Using “Tools of the Trade” from Faculty Advisors’ Disciplines to Support Advising Development

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A Little Background

- My job:
  - Student Services Coordinator
  - Nursing Department, Winona State University
  - All-University Advising Committee
Outline for Today

A review of my dissertation research and findings
– Some background on faculty advising
– Research methods, including:
  – Research focus and design
  – Site and participant information
  – Data collection and analysis
  – Limitations
– Major findings

Small group discussion focusing on developing strategies for supporting and improving faculty advising on your campus

My project was supported by a research grant from NACADA
Importance of Quality Advising

– Promotes student retention and success (e.g. Folsom & Scobie, 2010; Tinto, 2010)

– Effective for all students and institution types; including low-income and first-generation students (e.g. Klepfer & Hull, 2012; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013)

– Represents institutional commitment to student success (Drake, 2011) and institutional action to promote retention (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Tinto, 2010)
Why Focus on Faculty Advisors?

– Traditional providers of academic advising
– Faculty advisors have advising responsibilities at two-thirds of U. S. colleges and universities (NACADA, 2011)
– Most advising models include significant roles for faculty advisors (NACADA, 2011)
Challenges for Faculty Advisors in Developing Advising Skills

– **Preparation** (Adams, 2002; Austin, 2002; Gaff, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hutson, 2013)
– **Time demands** (Wallace & Wallace, 2010)
– **Expectations** (Allen & Smith, 2008; Wiseman & Messitt, 2010)
– **Attitudes** (Wallace, 2011)
– **Training is often limited** (NACADA, 2011)
Additional Considerations for Faculty Advisors

- Faculty advising may be more episodic, occurring primarily in a few weeks leading up to registration periods.
- Faculty advisors typically have smaller caseloads than professional advisors.
- Smaller caseloads, combined with a concentrated focus on advising for only a few weeks each semester, may mean that many faculty advisors have less practice with advising knowledge and competencies than professional advisors.
Limited Research on Faculty Advising

– Research on advising led by NACADA
– Advising research often includes both professional and faculty advisors, with professional advisors representing a majority of participants
– Limited research on training for faculty advisors or on faculty advisors’ experiences in learning advising skills.
Methods
Research focus

- Explore faculty advisors’ reflections about and experiences in learning advising competencies and approaches
- Qualitative design

- Three foundational content components:
  - Informational—“knowledge academic advisors must master”
  - Conceptual—“concepts academic advisors must understand”
  - Relational—“skills academic advisors must demonstrate”
Research Site

- Mid-sized, public, four-year comprehensive university in the Midwestern U. S.
- 90% of students are undergraduates; 85% are under 25 years of age
- Faculty advising model, with mandatory advising for all undergraduates each semester
- A small number of professional advisors serve undeclared students
- Some colleges and departments have added professional advisors to provide advising resources and training to faculty advisors
Participant Selection

- Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members
- Faculty advisors for undergraduate students in colleges and departments without supporting professional advisors
- Four to ten years of employment and advising experience
Participant Recruitment

- Emails inviting participation sent to faculty meeting selection criteria
- Snowball sampling
- Eight faculty advisors participated in the study
  - From communications, social sciences, and health sciences departments
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Years at University</th>
<th>Years of advising</th>
<th>Number of advisees</th>
<th>Experience at other institutions/Type of institution</th>
<th>Preferred pronouns</th>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Teaching only/public 4-year</td>
<td>She, her, hers</td>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nan</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>She, her, hers</td>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maddie</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Teaching only, public and private 4-year</td>
<td>She, her, hers</td>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>She, her, hers</td>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>No assigned advisees</td>
<td>Teaching only/public 4-year</td>
<td>She, her, hers</td>
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<td>Bill</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Teaching only, public and private 4-year</td>
<td>He, him, his</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Claudia</td>
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<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
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<td>She, her, hers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Teaching and undergrad advising/public 4-year</td>
<td>She, her, hers</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

– Individual, face-to-face interviews
– Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed
– Semi-structured interview format
Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about your first experiences with advising. How did you prepare?
- Tell me about how your advising has changed since your first experiences
- Describe how you define good advising.
- Tell me about your philosophy of advising
- Describe your goals for advising
- Tell me about an advising experience you consider to be a success
- Talk about experiences or people that influenced your approach(es) to advising
- Tell me about what you find challenging when advising student and ideas about what might be helpful in addressing those challenges
Data Analysis: Moving from codes to categories to themes (Saldaña, 2016)

- Five step process, begun after completing the first interview
  1. Attribute coding (Saldaña, 2016)
  2. Process coding (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016) and In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016)
  3. Constant comparative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014)
  4. Theming the data and code mapping (Saldaña, 2016)
  5. Pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016)

- Memo-writing after each interview, and throughout analysis
Limitations

- Institutional factors
  - Size and type of institution
  - Student demographics
  - Faculty advising model

- Participant characteristics
  - Limited number of disciplines, all in helping professions and social sciences
  - Nearly all participants were women
  - Most had significant advising experience and tenure
  - All volunteers, most talked about valuing and enjoying advising
Results and Discussion
Informational Component: Beginning with Information

- “Figuring it all out”
  - Information for advising was a priority for beginning advisors
  - Easiest component to learn, but time-consuming
  - Studying and assimilating information used skills faculty members already possessed
- Strategies for learning:
  - “Learning on my own”
  - “Learning from others”
  - “Getting organized”
Relational Component: Critical Advising Skills

- “Building relationships”
- Priority for participants
- As one participant observed, “that personal connection is some of the magic that happens in some of those interactions”
- No participant discussed needing to learn skills for relationship-building
Conceptual Component: Concepts Guiding Advising

“Tools of the trade”
- Perspectives and skills from participants’ education, experiences, and disciplines reflected in:
  - Documentation
  - Advising tools and techniques
  - Approaches to interactions with students
Tools of the Trade: Documentation

Participants from health sciences disciplines developed documentation tools similar to those they had used in clinical settings.

I'm making documentation forms coming from the clinical world and very used to documenting everything we do. So I just took those type of SOAP [subjective, objective, assessment, and plan] notes, we used SBARs [situation, background, assessment, and recommendation], but you know that kind of thing and tailored it to advising.
Tools of the Trade: Documentation

Others used less formal systems, such as notes and emails to document advising conversations for future reference and as aids to memory.

And I use that back sheet [the blank reverse side of the advisor’s planning sheet for advising] just as a blank slate for me to be taking notes as we go through. So I’m oftentimes jotting notes while the advisee is in the room, or when they leave I try to make sure that I’ve got a couple minutes to just say, they're thinking about doing this, you know, in the summer of 2021. And I will forget if I don't write it down.

If I meet with a student and we've talked about some things, usually I'll try and send a follow up email mostly for myself. Because I can remember what the heck I told them.
Tools of the Trade: Advising Tools and Techniques

Health sciences faculty developed checklist and detailed course guides.

One advisor described an advising binder she had developed:

I have all our different sheets here. I have a little thing here if you want to be an O T [occupational therapist] what the most common prereqs are, and why a psych minor might work well with that. I also collect like the coaching minor, psychology minor, sheets like that that are common things for our students. I've also have this binder developed because more students wanted information on graduate programs. And because again we're a very broad major, they're looking at a very wide host of different things to do. So I've tried to, yes, identify those students but also I've come up with “this is a list of what the course is, what the prereqs of that course is, but then also what is it a prereq for,” so that they can see the importance in some of those things. But it's also a quick reference guide for me.
Tools of the Trade: Advising Tools and Techniques

– Faculty from other departments described using the course catalog as a primary tool for advising.
– Advising for majors requiring minors
– Helping students to consider minors consistent with their career and professional interests
– Options for course selection within some majors
Tools of the Trade: Approaches to Interactions with Students

Health sciences faculty described parallels between listening to students and listening to patients in healthcare settings:

And some of it is that clinical background listening to patients, listening to what they need and allowing them the time to share what they need and what they're doing. I mean, some of it comes from our background of health care. Students are no different than our patients. They need things, and we need to listen to them to figure out what it is that they need.
Tools of the Trade: Approaches to Interactions with Students

One social work faculty participant explicitly connected advising with social work:

It's for me, it's very much like meeting a new client in social work practice, that OK, we have to develop some sort of rapport before we're gonna get to the real good stuff here. So I, that's, it's kind of role, you know, I'm role modeling for them also how you start to engage with someone. How do you start to find out who your client is, and what strengths do they bring. What things do they want to work on, where do they want to go. So for me it's all, it's all social work.
Another social work faculty participant connected appreciative advising techniques with social work:

It's another way of thinking about the strengths perspective, which is one of the foundational, you know, theoretical models that the social work profession uses, right? So it's the same thing with a different name on some level, parts of it are. So, you know, for me, it felt very comfortable and familiar, and something that, you know, is another good way of thinking about how I want to be in the world and how I want to work with people, period.
A communication faculty member also emphasized student strengths, and used metaphors to describe her advising:

Now if the student were at a little higher level, trying to contemplate, “OK should I get a degree in communication or should I get a degree in something else?” What I loved to be able to do was to mirror back to the students what I would see in them. So these are the skills that I think that you have. And based on that here are a couple of different paths that I think you’d be really successful in. So you might take this particular course as an entry into the major and see if that feels comfortable to you, but make sure that you're mapping that against your general education where you can see you're not ending up with all these extra courses. But students loved having that mirror held up to them. This is what I see in you. This is what I think you do really well. Does that sound right? Does this feel like a path that might be good for you? And I never really minded if it was or wasn't in the major. Because again it's up to the student.
A sociology faculty member discussed not making assumptions about family support, and asking nonjudgmentally about support systems:

It made me realize that when I'm using those sorts of examples [discussing families] in classes, I need to be more inclusive and not, not say this in a normative way. It's true for my advisees as well. I cannot assume anything about their level of familial support. You know, what their emotional network is. So I will ask them, do you have a strong family support system? And I think that I figure out how to ask that in a nonjudgmental way. And the answers are incredibly varied. So not assuming that they have the resources that other students have has changed the way that I advise. Because now if, say, they don't have strong family support, “well, do you have a different type of network that's providing you with some of that?” It helps that we're in sociology and some of the language that I'm using is stuff that they're familiar with.
Implications for Practice: Developing a Culture of Advising

Training that addresses more than just informational competencies

Assessment of advising quality to

– Identify training needs

– Allow for increased recognition in promotion & tenure process (Hutson, 2013; Wallace, 2011)
Implications for Practice: Developing a Culture of Advising

Institutional supports for advising

– Mentoring and coaching for new advisors
– Advising loads
– Consideration of other advising models
– Recognition and reward for quality advising
How can Tools of the Trade be used on your campus?

Let’s break into small groups to talk about how you might use “Tools of the Trade” for faculty advisor development on your campus.

- Begin with worksheet 1 to brainstorm for about 5 minutes about activities, participants, resources, and strategies.
- Use worksheet 2 and take 5 – 10 minutes to work on a specific plan. Identify one goal for the coming academic year with action steps, a timeline for completion, resources needed, and persons responsible for planned actions.
Transforming Advising from an Obligation to a Privilege

Transforming advising from a “got to do” to a “get to do” activity will require institutional investment in:

– Training and professional development
– Assessment of advising
– Recognition and reward

These investments can help faculty advisors develop both skills and confidence to help transform the advising experience for both advisors and students, and create a culture of advising.
Contact me

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