

From the Co-Editors

We journal editor types are notorious for coming up with themes that link, sometimes abstrusely, the articles in any given volume. For this volume, however, there is no need to stretch. One word expresses the common element that runs through all four articles: *understanding*. So simple on the surface, yet so complex when one digs down deep. Indeed, the authors of the four articles within have dug deep to enlighten us about understanding and advising.

In “Focusing on the Future,” Dr. Angela M. Bowlus examines the reinstatement process, a source of anguish for students who have been academically dismissed and who must write appeals for reinstatement. Have you been in the shoes of administrators who have had to read and judge the merit of such appeals? If so, you know it is a process fraught with anguish. How shall such administrators come to empathize with the life that the student seeking reinstatement has led? How shall that student, with their future seemingly hinging on what they write, craft a narrative that constitutes an *apologia pro vita sua*?; not an apology in the sense of “seeking forgiveness,” as the Latin phrase suggests, but rather an *apologia*, “a giving an account of oneself.” Bowlus suggests that narrative theory can aid administrators and advisors in helping students shift their focus from an unhappy story—focusing on past trauma too much—to one characterized by success. Bowlus examines the concept of the “Student’s Journey” (modeled we assume on Joseph Campbell’s notion of the Hero’s Journey) where students describe how they have successfully battled their own dragons and how, now redeemed, they plan to return to their studies. During this stressful time, when academic futures are on the line, Bowlus urges administrators and advisors to work with students so that “the reinstatement process is less an apology or explanation of failure and more the story of a student’s transformation and redemption.”

Dr. Craig M. McGill, in “Sources, Obstacles, and Opportunities for Primary-Role Advisor Professional Development,” might not use the word “understanding” but it is certainly implied. He

draws a clear distinction between training and professional development. Advisor training is normally geared toward helping advisors with more concrete issues, such as the day-to-day dilemmas that students face. Professional development, however, is a meta-concept. McGill examines the latter through the words of seventeen NACADA leaders and advising administrators who, in general, mourn the difficulty of pursuing longer term goals when faced with daily difficulties. Three themes emerge from McGill’s interviews. First, that professional associations play critical roles in supporting true professional development (that is, going beyond mere training). Second, that numerous financial and structural barriers continue to hinder professional development. Third, there is a shortage for advisors—not just regarding finances, but regarding advisor recognition and support. McGill, in summarizing interviewees’ statements, recommends that advising leaders advocate more for advisors and for adequate funding.

How shall advisors support students with mental health challenges? That is the question Dr. Shantalea Johns asks in, “Exploring Faculty and Academic Advisors’ Experiences Supporting College Students with Mental Health Challenges.” This study utilizes the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine how advisors approach supporting students with mental health concerns. Dr. Johns looks closely at participant perspectives, meaning-making, and sense-making. In other words, they ask, “How shall we understand advisors’ understanding of students with mental health concerns?” Johns concludes that, “Understanding the significant impact of untreated mental health concerns on college students is crucial for the work we do as advisors.” We agree.

Finally, we are very pleased to present the work of Dr. Yisi Zhan and Wuriyeti Litip, both from Tsinghua University. Their article, “The Professionalization of Academic Advising in China: From the Perspective of Cultural Diversity” examines the relatively recent rise of professional advisors in China. It was not until 2017 that the Academic Advising Branch of the Beijing Association of Higher Education was created

with three objectives in mind: Improve the scientific nature and accuracy of advising research, enhance ideological and political education, and provide practitioners with systematic training. This approach caught on quickly in China; only two years later the focus shifted from Beijing to a *National Symposium on Academic Advising in Higher Education*. We are honored that the authors have chosen to tell this story—to provide us with understanding, if you will—to those of us less familiar with how advising is conducted outside of our comfort zones. This paper focuses on what makes the professionalization of academic advising in China unique to that culture. Such professionalization, as Zhan and Litip propose,

involves social values orientation and government recognition.

Understanding academic advising in China, understanding advisors' perspectives on students' mental health challenges, understanding how professional development represents a loftier (yet often passed over) concept of academic advising, and understanding how narrative theory should be regarded as an indispensable part of the rein-statement process: these important and diverse perspectives on understanding are what you will find herein.

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