The History of Higher Education and Academic Advising

This poster series depicts a brief history of academic advising and poses questions about the future of advising. You are encouraged to add your own perspectives, insights, and lived experience to the presentation.

“All social systems, no matter how grand or far-flung, both express and are expressed in the routines of the daily social life…” - Giddens 1984, p. 36

“Study the past if you would define the future” - Confucius

Advising is an unrecognized activity

Before 1870
College as preparing a learned gentry

1650  1675  1700  1725
Prior to 1776: The nine colonial colleges enrolled very few students, predominantly from wealthy classes. These colleges were meant to socialize boys through strict intellectual and physical discipline, role modeled and enforced by faculty.

c. 1776-1800: Following the American Revolution, the purposes of higher education shifted from intellectual and physical development of wealthy young men, to promoting a democratic government and an educated citizenry.

c. 1800-1870: Institutional missions expanded to include emerging disciplines. The number of institutions increased dramatically. A wider range of individuals had access to higher education.

Faculty disciplinary specialization emerged and increased. Classical curricula loosened and became increasingly focused on “practical” disciplines like natural sciences and philosophy.

Faculty roles as in loco parentis disciplinarians continued. Institutions began naming advisors to be allies to students in mediating student-faculty relations and navigating college life generally.

“A new rule has been established that each student shall choose from among the faculty same one who is to be his adviser and friend in all matters in which assistance is desired and is to be the medium of communication between the student and faculty.” - Hayes, 1840

How have expectations around student-faculty relationships changed?

Advising is a recognized but (largely) unexamined activity

1870-1970
College as preparation for the industrial era; social experience of college life

1750  1775  1800  1825
During this long period in advising’s history (detailed in a separate poster), several trends continued and other key changes set a historical foundation that continues to shape academic advising today.

1) The social and professional roles higher education played for individuals expanded and complicated. Increased access to higher education, and changes in credentialing for the professions relate to an increase in curricular complexity and the enrollment of an expanding and increasingly diverse student body.

2) As academic disciplines emerged and the role of knowledge generation became important to the funding model for higher education institutions, faculty became increasingly specialized in their disciplines.

3) The growing field of educational psychology, and the emergence of the Student Personnel Point of View led to the emergence of a cadre of student personnel staff and programs to support student transition and development.

In some places, this also contributed to an increased recognition of the need for specialization among those who advise.

Throughout this era, academic advising was largely accomplished by faculty. Advising’s two articulated purposes – educational planning and student development – were often placed in opposition to each other because of the way they emerged as priorities. In many institutions, academic advising duties gravitated toward the clerical, rather than the intellectual.

Advising is more intentionally recognized and examined

1970-2003
College as social mobility, vocational preparation

1850  1875  1900  1925  1950  1975  2000  2015
As advising grew as an important and distinct role in higher education, more attention was paid to the purposes, theories, and methods used in practice.

1970s: Burns Crockett and Terry O’Banion each connected academic advising practice to theories of student development.

Both attempted to

• Reconcile student personnel perspectives with teaching
• Call for advising practice to move toward a common ideal
• Normalize the kind of help students seek through advising

When interpreted from the lens of the Student Personnel Point of View from the 1950’s, these works became cornerstones of the Developmental Advising paradigm, which, in some cases, further differentiated faculty advising from that done by primary-role advisors.

1980s: As attention to advising grew, practitioners recognized the importance of scholarship focused on academic advising. NACADA, founded in 1979, facilitated opportunities to discuss important issues and build a literature base focused on academic advising.

1990s: Assessments of advising found that, although perceived as important, advising remained a weak point at many institutions. Importantly, they indicated a mismatch between academic advising goals (student development), dominant practices (relaying information), and student perception (general dissatisfaction).

Advising practitioners intentionally clarify and convey the role of advising within higher education

2003-Present
College as an individual investment

Early 2000s: Academic advising attracted practitioners from diverse educational backgrounds, who contributed new perspectives to the field. The primary paradigm of Developmental Advising was joined by new ways of examining advising theory and practice.

Several events focused attention on clarifying advising’s purposes and standards of practice.

2005: Advising is Teaching challenged the Developmental Advising paradigm

2006: NACADA’s Concept of Academic Advising highlighted the educational role of advising

2008: Advising is Advising challenged advisors to claim a clear educational purpose and to consume and contribute to scholarship

2010: Scholarly Inquiry in Academic Advising was published by NACADA to support the growing number of practitioner-scholars

2013: The Professionalization of Academic Advising highlighted the need for standard advisor credentials situated in a substantive knowledge base.

What educational background do you bring to advising and how has that influenced your practice?

NACADA's Professionalism in Academic Advising

This is a summary of a chapter in a forthcoming NACADA publication. Key references are on the associated handout.
1870-1970: Advising is a recognized but (largely) unexamined activity

The mid 20th Century: A pivotal period in advising history

1890s: Expansion of Curricular Choice
Near the end of the nineteenth century, American higher education was viewed as a means of creating mature individuals who could contribute to society. Under this philosophy, students received greater freedom to choose how to focus their studies.

1885: At Harvard, the “New Education” allowed students to construct their own curriculum.

1886: At Johns Hopkins, students chose a broad topical area within which to focus their studies.

1924: Assessment of Advising
A study of student personnel work conducted by Louis B. Hopkins (1926) at 14 prominent institutions found that successful advisors needed specific skills and knowledge that were not in alignment with those possessed by many who were asked to advise. Hopkins’ study revealed ambivalence toward advising among many faculty.

1940s: “Guidance” and “Counseling”
Notably during this time, psychological counseling, career counseling, and academic advising were often conflated under the terms “guidance” and “counseling,” which further blurred advising’s educational purpose. The underlying philosophy of the time:
1. Implicated students’ abilities were fixed, and
2. Emphasized vocational purposes of education (MacIntosh, 1948).

1950s: Dedicated Advisors & Advising Units
The first dedicated advising units were established in the 1950s in response to a greater awareness of student need, in many cases related to increased enrollments of World War II veterans.

The primary-role advisors often came from counseling and psychological backgrounds, and applied their theoretical perspectives and methods to the practice of academic advising. The Student Personnel Point of View informed many of these practices, which were quite different than those applied by faculty who were more steeped in their own respective disciplines.

The mission of advising to assist students in making decisions about their academic-intellectual growth, which was already systematically unrealized, was further diffused by the emerging focus on student psycho-social development.

1958: Assessment of Advising
Despite the growing specialization of advisors, inconsistency in practice and purpose remained. A 1958 study of academic advising at 20 institutions conducted by James Robertson affirmed the generally-recognized importance of helping students navigate academic decisions.

However, it also revealed that advising was predominantly clerical in nature, and students’ needs were often trivialized. Of particular note, Robertson called for a clear, educationally-focused philosophy of advising which would guide practice and enable the evaluation of advising.

academic advising’s history affects both daily work with students and advising’s place within higher education. Those who wish to affect change in advising need an understanding of the structures and roles that serve as obstacles and opportunities to innovation. This poster series highlights some areas with lasting ramifications for academic advising’s status and practice.

How can advisors influence the future shape of the field?
As advisors envision the future, the history of academic advising and higher education is an important guide. Throughout the history of academic advising, social structures within and beyond higher education have influenced advising. In addition, the perspectives, roles, and language used by practitioners (as seen in the influence of the Student Personnel Point of View and increased creation and use of scholarship) have also influenced the development of academic advising. This history shows the critical role practitioners played and continue to play in facilitating change.

“before we can tackle the problem of advising and directing our students satisfactorily, we must develop a philosophy on which to base our actions”
(MacIntosh, 1948, p. 135).

In thinking about the future of advising, consider the following:
1. How do historical trends influence daily practice at your institution?
2. This history is based primarily on large, American research universities; how do the histories of other institutions contribute new insights to the story?
3. How is academic advising structured and personnel organized at your institution? Why is it that way?
4. This poster highlights particular aspects of academic advising’s history and omits other parts of the story. Why did the authors choose to highlight these aspects?
5. What research topics could be important to further delineate advising within higher education?