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ACADEMIC ADVISING AT PENN STATE:

POLICY, PRACTICE, AND POTENTIAL

A Thesis in

Educational Theory and Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

As the field of academic advising grows, and best practices are researched, adopted, assessed, and adapted, it is increasingly important to evaluate the programs already in place in the field. This research project engages in that work through an analysis of current advising policy and practice at Smeal College of Business, Eberly College of Science, and the College of Education at Penn State University, University Park. The study utilizes methods of document and policy analysis to investigate and compare the advising theories and structures of the three colleges, as well as the guidelines and recommendations of the University Advising Council. Advising practices of the three colleges share some elements, but are largely quite varied. Based on these findings, as well as National Academic Advising Association and practitioner recommendations, suggestions for improvements are made to the university.

Keywords: advising, developmental theory, higher education, academic coaching, career counseling

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“I don’t even bother going to my advisor; she doesn’t know anything about my major, so I just end up having to do everything twice.” – *S.P., College of Education Student*

“They have no clue or even bother to have a perspective view of the students and the courses offered from the major, or at least do some research about the major they are advising for, shit. But that is not the worst, the worst is when they mislead the students with their limited knowledge, especially for freshmen. FFS they can really ruin some kids' college experience for being so careless.” – *u/imahobolin, Undergraduate Student (Sumatii, 2019)*

Academic advising is a massively important part of the college experience, but student experiences of academic advising can be varied due to the wide variety of institutional policies and procedures (or lack thereof) governing the profession. This is true at colleges and universities around the country; academic advising is performed by dedicated advisors, faculty members, deans, and combinations thereof. Advisors are housed in centers for student learning, student affairs, individual departments and programs, deans’ offices, and registrar’s offices. Advising as a practice is varied, from fifteen-minute meetings every semester to open office hours as needed, from academic planning only to the holistic/coaching model that has gained popularity over the last five years (NACADA, 2018). The study of advising as a field is fairly new, and though advisors have both a professional association and at least two journals all their own, the debate over

whether advising is a profession as is ongoing. A recent article in *The Mentor: Innovative Scholarship on Academic Advising* highlights a crisis in the field in the face of the corporatization of higher education and rising public distrust in academe (Steele & White, 2019). In the face of such challenges, academic advisors must remain committed to their students, providing guidance not only in matters of major and course selection, but also, often, in career, academic support, and life.

Academic advisors are called on to do a variety of tasks, some closer to counseling than advising. Higher Education's major news source, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published in 2018 an essay called *Student Needs Have Changed. Advising Must Change, Too*. The essay outlines the many expanding roles of the academic advisor in today's changing educational climate. As the demographics of college students change, the resources those students require to be successful must also evolve. At Penn State and colleges and universities around the country, the need for evolution is seen in the strain on mental health resources like counseling centers and school psychiatrists/psychologists. The college student of 2019 is racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse, often of non-traditional age, disabled, first-generation, undocumented. Academic advisors are being called on to answer all manner of questions- not just, "will this course count for my health and wellness requirement?" but also, "I don't think my family believes in anxiety- where can I go for help?"

To respond to these changes, some institutions, support academic advisors and the growth of the advising field through professional development, additional certification, and decreased workload (Anft, 2018). At other institutions, however, what the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has determined to be best practices/standards

are not yet codified in institution-level policy and practice. NACADA provides not only standards, but also professional development opportunities and resources for advisors across the United States. Many in higher education think of student affairs, residential life, and counseling staff as first line professionals when it comes to supporting students. With the right institutional support, academic advisors could be in a unique position to join this team, and support students throughout their college careers in matters academic and otherwise. As students come to college with more complex histories, perhaps it is time that universities think holistically about the resources that could or should be available to help.

Pennsylvania State University has no university-wide statement of commitment to the growth and development of advising as a profession. There are university-wide standards and guidelines for advisors, as well as statements of “rights and responsibilities of advisees”, and these are listed on the Academic Advising Portal at advising.psu.edu. Each college (of the thirteen that serve undergraduate students) has its own advisers, and organizes their workloads and expectations differently. Each college is also able to implement and assess its advising program differently, leading to a wide variety of practices between them. As is common nation-wide, there is diversity between colleges with regard to who does the advising, what the advisors actually do, and what the goals of the advising programs are.

With those things in mind, the goals for this thesis are to utilize policy documents, admissions materials, college materials, and student feedback to learn about the ways different colleges at the university set up the advisor-advisee relationship, compare those practices with a progressive benchmark university, and finally, recommend potential new policies that may improve advisor job satisfaction as well as advisor-student relationships

in multiple colleges. Undergraduate students in the Colleges of Education and Liberal Arts at Penn State have said that they have difficulty getting appointments with advisors, that their advisors are not knowledgeable about major and minor requirements, and that advisors have directed them elsewhere for non-academic path questions and problems. Penn State's Undergraduate Advising Council offers resources and best practices for advisors across colleges.

Penn State Policy: An Overview

The Penn State University Strategic Plan includes six “Foundations.” These foundations are meant to guide the community toward creating and implementing policies that strengthen the “Thematic Priorities” of the Strategic Plan. Of the six foundations, three could be directly addressed by academic advisors: “Enabling Access to Education”, “Engaging Our Students”, and “Fostering and Embracing a Diverse World”. When it comes to access to education, Penn State's stated priority is to address the student debt crisis and cost of attendance, and to make the education offered at the university one that is practical and career-oriented. “Engaging Our Students” highlights the importance of facilitating “co-curricular engagement for all...students”. While there is mention here of “academic support services” and “relationships with faculty”, there are no specific references to individualized guidance and the role advising can play in this arena. Finally, “Fostering and Embracing a Diverse World” recognizes the important roles inclusion and equity play on a 21st Century campus, and highlight the advances Penn State has made in recruitment of students and faculty of diverse backgrounds. While this foundation is vital

to the health and success of the campus community, it falls short in addressing the ways Penn State is behind some of its peer institutions in areas of diversity. One example here is the statement that Penn State will “assertively incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into our research, teaching, learning, outreach, assessment, operations, and decision-making” while at the same time the university does not require implicit bias/diversity training of faculty and staff. In some colleges, all advising is done by faculty members, and the lack of inclusion of advising in the conversation about access, engagement, and inclusion is problematic for students.

Advising at Penn State is governed by the Undergraduate Advising Council (UAC). UAC members are heads of advising from every college, including each commonwealth campus. Members meet monthly during the academic year to provide oversight and guidance for the University’s academic advising program, including standards and assessment protocols. The council recommends policy changes to Faculty Senate, as well, leading to a coordinated advising effort across the whole of Penn State. The Penn State colleges that serve undergraduate students have varying advising structures and practices, but all staff have equal access to the wealth of UAC resources and guidance. Each college’s advising office includes a UAC councilmember, giving them equality of opportunity when it comes to building and maintaining effective advising protocols under committed leadership.

Chapter 2

Background

To guide this thesis work, I sought out recent literature in the field of academic advising, focused strongly on larger institutions where possible. I was initially disheartened by the scope of research in the field. My keyword searches resulted in articles that were related (e.g., residence life, student affairs) or only partially relevant (e.g., articles on advising method, rather than theory). I expanded my search to include the primary text for new and student advisors, as well as conference materials and other resources available through NACADA. Through NACADA, I discovered advisor-practitioners writing on their experiences, and have chosen to include some of those materials in this research. The voice of practitioners, rather than solely academic researchers, lends a particular expertise to the work that I would not have found otherwise. Further, I had my own experiences as an advisor validated and confirmed as I read pieces by advisor-practitioners, and found myself on more even footing conceptually as a result. The evolution of my topic, questions, and data collection are largely due to the inclusion of materials that may have been peer-reviewed, but were accepted by scholars in the field and published in other ways (e.g., NACADA Annual Meeting presentations, webinar transcripts). What follows is a review of the history of advising as a practice and a profession, as well as an interpretation of where the field is heading next.

What is Academic Advising?

Academic advising is defined in *Historical Foundations of Academic Advising* as “situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach” (Kuhn, 2008). This broad definition encompasses many years of debate over whether or not advising is a profession at all, and how best to theorize about a profession that may not exist. Scholars of higher education history generally and academic advising specifically identify three eras of advising. The first era, from the inception of higher education in the United States (Harvard, 1636) through the 1870s, is marked by a lack of advisors/advising in separate roles than faculty/tutors. There was no real need for advising at this time, because all students took the same courses in the Classical curriculum, and career options were limited by the times. Advising as we know it in the United States began in the 1870’s, as colleges began to open required courses to practical subjects. The period from the 1870’s through the 1970’s is known as the era of “Academic Advising as a Defined and Unexamined Activity” (Frost, 2000). In the 1870’s, elective courses were introduced as options for students who were beginning to rebel against what they saw as a harsh, disciplinarian professoriate and a restrictive curriculum (Kuhn, 2008). Students enrolling in college for the first time during the dawn of this new era of electives were guided by advisors who were meant to assist in course and program selection. Whether this actually occurred is up for debate. Presidents of Harvard and Johns Hopkins held up their advisors as leaders and mentors in the collegiate community, but higher education historians have written of the

lack of assessment and accountability governing advising practice at the time (Morrison, 1946; Veysey, 1965; Kuhn, 2008). From the early 1900's through 1949, colleges around the country began focusing on a variety of first-year and student focused initiatives, meant to foster student development not only as academics, but as whole people. In 1949, the American Council on Education published the *Student Personnel Point of View*, a document that put into writing the importance of academic advisor roles in higher education, as well as a student-centered philosophy of advising and student affairs. The third era of academic advising, from the 1970's to now, is one that is marked by advances in professional standards and norms, the rise of academic advising as a field of study, and the start of the practice of benchmarking- advising professionals comparing their practices to those at other colleges and universities. The 1970's also saw the beginning of advising's professional association, journal, and conference with the founding of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). During this time of growth, theories of advising practice as well as the organizational and administrative structures of advising were published by scholars in the field.

Developmental theories of academic advising, the concept that advisors should model their practice based on aiding students through developmental stages (e.g. Vygotsky, Kohlberg, Erickson) gained popularity in the early decades of the third era of academic advising. Developmental theories of advising rose out of student-centered philosophy, and take into account the personal development of students through education, rather than just intellectual/scholarly development (Crookston, 1994). At the dawn of the new millennium, scholars in academic advising began to look for non-developmental theories of advising, such that a new "normative theory" may emerge and take hold of the profession. Examples

of these other dominant theories in the field are “learning-centered/ educative advising” (Borgard, 1981; Hemwall & Trachte, 1999; Lowenstein, 2000; Melander, 2005) and “narrative advising” (Christman, 2005). A special issue of the *NACADA Journal* (2005) contained a number of scholars writing on the potential for new theories of advising based on such interdisciplinary concepts as social norms theory, conflict theory, and friendship theory.

Advising and Coaching

In recent years, the field of academic coaching has grown, and coaching as an advising practice has risen as well. Institutions can contract out coaching services for students, hire academic coaches, or train advisors in the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective coaches. There are training and certification programs available for those advisors interested in taking their coaching to a more expert level. The National Academic Advising Association has published a list of resources for advisors who wish to incorporate coaching into their practice. Coaching, as defined by the literature, is a clearly defined process that involves “relationship building, assessment, feedback, planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up” (as cited in McClellan & Moser, 2011). Coaches write about approaches to advising that utilize appreciative inquiry, restorative and social justice, and trauma-informed frameworks in order to meet the many needs of their students. In the case of one university, academic advisors were assigned student loads of 300+, while the coaches, employed by a private firm and contracted by the university, had student loads of around 80. The decreased student load enables coaches to delve deeper into the personal

struggles and stories that may contribute to academic and cocurricular success. Mangan (2014) writes of an academic coach who, having experienced personalized mentorship firsthand in his own college career, has greater empathy for his students and infuses the care he was shown into his coaching practice. For many advisors who embrace coaching, it is a way to expand advising into a more holistic practice, one that includes a mentorship component that can lead students to make meaningful decisions not just about their college and career, but also about their personal goals. As a new advisor, the discovery of coaching as a possible addition to my advising toolbox has increased my ability to meaningfully connect with students, and has led to the implementation of a well-rounded, individualized advising program for undergraduate students in the Education and Public Policy (EPP) program at Penn State. Students in the EPP major are confident in the knowledge that they can approach their advisor to ask questions about their life goals and post-graduate plans without worrying that those topics are inappropriate or irrelevant to the academic conversation. For students who have declared concurrent majors, and thus have advisors in multiple colleges, this has been a new and different experience at Penn State.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this thesis are the following:

1. How do three colleges at Penn State structure their individual advising programs?
2. Which advising theories undergird the programs at the three colleges studied? How are those theories visible?

Chapter 3

Data & Methodology

Method

The goal of this research is to discover the ways best practice guidelines are implemented across a loosely coupled university system that includes many colleges, each with their own organizational leadership structures, missions, and cultures. While this isn't technically a policy paper, the policy process framework is useful in conceptualizing both the structure of the study and the analysis of data. As such, I chose to utilize the qualitative method of document analysis for this thesis. Document analysis is both efficient and practical in this context. Other qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and surveys would strengthen further work in this area, and add richness to the findings that are not present due to the limited scope of this thesis. Document analysis presents some threats to validity, including the high potential for my own biases to impact the interpretation of data and findings. To address that potential, I sought out data from multiple sources, including institutions outside of Penn State, to further illuminate my findings.

Data Collection

To locate meaningful documents for this thesis research, I began with a comprehensive search of Penn State University materials. I used the main university website (<http://www.psu.edu>) to find out how many separate colleges serve undergraduate students. I chose to include only colleges whose primary focus is undergraduates due to the complex and vastly different nature of graduate student advising. The Penn State Law school, for example, offers classes for undergraduates, but because it is primarily a professional school offering graduate degrees, I did not include it in this work. I also chose to focus on University Park, due to availability of materials and the time and resource limitations of a master's thesis over a doctoral dissertation. In order to do a comprehensive study of the commonwealth campuses, I would need to not only analyze written materials, but also visit the campuses and speak to staff. The smaller nature of other campuses means that advisers often work across majors, unlike at University Park, where each college has its own department/office of advising (occasionally known by a different name or compartmentalized by program). Penn State Brandywine, for example, employs one education professor, and that professor's role also includes advising all education students at that campus. University Park released its enrollment data for the academic year 2017-2018 at the end of November 2018, and I utilized these data to find exact enrollment numbers for each college. I also used these data to confirm the judgments I'd made about which colleges to include; I was able to see for sure that, for example, the College of Medicine enrolled zero undergraduate students.

Fall 2018	Undergraduate	Grad/Med/Law	Total
-University Park	40,363	5,907	46,270
Agricultural Sciences	1,947	330	2,277
Arts & Architecture	1,127	244	1,371
Business	4,769	339	5,108
Communications	2,581	54	2,635
Earth and Mineral Sci	1,759	275	2,034
Education	1,303	631	1,934
Engineering	8,043	1,335	9,378
Health and Human Dev	4,192	301	4,493
Info Sciences & Tech	1,682	123	1,805
International Affairs, School of	0	97	97
Liberal Arts	5,069	810	5,879
Nursing	594	112	706
Science	3,580	714	4,294
Subtotal	36,646	5,365	42,011
Division of Undergraduate Studies	3,452	0	3,452
Other Areas	265	542	807
+Commonwealth Campuses	27,937	924	28,861
Great Valley	0	401	401
Dickinson School of Law - Unified	0	11	11
Dickinson Law	0	211	211
Penn State Law	0	529	529
College of Medicine	0	943	943
PA College of Technology	5,452	0	5,452
Total	73,752	8,926	82,678
World Campus	8,346	6,112	14,458
Total Including World Campus	82,098	15,038	97,136

Figure 1- Undergraduate and Graduate/First Professional Fall Enrollment 2018, Penn State University

With enrollment data in mind, I then utilized the university's policy portal, the undergraduate bulletin, and the advising portal to determine whether policies exist that govern academic advising. I read the University Advising Council website, first as an early-career advisor, and then as a researcher. In other words, my first read was for user experience, ease of finding resources, access to outside documents and trainings, and other information that I might want to find as an advisor. My second read-through of the website was for policy language- I was interested in the ways the UAC utilized language and format to potentially encourage advisors to embrace best practices and national standards. I then looked at the numbers of advisers listed for each college and the number of students enrolled in each college (specifically at University Park), to gain a sense of the ratio of advisers to students across the university. Students on the Penn State University subreddit have posted about advisers in STEM fields with student loads in the high hundreds, and anecdotal data from College of Education advisers has referenced the wide range of student loads between colleges. Determining whether this is accurate proved extremely difficult. There is no standardization across colleges when it comes to advising websites, and the variety of ways advising is structured means that the role an academic advisor plays in the College of Education could be done by three people with different roles in the Smeal College of Business, or entirely by teaching faculty in the Eberly College of Science.

Chapter 4

Findings

Research Question 1: How do three colleges at Penn State structure their individual advising programs?

Figure 1 shows enrollment data for each college and campus of Penn State. Using those numbers, I attempted to create a table that would make clear the differences in advisor: student ratios between colleges. Figure 2 shows the way that that plan quickly devolved- by the Smeal College of Business (third alphabetically in the enrollment data, and third that I looked up advising information for), I realized that the situation at each college was more complicated than simply counting the advising staff in the directory. I

Colleges	AS OF FALL 2018 Students	ADVISORS
College of Ag Arts and Arch	1947	18 FAC 3 AD only
Smeal College of Business	4769	outline! 5 AD only clear roles! 16 AD only Fact + Student
Don P. Bellusci College of Comm	2581	7
Earth + Mineral Sciences	1759	9
Education	1303	6

Figure 2- First Draft of Advisors by Major at University Park

have included the final version of the table (Table 1) of data at the conclusion of this section. Table 1 includes not only includes enrollment and dedicated advisor data, but also information about the advising programs at each college included in this study.

Smeal College of Business has a strong, accessible advising program with resources available for students from first-year through post-graduation. To advise the 4769 students enrolled in Fall 2018, Smeal employed 16 dedicated academic advisors at the college, for a ratio of nearly 300:1. That number isn't entirely accurate due to the other advising

programs in place. Prior to arriving on campus before their first year, new students in Smeal are assigned student/peer mentors. Student mentors are upperclassmen who aid new students in the transition to college, from academics and entrance to major to campus life. Mentors take on small groups of first-year students, contact them before the academic year begins, and maintain relationships through the first semester. When students officially enter their major at the conclusion of sophomore year, they are assigned a faculty mentor who is not only a point-of-contact for information about courses and graduate school, but who may also serve as advisers for student organizations and business fraternities. Information about these roles, and how students can access the many sources of information at Smeal and Penn State, are easily to find on the clearly labeled Smeal website (<http://smeal.psu.edu>).

Smeal also maintains a strong web presence. The Smeal advising website leads undergraduate students to not only advising information, but also scholarship, diversity, and career resource content. Sites are clearly labeled and easy to read, and the mission of Smeal is accessible to students who wish to read it. Advising also maintains frequently updated Twitter and Facebook pages, with information about upcoming events and deadlines, so that students can easily see important information without having to go to the website. Smeal maintains the Business Career Center as a hub for career counseling, career fairs, alumni interviews and networking, resume help, and other career and job exploration resources. There are few noticeable weaknesses in the Smeal structure on paper, and further research is needed to determine whether the program works for students and advisors as well as it seems to.

Students in the Eberly College of Science have access to a similarly strong advising structure. Fall 2018 Eberly enrollment was 3580, with six dedicated advisors (staff with Academic Advisor in their job title), for a ratio of nearly 600:1. However, as with Smeal, the picture is complicated by the concurrent faculty advisor/mentor program each department has in place. Departmental advising websites in Eberly make counting the number of faculty who take on advising roles an inaccessible task- some departments choose to list individual faculty members, while others just mention the presence of faculty in the advising role. Each major in Eberly maintains its own advising program. Some majors within the college have individual advising websites, while others link back to the main Eberly page. Students who wish to learn more about advising in the Math department are invited to schedule an appointment with their assigned advisor, or download the Undergraduate Handbook, a 33p document with checksheets, course plans, and other important information. A student in the Statistics department, on the other hand, can find information from the UAC, the Office of Disability Services, the Registrar, and other commonly needed university resources right on the front page of the department advising program. Walk-in hours are clearly marked, with information about when to arrive and what to bring. Across Eberly departments, there are a number of dedicated advisors, and as well as faculty advisors/mentors that students work with after entrance to major requirements are met. Eberly advising maintains an all-college advising Twitter account which provides students with information about important events and deadlines, and enables students to access that information without having to utilize the website.

Eberly's career and post-graduate counseling resources, like those at Smeal, are self-contained. Eberly students wishing to find more information can head to the Office of

Science Engagement, both a website and a physical location on campus. The Office of Science Engagement provides students with resources about co-op programs, STEM study abroad, and undergraduate research opportunities. For interested students, there are also many opportunities to network with Eberly alumni at events and in student organizations, and those opportunities are listed on a calendar at the Office of Science Engagement website.

The College of Education advising program is the least robust of the three included in this study. There is no dedicated career counseling center, and on the College of Education advising and student support websites, many resources and opportunities are links to departments outside of the college. In the College of Education, students have access to dedicated advisors, as well as faculty mentors and, in the programs that lead to teaching certification, mentor-teachers. Fall 2018 enrollment for the College of Education was 1303, with six advisors, for a 200:1 ratio of advisors to students. Students looking for advising information can find a link to Starfish, where they can schedule appointments, as well as links to checksheets and certification requirements for each program. College of Education advising maintains a Facebook page, but it is not frequently updated, and there are many events and deadlines missing.

Many College of Education students are unique in that they have to complete requirements for the Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PA) in order to gain certification to teach in PA public schools. The large number of certification majors in the college relative to the number of non-certification majors means that there may be a focus on certification requirements and deadlines in the college, as well as a focus on teaching jobs in college career counseling and advising. Anecdotally, the majority of

the career and job placement materials available in the Advising and Certification Center are relevant solely to students who are determined to teach in classrooms.

Students in the College of Education often work closely with graduate students through the Professional Development School experience for pre-service teachers, and the many administrative and student affairs assistantships held by students in Higher Education. High school students who are interested in education have access to the Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (S.C.O.P.E.), a month-long residential program at the University Park campus. During S.C.O.P.E., students have access to college courses, undergraduate student mentors, SAT prep, and study skills and time management resources. This program is inclusion-focused and provides benefits not only for high school students, but also for the involved undergraduates.

	College of Education	Eberly College of Science	Smeal College of Business
Undergraduate Enrollment	1303	3580	4769
# of Dedicated Advisors	6	6	16
Faculty Advisors	Mentor-teachers for certification majors, honors advisors for Schreyer students	Yes	Yes
Website Format	Easy to find, few button clicks, but resource sparse (recommended courses and forms). “Academic Advising” includes three pages- contact, helpful links, and staff directory.	Complex- individual programs have advising websites, but some link to the Eberly advising site. “Advising and Academic Assistance” includes info about diversity, support, sci ed, policies, contact (by program).	Resource rich, few button clicks, easy to navigate. “Academics and Advising” includes information about diversity, scholarships, opportunities, etc.
First-Year Experience	None listed	University-wide programs listed (NSO, LEAP)	Peer mentors assigned summer before start
Career Programming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CoE Alumni orgs 2. PDS 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-op program option 2. Undergraduate research 3. Alumni orgs 4. Office of Science Engagement 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Faculty mentor 2. Alumni orgs 3. Business career center
Interesting/Innovative Advising	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SCOPE (H.S. sophomores) 2. Advising FB page (not up to date) 	@PSUSciAdvising on Twitter	@SmealAdvising on Twitter, active FB page
Potential Problems	Primary focus on certification majors	Disorganization of website and inability to access information outside of Starfish could lead to confusion for students	

Table 1- Advising Program Data from College of Education, Eberly, and Smeal at Penn State University

Research Question 2: Which advising theories undergird the advising programs of the three colleges? How are those theories visible?

The University Advising Council provides guidance on how to advise, including materials on a variety of prevailing theories in the field. According to the UAC, there are three main components of advising: conceptual, informational, and relational. Within the section on advising's conceptual grounding, advisors learn that "Academic Advising is an educational endeavor." As in the NACADA framework, developmental advising gets the most space. Developmental advising is the process whereby advisors assist students/advisees "in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals" (Crockett, 1985). Developmental advising sees students as co-creators of educational pathways, rather than empty collegiate vessels for whom goals and aspirations are sent from above. There is also representation of the advisors-as-teachers theory in the form of an essay linked from that section. The essay expands on the many roles advisors play at once (e.g., teachers, mentors, critics). These combined roles are similar to the characteristics of teachers.

Prescriptive advising is prevalent in the advising structures at all three studied colleges. Prescriptive advising is a linear model, where information and policy flows from advisor to student. There is minimal room for student responsibility, voice, or reflection in this model. Students are told the path to take, and are expected to take it. Developmental advising could be considered the more philosophical method of advising, whereas prescriptive is the more logistical or mechanical method of advising. Prescriptive advising is visible in minor ways in all three studied colleges. The College of Education primarily consists of certification-focused students with classroom teaching goals. Those majors are

regimented and specific, and students are given little room for development and reflection. One outcome of an advising and curriculum model like this is that students are able to make it to junior and senior year without ever questioning their career goals. In some cases, students set foot in a classroom and realize they don't want to be teachers at all, leaving them questioning their college experience and without the tools to think about next steps. In other cases, students find themselves with grade point averages below the cutoff for continuance in the majors, and again, are made to leave the teaching track without the tools to explore other options. That said, the College of Education also prioritizes "articulating the meaning of higher education" on the front page of its advising website, implying a potentially more complex theoretical framing of advising practice. There is evidence of both prescriptive and developmental theories guiding practice at the College of Education. Individual advisors may also have personal theories of advising that are not reflected in program policies and are not accounted for in this study.

Eberly College of Science, like the College of Education, is both prescriptive and developmental in nature. There are few student-facing resources, and as a result, students may have a difficult time finding ways to guide their own educational choices. When advisors are the gatekeepers of information, students are beholden to them for knowledge and help. The scarcity of information may influence student perception that advisors must have all of the answers, or that the job of the advisor is to tell students what to take and how to succeed. The structure of advising at Eberly College of Science is potentially susceptible to more prescriptive advising also because it relies so heavily on faculty advisors. Faculty members are less likely to be members of NACADA, and less likely to have the time and energy to spend on developing their advising skills. At a university like

Penn State, advising is not a heavily weighted item in considerations for promotion and tenure, so advising done by anyone other than a full-time advisor has the potential to be limited.

Smeal College of Business has the most student-focused advising program and resources. Students are considered the “CEO’s of their own education” and expected to come to appointments and meetings with prep work completed. Instructions to come prepared are present at other colleges, but Smeal makes student-facing resources most readily available so that it can actually happen. Developmental advising is by far the most likely to actually happen according to the UAC and NACADA guidelines and frameworks at Smeal due to the many sources of help and support available to students. Mentorship is common at the three colleges, but is directly tied to advising at Smeal. Faculty mentors are there to guide students toward meaningful and productive post-graduate and professional decisions. These mentor-mentee relationships have the potential to develop into coaching relationships, if the faculty mentors have the will, capacity, and resources to alter an advising practice norm.

	College of Education	Eberly College of Science	Smeal College of Business	Undergraduate Advising Council
Developmental Advising	Student-facing resources, guidelines for advising appts that encourage students to do work themselves; acknowledgement of the mission of advising (personal growth rather than solely academic/professional)	Little evidence of this theory on Eberly advising websites	Student-facing resources, guidelines for advising appts that encourage students to do work themselves- “students are the CEO’s of their own education”	Developmental- providing advisers with the language to coach students through goal-setting and planning
Prescriptive Advising	Certification majors: students are given specific course schedules/guidelines, little opportunity for self-discovery	Few student-facing resources available, disorganization of system may lead to little time for more developmental discussions with students	Minimally prescriptive program- many resources (peer and faculty mentors, etc) available to spread the advising need around	No evidence of prescriptive advising in the UAC documents
Other (varies)				Advisors-as-teachers present in some documents, also NACADA links to further research and information on new theories and practices

Table 2- Guiding Theories in Academic Advising Programs of Three Colleges and the Undergraduate Advising Council, Penn State University

Prescriptive Advising	Developmental Advising
Advisor tells student what he/she needs to know about programs and courses.	Advisor helps student learn about courses and programs for self.
Advisor knows college policies and tells student what to do.	Advisor tells student where to learn about policies and helps in understanding how they apply to him/her
Advisor informs about deadlines and follows up behind student.	Advisor informs about deadlines, then lets student follow up.
Advisor tells student which classes to take.	Advisor presents class options; student makes own selections.
Advisor keeps informed about academic progress through files and records.	Advisor keeps informed about academic progress through records and talking to student about academic experiences.
Advisor tells student what to do in order to get advised.	Advisor and student reach agreement about nature of advising relationship.
Advisor specifies alternatives and indicates best choice when student faces difficult decisions.	Advisor assists student in identifying alternatives and weighing consequences when facing difficult decisions.
Advisor suggests what student should major in.	Advisor suggests steps students can take to help decide on major.
Advisor identifies realistic academic goals based on grades and test results.	Advisor assists student in identifying realistic academic goals based on grades, test results and self-understanding.
Advisor is concerned mainly about academic life of student.	Advisor is concerned about personal, social and academic life of student.
Advisor provides information mainly about courses and class schedules.	Advisor provides information about workshops and seminars in areas such as career planning and study skills, in addition to courses and class schedules.

Table 3- Prescriptive and Developmental Advising Strategies (Crookston, 1972)

Chapter 5

Discussion

Regardless of success, the differences in advising programs from college to college increase student inequality of opportunity and achievement. The ways colleges implement their differing advising programs are largely unregulated, and the lack of regulation, though positive due to the potential for innovation, widens the gap between the strongest and weakest programs. Penn State through the Undergraduate Advising Council has devoted resources to the improvement of academic advising across the university. This study is an excellent example of how the policy process can function in a large organization, and how implementation can be the downfall of many a well-intentioned policy framework. The Undergraduate Advising Council not only provides resources so that advisors can learn and grow, but also assessment tools so that individual advising programs can determine what's working and what isn't and then evolve. If the university is interested in improving academic advising across all colleges, it must be willing to undergo a comprehensive evaluation of policy and practice, and then engage in the very difficult, slow, often painful work of cultural change. As it stands right now, policy and practice are not aligned due to the mismatch of guidance, student expectations, and available resources/capacity.

Developmental advising is present in the three studied colleges in the form of mentorship, and in some policy documents and the practices of individual advisors. In the cases of Smeal and Eberly, the availability of faculty mentors may increase the supports

available to students, as well as decrease the workload of dedicated academic advisors, leading to a more efficient and effective overall experience for all parties. The College of Education's unique proximity to practitioners also increases student access to support. Students in the College of Education do not have access to the same career counseling opportunities as those students in Eberly and Smeal, but have the same desires to gain meaningful and well-compensated employment in the field of their choice. This disparity is a reflection of trends in career placement across the country. Teachers in public schools continue to strike for student resources and higher salaries, while those in tech and business are able to gain positions that better enable them to raise families, contribute to the economy, and pay down their student loans. In a recent conversation with a group of alumnae from my own college, I was disappointed but not surprised to hear the comment, "that's why teaching attracts neither the best nor the brightest- how could anyone choose to work for that little?" As universities prepare students to enter the workforce, it is vital that advisors and other higher education professionals are at the forefront of the work to increase the prestige of service jobs. We can't contribute to downgrading of teaching and other important work in our own communities by decreasing the resources available to students. Instead, we must be innovative and forward-thinking, and give students the confidence to declare their intention to pursue service work and negotiate for higher pay. Similarly, universities can't continue to at once declare advising to be important for the personal and intellectual growth of students while also ignoring advising and other service in promotion and tenure conversations. For those faculty who serve in advising roles, there is little professional incentive to do so. Advising is recognized through awards, but service to undergraduates is otherwise a meaningless professional task, done

for personal reward. Other than recommendations to the Faculty Senate that are codified as policy by the university, the UAC is not in charge, and cannot mandate, that individual advisors and faculty advisors follow standards. Likewise, membership in NACADA is common, but not required, and could not be mandated. Penn State could increase the incentive to participate in professional development activities by devoting funds for NACADA webinars and regional conferences to interested and dedicated advising staff. Penn State and other large universities could be trailblazers in the promotion of advising and academic coaching, funding and researching student success both in higher education programs and implementing the findings of that research in centers that serve student needs. Finally, as we move further into the twenty-first century, it is of vital importance that information is easy to access and interesting to read. College websites at Penn State utilize different templates, and there is no across-the-board standardization of format. For undergraduate students, the many button clicks required to find all of the necessary information for scheduling, requirements, and other opportunities is a frustrating experience. Though current undergraduate students are digital natives, the assumption that they can and will navigate complex websites is false, especially when those websites are organized according to invisible rules of institutional organization. The College of Education is currently engaged in the process of website redesign, but colleges across the university are not working together to build websites that follow a cohesive, consistent format, and it is likely that some of the problems students have with finding information will persist. Undergraduates are constantly bombarded by information, and the demands on their brains are massive. Rather than fight the progression of reading and internet aesthetics, it would be in all universities' best interests to make information easily

accessible- bullet points rather than walls of text, minimal button clicks, and fonts and graphics that are easy on the eyes. Penn State could help mitigate the current issues by involving undergraduate students on website redesign committees, and also by increasing the incentive for colleges to work together to solve problems that impact the entire campus community.

While the outcomes of this research could not be generalized across other universities, the research methods used herein may be useful in determining where advising programs at other institutions are guided by theory, where they succeed in stated missions, and where they fall short. Advisors and policy-makers at Penn State seem to be committed to developmental advising and increasing the professionalism of the practice. The problem arises when colleges are independently governed, able to create advising structures and policies that go unassessed, and do not have the resources available to engage in the philosophically-minded task of developmental advising over prescriptionist advising. Advising programs across colleges are different in scope and tone, and while they largely align with the literature (e.g., developmental, student-focused), implementation is not consistent or steady because of the culture of the university more generally.

Colleges and universities that embrace the profession of advising see upticks in student retention and graduation rates. After implementing a coaching program that included training 42 advisors in life coaching, as well as increasing other student supports across the university, the University of Oklahoma achieved an astonishing 92.1% freshmen-to-sophomore retention rate. Coaching programs geared toward increasing student success and retention have also begun at the Indiana University, Florida State,

and the University of North Carolina (Anft, 2018). Due to advising's relatively young age as a professional field, there are a number of structural barriers in place to making meaningful change at a large institution like Penn State. Directors of Advising in the various colleges remain lower than dean-level on organizational leadership charts. Penn State's variety of advising programs could be improved if university leadership embraced a model that increases the power of advising professionals and committed itself to evaluation and change as it does with academic programs.

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Appendix A

Example of University Advising Council Resources

Conceptual – Ideas and theories that advisers must understand to advise effectively

Essential Information

Academic Advising is guided by a set of core values. ▼

Academic Advising is an educational endeavor. ▼

Academic Advising practice is based in theory and scholarship. ▼

Tools

[Approaches to Advising](#) - a collection of resources about ways to approach advising to meet different student needs.

[Ethical Advising Best Practices](#) – a summary of the most important behaviors required of an academic adviser.

Foundational Readings

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