What is Academic Advising? An Application of Analytic Induction

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Nearly 40 years after the creation of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising and at least as many years after academic advising was recognized as a unique role in higher education, the term academic advising *as applied to individuals who work in higher education has been only colloquially defined. Using the analytic induction research method, we arrived at a definition of academic advising created from the words of academic advisors. In this paper, we address the way each word or phrase has been used to create the definition and present implications for policy, research, and practice.*

Over the past 7 years, we have been conducting research on the occupation of academic advising. While researching and reading advising literature, we found that lack of a universal or corroborated definition of academic advising complicated discussions of it. The literature and data gathered revealed that those involved in academic advising did not share a common understanding, purpose, or activity; that is, faculty members, organizational stakeholders, and others define advising differently. These variances include identification of different tasks, but more significant, dissimilar interpretations of advising goals.

The lack of a cohesive definition means that the skills, education, training, and values necessary to advise students may also remain indeterminate. Furthermore, we found that many advisors on the same campus, same college, or same department occupy distinct roles. This lack of consistency can confuse students who seek advising and those who provide advising, but perhaps more important, without a single definition, researchers of academic advising encounter challenges. For example, stakeholders consuming, performing, or requesting research may face an enigma when trying to define, describe, or analyze advising because no universal or operational definition exists in academic advising research.

In a section titled, "Analytic Induction," Merriam (2009) presented a method to initiate the process of defining academic advising. From this struggle to understand, interpret, and relate academic advising research and the responsibilities of academic advising to colleagues, we defined advising using the experiences of and descriptions from those in the field and the method described by Merriam.

Literature Review

Nearly 40 years after the creation of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) and at least as many years after academic advising was recognized as a unique role in higher education (Cook, 2009), the term *academic advising* has been colloquially applied to the endeavor we address herein (NACADA, 2015). Multiple definitions can be found by searching the NACADA web site where individuals, institutions, and organizations have each defined advising. They are also reflected in a widely used resource for professionals, *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook*, in which the contributors encouraged individuals and campus stakeholders to create their own definitions (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2008).

In the past, the benefits potentially conferred by creation of a universal, dictionary-style definition captured the attention of constituencies. In 2003, NACADA President Betsy McCalla-Wriggins appointed a task force and charged it with developing a definition of academic advising. The February 2003 issue of the *Academic Advising News* (NACADA, 2003) described this effort:

> Definition of Advising Task Force—many members have sought and asked for a comprehensive, succinct definition of "academic advising." Knowing that there are many such definitions in the literature, this Task Force has been asked to pursue the task of developing one such definition that could

be endorsed by NACADA. As you might guess, with a variety of expectations of advisors and advising coupled with the variety of organizational and delivery models, this will be a monumental task. Yet, volunteers have agreed to tackle this task. (p. A7)

Although the task force did not create a dictionary-style definition, efforts from the task force members led to the NACADA Concept of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2006; hereafter, *the Concept*) to "provide a useful document to its constituents, reflecting as many of the current views and philosophies of our members as possible" (para. 3). The Concept presents a broad overview of components that contribute to successful advising practice but does not explicitly delimit them. Furthermore, it neither specifically describes the activity of academic advising nor explains the distinctive aspects of academic advising practice because many other roles within the educational realm could describe components of practice with the same terms used in the Concept.

Some argue that the professional organization or task force does not have the purview for creating a definition. Many types of professional organizations have been created to serve members, and these members are considered the best suited for informing and developing their organization (Harvey, Mason, & Ward, 1995). Although we could not find a direct statement from NACADA regarding the role of members in driving the effort to find a definition, we have discerned that the members play an essential and meaningful role in the directions and undertakings of NACADA. Our approach differed in that we tried to be inclusive of all the membership while attempting to use an objective method. We contend that our approach appropriately reflects the role of NACADA as a representative of the membership rather than as a governing body of the membership.

We also realize the difficulty of the task. While conducting research on the profession, we found that some individuals steadfastly refused to entertain a common definition for advising, citing that a definition might irreparably alter the profession and exclude many of those who currently embrace the title *advisor*. Therefore, we acknowledge that the process of defining academic advising may have been tumultuous and remains potentially fractious.

Wilensky (1964) published research on occupations and the use of the term *profession* and described growing pains for the individuals affected by the process of distinctly outlining a profession: "This involves further definition of essential professional tasks, the development of internal conflict among practitioners of varying background, and some competition with outsiders who do similar work" (p. 144). Research by various members of the current team, Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, and Barkemeyer (2015) and Johnson, Larson, and Barkemeyer (2015), indicated that academic advising practitioners describe *academic advising* in different ways and perceive the role and processes of advising differently in separate parts of the country, at various types of institutions, and among offices on the same campus; furthermore, many want to maintain this diversity.

Although the creation of a definition for advising remains a complex undertaking, a unique, single definition also may confer benefits to practitioners. As Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) suggested, without a consensus definition, advisors struggle to communicate to each other about their specific advising practices, agree on the goals and activities of advising, and perhaps most important, prevent others outside of the field from identifying the distinct skills and provisions of the advising activity.

Furthermore, to advocate for the advancement and recognition of academic advising, and consequently, for the benefit of the institution and students, stakeholders must articulate the nature of advising: what it is and what it is not. In our experience, advisors need a consensus definition because supervisors, human resource officers, institutional colleagues, and others in the higher education community not directly familiar with advising exert great influence on the responsibilities of the advisor and the occupation. Therefore, many practitioners receive raises, promotions, respect (or not), and a seat at the table from individuals not directly familiar with the practice of academic advising.

A lack of a common or uniform definition of advising allows administrators to use or create any rubric to hire, supervise, or assign advisors. This means that advisors may not be tasked with responsibilities for which they may be most suited or influential, such as serving on curriculum committees or assessing the impact of policy changes. When individuals unfamiliar with advising attempt to evaluate or quantify it, how often do

advisors, or advising units, receive poor assessments because the evaluation was based on practices that do not align with the goals of advising? How do these outsider judgments affect the way resources are administered? For example, when an institution, department, or office claims to allocate resources to advising, are funds given to advance advising or to the unit where someone referenced as an *advisor* is engaged in responsibilities unrelated to advising, such as scheduling, web site maintenance, reimbursements, filing, recruitment, and the like?

A practitioner-derived normative definition might limit individuals and institutions, particularly those not directly engaged in advising, from defining advising in a way that primarily benefits a departmental (or personal) agenda rather than the student or the goals of the occupation. Without a common definition, others can make claims about advising or advising practitioners that may or may not represent the responsibilities of academic advising. In the absence of common understanding, what rebuttal or contrary opinion can be meaningfully advanced? A definition of advising gives power to practitioners and scholars in the field, not to others who operationally define practice or research for them.

Although a universal definition of academic advising could affect training, access, respect, compensation, and many other areas, we chose to forego a presentation of a comprehensive discussion on these topics; instead, we focused on research as the one area of impact that cannot be neglected because it affects all other areas of the advising enterprise. Research is accessed and interpreted through shared or created common understandings. In particular, a scientific approach provides a sturdy framework by identifying variables for study, which encourages continual refinement and clarification of variables for consistently undertaken research (Salkind, 2010). This efficiency in clarifying variables differs from other activities, such as scholarship or discovery, because it is "a collective project of indefinable duration" (Salkind, 2010, p. 1249) in which everyone has equal access and opportunity for discovery and research. We selected academic advising as the variable of our study so that all researchers will have a sturdy framework on which to apply, evaluate, or conduct research on academic advising.

In *What Works in Student Retention*, Habley and McClanahan (2004) described academic advising as a high-impact practice affecting student reten-

tion. This effect of academic advising on college campuses is "recognized as a viable and necessary component that results in the success of college students" (Grites, Gordon, & Habley, 2008, p. 462) and can be found in texts and research on advising, such as *Driving Toward a Degree: Establishing a Baseline on Integrated Approaches to Planning and Advising* (Tyton Partners & Babson Survey Research Group, 2016). However, the findings in these and other publications cannot be easily compared because academic advising was not operationally defined in either publication. Without a consensus definition of advising, researchers could be studying disparate components of the occupation that further limits the applicability or generalizability of the research to practice. With academic advising being acknowledged as an important enterprise for student success, all constituents should know the particulars of the term *academic advising* so that the useful and beneficial aspects of it are accurately studied and replicated.

Advising scholars have called for a description of academic advising as a distinct undertaking (Habley, 2009; Himes, 2014; Kuhn & Padak, 2008; Lowenstein, 2014; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). For example, Lowenstein (2014) exhorted, "We want advising to be advising, to have a distinctive purpose of its own. Our theory should embody the autonomy principle" (para. 48). From the 2015 NACADA Annual Conference Common Reading session, Cunningham (2015) related: "One participant suggested that advisors themselves will need to provide a meaningful definition, and the definition will not be a job description or a description of the advising process, but instead will detail what advising is" (para. 4). While many individuals want to clarify practice first, Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) explained that a definition constitutes a step toward clarification and not the other way around: "The identity of academic advising will become clearer when advisors can describe the nature of academic advising comprehensively…" (p. 51). Citing Schulenberg speaking at the Common Reading, Cunningham (2015) insisted "that advising professionals need to take ownership of this defining process" (para. 4).

Many fears surround the clarification process, particularly in relation to perceived homogenization. However, the choice to articulate academic advising practices and purposes does not lead to homogenized practice of advising any more than it does for the role of a psychologist or lawyer. On

the contrary, creating a similar understanding of advising allows individuals to practice from a space where individuals and groups share, discuss, understand, and advance a recognizable and universal enterprise while maintaining or applying individual styles, tools, and approaches to the same goals. Furthermore, a definition may positively influence both the professional aspects of the occupation and elevate the role of advisors in higher education. Through the use of the analytic induction (AI) method, we aimed to follow Schulenberg and Lindhorst's (2008) suggestion by defining advising, not as individuals in silos, but as an informed community of practitioner-scholars. We focused on creating a definition for academic advising by analyzing the normative understandings, experiences, and individually created definitions of NACADA members.

Method

We used the AI research method to answer the question: What is academic advising? Specifically, we posed a series of questions to academic advising practitioners and analyzed their responses. The process was used to craft a definition of academic advising that addresses the research question and captures all aspects of the data provided by the participants.

Hammersley (2010) presented a broad overview of the method: "AI is portrayed as starting from the detailed examination of a small number of cases that display the type of event or feature to be explained" (p. 393). Goldenberg (1993) described the AI method as the process of "inductively creating typologies or ascertaining the essential characteristics of something of interest, be it a relationship, an institution or role" (p. 163). In other words, the ability to define a phenomenon by creating discrete categories of essentiality makes up the essence of AI. Social scientists particularly appreciate this approach because they can use it to create universal statements, such as *all S are P* (Robinson, 1951 quoting Znaniecki).

AI, a type of qualitative research, does not require large samples because the interest is placed on the quality of the sample. Therefore, AI findings reveal rich information gathered from diverse data sources rather than from as many cases as could possibly be considered. Katz (2001) articulated the priority:

> There is no methodological value in piling up confirming cases; the strategy is exclusively qualitative, seeking encounters with new varieties of data in order to force revisions that will make the analysis valid when applied to an increasingly diverse range of cases. (pp. 480–481)

Merriam (2009) succinctly described data analysis: "The process begins deductively by formulating a hypothesis about the phenomenon of interest. If an instance of the phenomenon fits the hypothesis, it stands; if a case does not fit the hypothesis, the hypothesis is revised" (p. 205). However, Robinson (1951) suggested that the hypothesis, in this case a definition, can be revised to include or exclude data related to the phenomenon. Specifically, Robinson mentions a concept by Dub referred to as *limiting the universal*, which means that for the application of it, a universal truth must have limits.

In summary, AI is used to capture everyone's description or experience of a phenomenon, but the researcher scrutinizes and sorts the data such that the analysis includes all cases of the phenomenon that describe it while excluding those not related to the phenomenon of interest. The metric used to include or exclude the characteristics of a phenomenon is based on the answers to the following questions: "Which characteristics must exist for the phenomenon to occur?" and "Which may prevent or hinder the phenomenon from occurring?" Thus, the outcome of the analysis describes the characteristics required and those that can or must be excluded in defining the subject of interest (Robinson, 1951).

This method does not lead to causally made conclusions. Even if all necessary characteristics for a phenomenon to transpire are found, the phenomenon does not necessarily materialize as a matter of course; however, only when the characteristics are found can the potential for a phenomenon be confirmed. Therefore, in the end, AI is used to define or categorize items, ideas, processes, and concepts discretely so that the outcome features enough precise characteristics to include all possibilities while intentionally excluding those not required. These limits are created and substantiated by continually reviewing the data related to the phenomenon.

Sample

Using purposeful sampling (as per Given, 2008), we solicited members from the academic advising community for participation. We made no restrictions on participation from those who responded to our invitation because we wanted

information-rich data from participants who had an interest in the outcome of the study (as explained by Patton, 2002, p. 230). This type of stakeholder sampling has been useful in gaining information from participants with specific experience or understanding and investment in the topic studied and creates a broad parameter for inclusion of a diverse study population. To gauge participant's investment in the occupation of academic advising, respondents affirmed the statement, "You are an academic advisor or your occupation is directly involved with academic advising"; all participants answered with *yes*.

Prospective participants were recruited at two different academic advising conferences in 2015: the Utah Advising Association (UAA) annual statewide conference in St. George and the 2015 NACADA Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. Potential participants voluntarily gave their contact information to us, and we later e-mailed them a link to take the survey. Data collected from the Utah regional conference participants were analyzed to initiate the development of codes and the categories leading to some themes. The analysis of this pilot study data became the starting point for additional analysis of data gathered from participants at the national annual conference, who we contacted like those from the Utah conference. A total of 72 participants from both conferences completed the survey, and 71 usable data files (pilot study, $n = 23$, full study, $n = 48$) were used to produce a definition of academic advising (1 data file was corrupted and unusable).

Survey

The questionnaire consisted of five questions based on past research on the occupation of academic advising and advising practice literature. These questions were further refined by definitions or specific characteristics of other occupations, which we evaluated for qualities or statements of essentiality. At the top of the *Defining Academic Advising Survey* was the following statement directing participants to provide normative answers:

> When answering the following questions about academic advising, please do not confuse your answers with what others expect of you, what is listed in your job description, or even what other advisors typically do. Your answers to these questions should be based on what you imagine or perceive the specific task of academic

advising means. What does it mean to academically advise? In particular, what does academic advising look like at its best, most effective, and fulfilling.

After analyzing the data from the pilot study, we found that participants often intermingled the qualifications of an advisor with the practice of advising. In an attempt to separate the qualifications of an advisor from the activities of advising, one question was added to the survey sent to the 2015 NACADA conference participants.

The following items from the questionnaire were used in the final study:

- Who do academic advisors see or serve?
- Why do academic advisors see these people? What is the purpose of the interaction?
- If academic advising occurs in a specific setting or under any specific circumstances, please describe the setting or circumstances.
- What is essential to academic advising? In other words, without this (or these) characteristic(s), it would not be academic advising.
- Describe the qualifications or skills of an academic advisor.
- What is academic advising? How do you define it?

Participants responded to the items through a secure web-based survey. The participants' responses were captured through a secure server for future analysis through REDCap (Harris, Taylor, Thielke, Payne, Gonzalez, & Conde, 2009).

Analysis

Analysis of these data resulted in categories and codes that contributed to the definition. First, reading through each line of participant responses, we assigned each word or phrase to a category. Categories captured the status of a word or phrase in comparison to the definition that existed when that participant's data were analyzed. Categories included: *already in*, *add/change*, *new category*, and *not applicable*. Data were gathered and analyzed using three programs: Dedoose 7.0.23 (SocioCultural Research Consultants, 2016), Excel 15.32, and REDCap (Harris et al., 2009).

Second, using the categories, we grouped words together to develop codes. Each of us used the data in each category to revise the previously

Table 1. Phrases describing advising that emerged during analysis

Stage	Phrase
Initial (pre-study): created using descriptions of academic advising from the NACADA web site	Academic advising is conducted by a specialist or expert that studies individuals or groups and their academic engagement in higher education and whose aim is a successful higher education interaction for the individual or group.
Discussion 1 (after pilot study)	Academic advising uses professional knowledge for a productive student interaction that empowers campus and community members to achieve their academic goal(s) in higher education.
After discussion 2 (after final study)	Academic advising (is a collaborative process) that applies professional knowledge and skills (tools) to a (confidential/safe) and (proactive, purposeful, deliberate, intentional) academic interaction to empower students and campus and community members to productively/ successfully navigate and persist in academic interactions (endeavors) related to higher education to address goals.
Final	Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education.

inducted definition sequentially into a new definition based on these codes. We each attempted to maintain the participant's word choice, if possible, but chose a synonym or phrase, as allowed by the AI method, when necessary to ensure that the definition made sense. Once the coding process was complete, we met as a group to review our analyses.

Findings

Each of us arrived to the discussion meeting with similar definitions, and this strengthened our assertion of interrater reliability. After sharing and reviewing each other's conclusions, we discussed the findings in depth to ensure that each definition was understood completely and that it met the goal of being a necessary condition for advising. We also conducted further conversations to address word choices, semantics, and the essential characteristics of the data used to produce the categories and codes. After subsequent revisions, we arrived at a final definition that respected the data. Table 1 captures four phases for the definition that materialized during the analysis process.

Definition

The following definition emerged through this research process: Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education.

Arriving at a definition through the analysis of participants' normative understanding of academic advising, according to the characteristics that do and do not define it, proved a complex task. The analysis required dissecting each participant's word choices; our own relationship, as individuals and a group, with each word; the academic advising community's affiliation with the word; the usage of the term in research; and the definition(s) of these words as it (they) appear in dictionaries and other impartial sources. This largely semantic discussion meant that each word was deliberately chosen and supported by participant data, numerous discussions about the data and the way the data logically supported the choice of term. While many research manuscripts simply show the research findings and let the data set speak for itself, we felt that, because of the concerns about the very topic of the study—a definition of academic advising—we would divulge more information about our findings. Therefore, mirroring our discussions, we describe the rationale behind the selection and placement of each word or phrase and some detail about the

ramifications of making these choices. This greater detail provides essential clarification for understanding the focus, purpose, and capacity of each word.

Academic Advising

Participants used the word *advising* and the words *academic advising* to describe the activity. However, most respondents qualified the term *advising* with *academic* or proceeded to describe the endeavor as related to academics. The use of the qualifying term *academic* reflects participant data and highlights the primary purpose of advisors as engaging with matters related to academics. The data suggested that advising included assisting students with financial choices, identity crises, or personal issues, but only as part of academic advising when these concerns affected the student's ability to achieve, thrive, or survive academically. Most respondents indicated that to address issues not related to a student's academics or outside the scope of advisor knowledge, advisors should refer students to the appropriate entity on campus. According to the data, this finding may be interpreted to mean that the aim of advising must be related to academics or it may not be advising.

Respondents did not use adjectives, other than *academic*, to describe advising. For instance, no respondent described advising as *higher education advising*, *student advising*, or *career advising*. This finding indicates that advising, when described as *academic advising*, seems to describe a unique and specific activity that respondents did not conflate with any other purpose. The lack of qualifiers indicates that academic advising is a specific and unique activity in the minds of the participants because no descriptors were needed to define the term operationally.

Knowledge of the Field

As many academic advising researchers know, very little research supports academic advising as a recognized field of study. However, according to Dictionary.com, a *field* is generally defined as an area of interest or a sphere of activity. To our knowledge, no one would dispute that academic advising is based on an area of interest or a sphere of activity. The phrase, *knowledge of the field*, then was used to describe literature or information that relates to the purpose(s) of academic advising or the sphere of the responsibilities that it encompasses.

The use of the term *knowledge* can be explained by reading participants' descriptions of the knowledge necessary to advise. For example, one participant described this knowledge as

assess, provide interventions, expertise in student development theory, multiculturalism, career, disability, university policy, international student law, mental health issues, campus resources, community resources, emergency services, provide insight or assistance, counseling skills. [To] meet with students, listen to their situations, apply these situations to the wide range of policy and constraints, discuss options with the student, help the student work through any concerns, help the student improve his/her ability to process/cope with circumstances regarding academics, and fill in the gaps left by the higher educational system. Advisors are there to assist with basic questions for navigating the college experience, but they are also there to assess and provide interventions for when a student needs to progress developmentally.

We agreed that application of the techniques mentioned by this participant require knowledge, experience, and a high level of skill generally evidenced in tertiary education. Most participants related similar responses regarding the knowledge necessary for effective advising. Grites et al. (2008), reported that "fifty-one resources . . . support the theoretical foundations of academic advising" (p. 462), showing that knowledge related to the field has been rich and varied, not static, solidified, or simple, for at least a decade. As with other professions or occupations, the requisite knowledge changes and may be considered distinctive by region or locality to a limited extent. As new theories, ideas, research findings, and tools surface, the knowledge base for advising shifts or stratifies. However, to be called *academic advising*, the endeavor must be undertaken according to a knowledge base that applies to practice.

Applies

We used the word *applies* to capture participants' position that advisors must use knowledge of the field to help students and advance interactions within higher education. In other

words, academic advising is more than knowing or studying theories and strategies. It is the application of concepts and principles that defines an activity as academic advising.

Like a paralegal, who may know and study the law, but cannot apply the law or act as an attorney, para-advisors possess specific knowledge and training, but they have not acquired the education, skill, knowledge, or experience to advise skillfully and responsibly by applying knowledge. Therefore, both the ability to apply information and the ability to understand it are required for the academic advising interaction.

Empower

Participants overwhelmingly described advisors facilitating, enabling, helping, or empowering students to undertake activities and make choices. To *empower* means "to give the authority or power to do something; make stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights."

Descriptions from participants clearly indicated that advisors do not perform specific tasks, such as scheduling, picking courses, or writing petitions when such a task usurped or replaced a student's power or authority. Thus, the responses frame advising activities (assessment, research, meetings, interactions, orientations, and scheduling) with the purpose of providing students and campus and community members the means to understand and use their own authority and power. This empowerment was sometimes described as a collaboration aimed at causing an effect on a person's ability to interact successfully within higher education. The implication that advising leads to student empowerment may affirm that tasks and interactions that do not promote the student's (campus community's) authority, sovereignty, or power to navigate higher education may not fall under the umbrella of academic advising practice.

Students and Campus and Community Members

The terms for the stakeholders of advising did not emerge in the data with the specific configuration of *students and campus and community members*. However, the research process often leads to new words and phrases that reflect concepts but not verbatim terms; that is, words that accurately represent the data or fit the context may constitute the best choices for the analysis. For example, the phrase *students and campus and community members* provided a more accurate context than would a listing of all related words uttered by participants: *parents*, *students*, *faculty*, *staff*, *nonstudents*, *outside organizations*, and *businesses. Students and campus and community members* was created to include any person or entity that interacts within the higher education campus for any reason.

Although most data described a typical interaction with currently enrolled students, advisors described themselves as an *ambassador* or the go-to person for questions and answers to problems for the entire campus and community: "I don't turn anyone away." This role of ombudsperson may stem from the advising office as a resource for information and referrals, a description revealed in the data. Advisors in our study indicated that they might be tasked to work with nearly anyone on a higher education campus.

Navigate

The data conclusively showed that the provision of academic advising is considered purposeful, with direction, and goal oriented. Nearly every response included the words or synonyms for the words *goal* and *navigate* (more than twice per participant). *Navigation* means to "steer, pilot, or guide over a specific terrain" and may encompass goal setting or goal discovery, neither of which is requisite to the definition. Because advisees do not always present a goal, the term *navigation* more accurately captures the participant's viewpoint that advising is aimed at assisting, directing, or guiding students as they interact with the higher education setting. *Navigation* clarifies a specific purpose for the interaction and the activity; mainly, that advising is a resource, like a compass, that provides direction and other valuable tools.

Successful

We chose the term *successful* for a context where it does not denote pleasant, easy, or even desirable; rather, for our study the term reinforces the aim of a productive interaction that achieves a purpose. In this context, a synonym for *successful* could be *productive*. An academic advisor can help a student, advisor, or member of the campus or community navigate the journey by providing directions, issuing warnings, sharing a list of equipment, consulting about a time line, and giving other similar types of support.

However, *successful* reflects respondents' belief that advising is more than providing tools or warnings; rather, advising is seen as productive. The navigation and the tools are provided so that action transpires, whether positive or negative, and this success either results in knowledge, goal achievement, direction, or other measure of productivity, defined overtly or not, by the advisee and advisor.

Academic Interactions

As a human-centered activity, academic advising revolves around the academic interactions of students and campus and community members within the world of higher education. Participant data suggested that students communicate with advisors to discuss their relationship or experiences related to academics, including those with technology, course instructors, careers, policies, people, identity, failures and other personal issues, or numerous other higher education concerns related to academic interactions. In this way, academic advising is not limited to only students in classes and includes all components of the academic setting.

Higher Education

Every response in the study indicated that academic advising is based on unique endeavors that specifically relate to higher education. The academic advising interaction may transpire anywhere and with anyone from any age group, but it is related to the sphere of higher education.

Discussion

The definition—academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education—provides a focal point for both the person advising and those interested in the work of advising. We contend that academic advising benefits when advisors speak with a common language and a voice that is based on a common understanding of the responsibilities that take practice closer to or further from the purpose.

As important, the definition allows for sharing this understanding with those who supervise, hire, or interact with advisors so they acquire a clear understanding of the purpose of advising and can offer succinct presentations of advising responsibilities. Provosts, deans, chairs, faculty members, and others generally cannot take time to read a series of standards, concepts, or values. If inter-

ested, some may struggle to apprehend the information in context. Therefore, a common definition offers a practical means to comprehend the process of academic advising. Indeed, advisors face long and complex professional development processes to incorporate and master the sources that contribute to explanations of advising. Therefore, a clear, succinct, and common definition helps advisors, administrators, and constituents demarcate the roles and responsibilities of advising from those not incorporated into advising.

Our intention in creating a definition, however, extends beyond the provision of a job description; rather, we offer it for exploration, further delineation, and digestion by each practitioner. For instance, this definition does not offer guidance on the way to advise. Therefore, we did not incorporate any practices or methods into it. Advisors can advocate for the appreciative advising or the advising as teaching approach, each of which constitutes a choice made by experts who practice advising.

Likewise, advisors determine the research, process, or literature that informs their practice according to their own circumstances and their own predispositions. Therefore, each advisor in any office or at any campus should investigate the Concept (NACADA, 2006), the Core Values of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2005), Academic Advising Core Competencies (NACADA, 2017), and other literature to integrate or frame their personal philosophy of advising and measure or explore the way it fits within the definition of academic advising. If the definition does not fit the enterprise, then additional AI or other research should be undertaken to ameliorate the finding. This engagement across resources, combined with personal reflection, results in a rich understanding that guides advising practice but does not alter the base definition.

In our opinion, an individual or institutional stakeholder should not create a distinct definition of advising according to personal particular needs; such a definition counters growth in the occupation and makes academic advising impossible. Experts do not create a unique definitions of their vocation. Practitioners make educated and skilled decisions about the tools, philosophies, or skills to match the client, the responsibilities, and the inclinations of the expert, but the choice does not change the essentiality of the activity—the definition of it. During our analysis of dictionary and professional organizational definitions used for nonadvising occupations, we surmised that occupational activity

is defined by a succinct but relatively broad characterization. Brevity or succinctness seemed important to convey the definition to others, and the breadth made it as inclusive as possible while circumscribing it. This definition of the occupation does not limit the way it is practiced or studied, but provides a base from which those individuals in the field further refine it with experience, knowledge, practice, theory, and research.

Although we created a definition, we encourage continuation of the process. The definition is not intended as a commandment but as a reflection of the current understanding and interpretation of the essential characteristics of academic advising as described by the respondents. Thus, as the field changes, more data are analyzed, and the field grows and changes, the definition must specifically include or exclude more data and be revised accordingly.

Limitations

Five main limitations can be attributed to this study. First, as Katz (2001) indicated, AI is based on data collection to describe a range of varied cases. For the study presented herein, we could not determine the diversity of the sample population because we purposely gathered limited demographic information: highest education level, type of advising position/interaction with advising, and NACADA region. However, additional demographic information, such as number of years advising, institution type, or other personal characteristics, including gender, race, ethnicity, or age, might have revealed the nature of the cases more clearly. Of specific interest for future research, the information on whether participants act as primary-role or faculty advisors may yield useful information for determining a reflective definition. This limitation also may mean that the definition may not apply equally to every type of campus or all advisors; however, the significance of the findings, arrived at by inducting the information from these participants' lived experiences, remains intact.

Second and third, the participants came from the UAA and NACADA conferences. Therefore, information, invitations, and solicitations were offered as professional advising development opportunities. This approach favored people from a specific location and with the financial resources for a membership to NACADA and professional development and travel, which means that the data gathered may not represent every type of advising situation.

Although we remain confident that we collected diverse opinions on the activities and definitions of advising by people who represented many others in the advising field, we surveyed practitioners and administrators with access and interest in professional development. The data might have been richer if gathered from other stakeholders, such as students, faculty members who do not advise, campus administrators, alumni, and community members. However, nonpractitioner perceptions may or may not be relevant to the operational definition. Nonetheless, using a more inclusive process, in the future, to gather data from a variety of stakeholders might provide richer data for additional analysis.

Fourth, AI has been traditionally used to analyze an interaction or a relationship. To utilize the AI method fully, we could have video (or audio) recorded academic advising interactions and analyzed the recordings. Although review of tapes would not provide a normative understanding of the activity, the data might have contributed to a more direct understanding of academic advising. Therefore, direct observation may provide data to substantiate or alter the definition.

Finally, our definition, academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education, should not be considered conclusive. The AI method remains flexible to accommodate undiscovered versions of the phenomenon; in fact, any new case or understanding should be analyzed. As the academic advising practice is better understood, refined, and developed, the definition will evolve through ongoing research. By acknowledging these limitations, we and those who come after understand the limitations and opportunities to expand this research.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

A definition of academic advising has numerous potential implications. We believe that scholarly papers could be written based on the implications of creating a definition for academic advising. However, we focused on a limited number of possibilities to discuss for each area of practice, policy, and future research.

The definition, academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education, could serve as a measurement or rubric

to asses all the activities or practices of advisors. At a minimum, it outlines the meaning of *academic advising* and the responsibilities that could be encompassed by the academic advisor. Most notably, it may also restrict the list of endeavors academic advisors undertake and who is considered an academic advisor. Tasks deemed non-advising by our participants, such as scheduling, web design, t-shirt making, or reimbursements, for example, could be evaluated to determine which of these, if any, empower individuals to navigate higher education successfully. Any that do not meet the goal, should be defined as *other than advising*. Likewise, if faculty members, deans, and chairs adopted this definition, advisors might be asked to participate regularly in curricular decisions, assessments, and other processes deemed empowering for the successful negotiation of higher education.

A universal definition shared with the human resources department may contribute to efforts to develop knowledge levels applicable to a variety of academic advising positions. Specifically, our research can be applied to creation of academic advising career ladders through collaboration between advisors and human resource managers on determining the skills encompassed by advising, the necessary knowledge for participation in advising, development of skills after hire, and compensation parameters that would characterize such a career ladder. The resulting definition might also lead to a standard for the educational level and pre-employment training requirements. By establishing clear intentions for academic advising embedded in a definition such that requirements for training, education, or other necessary skills are delineated, a standard for practice can also be initiated.

Perhaps most tangible and directly aligned with our intent, researchers can use the definition, academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education, to explain precisely the topics for study, demarcate variables, and discuss the way findings can be generalized to advising. Clarification of the term *academic advising* contributes to knowledge of the parameters for and the core of a meaningful advising theory or theories most consistent with a consensus view of advising. Specifically, using this definition in a hypothesis, researchers can use video or audio recordings to document advising objectively. The data from observation along with the data analyzed with AI could generate a strong and tested definition of advising. Furthermore, AI and observation-based research can be conducted to determine the level of relevance of existing theories, the Concept (NACADA, 2006), the Core Values (NACADA, 2005), Academic Advising Core Competencies (NACADA, 2017), and other important statements characterizing advising for enriching the definition we put forth herein.

Conclusion

Using a common, baseline definition to define the activity of academic advising gives advisors a common language and reference. With a singular voice, advisors may describe advising activity more easily, advocate more effectively, and conduct and understand research on advising with more confidence. The clarification and consensus wrought from the definition may lead to other benefits such as more appropriate compensation, analogous work, clarity in occupational progression, and better utilization and harmonization of skills to meet the mission of the institution, individual, department, or unit. Because it does not remain static but evolves, AI can be used continuously to provide a consistent answer to the question: What is academic advising?

Although defining the activity constitutes an important exercise for advisors and those who seek advising, a definition should be not be used in a silo. It should be shared and understood universally as a tool that contributes to the institutional mission for student success. In the end, the use of or an attempt to create a more universal definition does not appear to lead to any significant negative consequences; rather, only positive or neutral outcomes are realized. Therefore pursuing a definition can only add to the richness of the academic advising body of research.

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