent of the responses were in favor of a nationally recognized training program providing a certificate. NACADA was mentioned as an appropriate certifying agent by 83%, with 13% being in favor of a separate certifying board.

There also was agreement as to the topics to be included in any certification training/testing: definition of advising; counseling skills; use of information; interviewing skills; career counseling skills; and communication theory and techniques were selected by the respondents from a list of options. Referral skills, student development theory, decision-making skills and theory, legal aspects of advising, and knowledge of special

populations were also mentioned as important. The topic selected by fewest respondents was research skills and knowledge.

Finally, 38% of the respondents indicated that advising held a promising future at their institution. Forty-four percent indicated it had an uncertain future, and 18% felt it had no future at all. This in spite of the fact that 69% felt the degree of awareness and support among faculty and administrators had increased or increased significantly in the past five years.

Analysis of the survey data by institutional type, institutional size, and NACADA region is contained in the complete Task Force report. While some minor differences were found between institutional type and size, the regional data did not reveal any significant differences.

### *Discussion*

The intent of this survey was to provide a general picture of advising as described by NACADA members, and to solicit their ideas and opinions about academic advising as a profession. The survey revealed no patterns or obvious similarities in advising systems, in titles, or in contractual rights and salaries. Indeed, it showed little salary consistency even across a single campus. A surprising finding was that 50% of the respondents advised part-time while carrying out other duties such as teaching or orientation. This finding has implications for advising as a profession, since many advisers may identify more strongly with other professional groups, such as student personnel administrators, or as faculty members do with their academic disciplines.

Another interesting finding was that many institutions required only a bachelor's degree and no previous advising experiences for entry-level positions. Further, many schools had no preference for a particular academic course of study or preparation.

Is advising a profession? A surprisingly 84% of NACADA respondents said "yes." And yet only half favor national certification for professional advisers. In a survey of this nature, a certain degree of subjectivity in responses is anticipated. Questions solicit respondents' opinions, which necessarily will reflect individual backgrounds, experience, and priorities. Advising systems, settings, and institutional needs are sufficiently diverse that designing a generalized training and testing program could, at best, address the fundamental knowledge and skills to be expected of a proficient adviser. Before the profession of advising (if indeed advising is a profession) considers certification as a goal, it must make critical decisions concerning the intent of establishing certification standards and the level of proficiency and experience to be required.

Another surprising finding was the very low number who recommended "research skills and knowledge" as a topic for inclusion in certification training or testing. If advising is to be recognized as a legitimate profession, its practitioners need to establish a sound research reputation. If certification of advisers is a goal for advising as a profession, should not certifiable advisers be expected to demonstrate at least basic knowledge and skills in conducting and/or interpreting research? Many who support

At the beginning of the Task Force report, several definitions of a profession were given, including specified common criteria as follows:

1. *standards of admission and training,*
2. *legal recognition,*
3. *a specialized body of knowledge and skills,*
4. *the development of a professional consciousness, and*
5. *a self-governing professional organization.*

Apart from 5 (a self-governing professional organization) and a growing sense in some quarters of 4 (the development of a professional consciousness) none of the criteria seem to apply to advising as it is practiced today. Although advising positions require some degree of training and education, common standards for employment are not the norm. Since the educational level or degree obtained is used often as a benchmark in our society for determining professional standards, inconsistence in this area reflects an absence of these important standards.

Although the majority of respondents report that a career ladder in advising was important to them, no career path seems to exist for most of them. In spite of this, one point is clear from this survey: **many professionals are attracted to advising, have been advisers for a long time, are satisfied with their jobs, and intend to stay in the field.** This is confirmed by the fact that the turnover rate in advising positions is not high.

The many inconsistencies across the field of advising brought out in this survey forecast the difficulties associated with setting standards for professional advising. Future studies should concentrate on specific aspects of advising such as salaries and titles (with one person reporting for each institution), standards for entry-level positions, and training criteria. A separate survey of faculty advisers should be undertaken. Judgments about academic advising as a profession by professionals outside the field, such as chief administrators of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs would be instructive. More definitive and in-depth information needs to be gathered about critical areas of academic advising before the question of professionalism can be resolved. To this end, the current president of NACADA has extended the work of the Task Force on Advising as a Profession and continued work should shed more light on this complex but critical topic.

## References


**Habley, W. (1986). Show us the future: The challenges facing academic advising. NACADA *Journal*, 6, 5-11.**

Lieberman, M (1956). Education as a profession. New York: Prentice Hall, pp. 2-6.

**Wrenn, C. & Darly, J. (1949). An appraisal of the professional status of personnel work. In E. *G*. Williamson (Ed.), *Trends* in student personnel work. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.**