An Exploration of Graduate Education in Academic Advising: A Case Study Analysis

Craig M. McGill, Kansas State University
Wendy Schindler, Northern Kentucky University
Keira Solon, University of Central Missouri
Sean T. Bridgen, Kansas State University
Sarah A. Mathews, Florida International University

As a field's literature base deepens, an academic discipline can emerge and lead to the development of a profession. For an academic discipline to thrive, new scholars must be trained in its specialized knowledge. Kansas State University was the first institution to offer graduate programs in academic advising. Subsequently, other graduate programs have been developed at various institutions across North America. The purpose of this collective case study is to examine graduate education in academic advising through two separate but related cases: an interview study of NACADA leaders and a content analysis of graduate programs in academic advising. The growth in graduate programs, along with the expanding knowledge base, will strengthen academic advising's potential as a bonified, recognized academic discipline.

[doi:10.12930/NACADA-22-05]

KEYWORDS: Academic advising profession, academic disciplines, graduate education, graduate programs, Scientific/Intellectual Movements, qualitative research

Academic disciplines are distinct areas of knowledge that are "taught, studied, and researched in a college or university setting" (McElreavy et al., 2016, para. 9). Certain broad and overarching disciplines such as music, logic, and mathematics have been taught, studied, and investigated since the time of Plato's Academy. The modern arrangement of academic disciplines date back to the 19th century when scholars became increasingly specialized. For example, the "natural philosophy" of the ancients evolved into biology, physics, and chemistry, each with their own scholarly practices, communities, and literature bases (Trowler et al., 2013).

As a field's literature base deepens, an academic discipline can emerge and lead to the development of a profession (Houle, 1980). At the heart of a profession is its intellectual, esoteric body of literature (Pavalko, 1988). Academic advising is now professionalizing; scholars are examining academic advising as a field of study (Habley, 2009; Kuhn & Padak, 2008; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008) and its potential to be an academic discipline (McGill, 2019). Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) juxtaposed the development of the disciplines of archeology with the "distinct interdisciplinary field and profession" (p. 43) of academic advising to show the field's evolution in relation to a recognized discipline. Kuhn and Padak (2008) outlined how the field of academic advising functioned as a faculty responsibility (i.e., as a service), and whether to call it a field or an academic discipline. While noting that academic advising could be considered a "field," they argued a field is not necessarily a "discipline." However, "the term 'field' is so generic that calling academic advising 'a field' says little about its essence" (p. 2). But to call the field an academic discipline would require "a body of credible organized knowledge that is unique" (p. 3) and can only happen once

> . . .it has a clear delineation of the modes of inquiry by which it validates itself, creates new knowledge, and advances as a discipline; and when its intellectual content is offered as a coherent grouping of courses in degree-granting majors at several institutions of higher education. (p. 3)

In other words, an occupation's theory and intellectual techniques involve articulating problems that define the field's parameters and shape its body of specialized knowledge through academic literature.

As a disciplinary base continues to grow, scholars are turning their attention to the issue of graduate education in academic advising. Kansas State University was the first institution to offer a graduate certificate (in 2003), a master's degree (in 2008), and a doctorate in academic advising (in

2020). Recently, Rowan University added an academic advising track to their master's degree in higher education. Although the development of one doctoral program is a milestone for the field of academic advising, it is not enough to sustain an entire workforce of practitioners. Subsequently, since the inception of the programs at Kansas State University, 10 additional graduate certificates arose at various U.S. and Canadian institutions.

For an academic discipline to thrive, new scholars must be trained in its specialized knowledge. Kuhn and Padak (2008)'s discernment of academic advising as a field of study over a decade ago and the issue of its status as a field and academic discipline bears a new examination. Therefore, the purpose of this collective case study is to examine graduate education in academic advising. Collective case studies explore multiple cases within a bounded system (Bhattacharya, 2017). Here, the bounded system is the issue of academic advising graduate education explored in two separate but related cases: an interview study of leaders in NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advisors (NACADA) and a content analysis of graduate certificate programs in academic advising. Each case has a separate research question, source of data, and individual findings; the cases are intricately connected by the topic, and it is the topic itself that is of most import for the current study. For this type of methodology, "selected cases are representative of the issue under investigation and information-rich sources" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 110). Each case is guided by a separate research question:

RQ1 (Case I): What issues do academic advising leaders raise in relation to graduate education in academic advising?

RQ2 (Case II): What are the common course-types required in graduate certificate programs?

Conceptual Framework

Theories of academic discipline formation offer insight into the evolution of academic advising toward an emerging discipline. Three types of social movement institutionalization provide a framework for considering how this is operationalized (Walker, 2006 as cited in Arthur, 2009). When incorporated into a university and fully funded, the movement is politically institutionalized. When the academy at large accepts the practices and ideologies of a movement, it is culturally institutionalized. When a movement has distinct research agendas and formal communication/structure, departmental bodies with control over degree-granting and hiring, coherent curriculum, and budgetary independence, it is organizationally institutionalized.

As knowledge across academia is divided into branches, precisely defining academic disciplines is fraught with dilemma. Krishnan (2009) proposed six characteristics for determining whether an area of scholarly inquiry qualifies as an academic discipline, specifically:

- a particular object of research (may be shared with another discipline);
- a body of specialty knowledge referring to their research object (specific and unshared);
- theories and concepts that organize their specialty knowledge effectively;
- specific language/terminology pertaining to their research object;
- research methods consistent with their specific research requirements; and
- some institutional manifestation in academia (subjects taught at higher education institutions, academic departments, professional associations, etc.).

Institutional manifestation is crucial, as an academic discipline is only able to reproduce, enhance, and pass on its body of knowledge through institutionalization (Krishnan, 2009). Although not all academic disciplines will necessarily have all the aforementioned characteristics, the more closely aligned a discipline is with these six characteristics, the more likely it is to become recognized and institutionalized.

The field of academic advising is interdisciplinary, which may draw criticism from those who represent singular disciplines or "monodisciplinarians" (Groenhuijsen, 2009). However, the boundaries within which academic work traditionally takes place can be arbitrarily narrow and prevent academics from seeing connections to other disciplines (Krishnan, 2009). Disciplines recognized since the early centuries of higher education (e.g., arts, history, and humanities) provide a basis for current knowledge, but a shift toward an interdisciplinary approach to learning has become a prominent characteristic of academia in the twenty-first century.

Interdisciplinary fields face a unique struggle in their quest for disciplinary recognition (Lim et al., 2013; Lim & Rager, 2015; McGuire & Cseh, 2006). As graduate programs emerge in interdisciplinary fields, the need for a consistent curricular base lends disciplinary credibility within the academy (Lim & Rager, 2015; McGuire & Cseh, 2006). The field of academic advising is not immune to these struggles as it continues to professionalize, making it all the more important to examine graduate education vis-à-vis graduate certificate programs.

Author Positionalities

The first author began the current paper seeking to find out how many graduate programs existed in academic advising. His interest sprung from a decade of experience as a primary-role advisor, his dissertation research on the professionalization of academic advising, and graduating from a master's program in academic advising. Of the five authors, four have had primary-role advisor experience, one has served as an advising administrator, and three are faculty members who have had substantial experience with curricular design. Three authors hold terminal degrees, one is a doctoral candidate, and one is an aspiring doctoral student. Four are located in the U.S. Midwest and one is in the Southeastern U.S. The first author was an insider for Case I; all other researchers were outsiders. This broad swath of experiences both enrich and may introduce bias into the findings and data analysis because we are committed to the field of academic advising.

Case I: Methods and Findings

Due to the complexity of presenting two sets of data collection, analyses, and findings, we have organized the paper according to case. This section presents the methods and findings of Case I: the perspectives of NACADA leaders regarding the issue of graduate preparation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first set of data comes from a broad study of the professionalization of academic advising (McGill, 2019). Seventeen NACADA leaders who offered "information-rich" (Patton, 2002, p. 46) perspectives of the professionalization of academic advising were recruited for the study. Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to identify leaders in the field who had served in a variety of advising positions and in a variety of roles in the association. All participants were professionals working in the field and had graduate degrees; fourteen held doctorates. To qualify for the study, participants had to be a current or past NACADA advising community chair, be a subject matter expert publishing about the professionalization of academic advising, or have held high office in the association (see Table 1).

The first author designed an interview protocol based on Knox and Fleming's (2010) analysis of the professionalization of adult education (vis-à-vis Houle, 1980), examining the essence and distinctive nature of the field, the various roles its practitioners performed, the career stages of advisors, the role of scholarly literature and graduate curricula, other stakeholders' perceptions of the field, and future directions. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 74–147 minutes, and after being transcribed were sent to participants to verify accuracy.

The interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo to assist with code tracking. Initially, these data were "inductively analyzed to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data" (Merriam, 2002, pp. 6–7). Here, we analyzed the data to identify prominent issues related to graduate education in academic advising. Our understanding of "issues" comes from an analysis of workforce trends (Rocco et al., 2003). The authors examined the extant human resource development literature for emergent trends and issues for seasoned adult workers. According to the authors, issues "affect the specific functions of an institution" (Rocco et al., 2003, p. 158). In contrast to trends identified within a field, "issues are dilemmas requiring a decision" (Rocco et al., 2003, p. 158). We used structural coding (MacQueen et al., 2008) to isolate parts of a larger dataset focusing on graduate education in academic advising. Structural coding "acts as a labeling and indexing device . . . likely to be relevant to a particular analysis" (Namey et al., 2008, p. 141). Framed around the ideas overviewed in the conceptual framework and Rocco and colleagues' conception of "issues," we sought to uncover these participants' chief issues of graduate education in academic advising.

Case I Findings: Issues

Advising community leaders lacked consensus about the curricular preparation needed for an academic advising career, signaling its fledgling

Table 1. Participant Profiles

No.	Current Position	NACADA (Years)	Higher Ed (Years)	Degree	Advising (Years)	Past Roles	CC	SME	Office
1	PA	12	15	PhD	15	FA; PA; AA	X	X	
2	UA	15	18	PhD	14	PA	X	X	X
3	AA	13	17	MA, Med	15	AA	X	X	
4	UA, FA	25	45	PhD	15	FA		X	
5	AA	23	40	PhD	40	PA; AA	X	X	
6	FA	15	19	PhD	19	FA; PA; AA	X	X	
7	AA	25	31	EdD	31	FA; AA		X	X
8	FA	11	36	PhD	30	FA		X	
9	AA	17	22	PhD	18	PA; AA			X
10	FA	12	17	PhD	15	PA; FA			X
11	UA	21	24	PhD	24	FA; AA		X	
12	AA	18	18	MS	18	AA			X
13	UA	22	26	PhD	26	PA; AA			X
14	AA	21	32	MS	23	PA; AA			X
15	AA	27	27	EdD	27	PA; FA; AA			X
16	AA	32	40	PhD	30	AA			X
17	UA	19	42	PhD	42	FA; AA			X
						Total	5	9	10

Note. AA = academic administrator; CC = NACADA community chair; FA = faculty advisor; Office = NACADA high office; PA = primary-role advisor; SME = subject matter expert; UA = university administrator. From "Leaders' Perceptions of the Professionalization of Academic Advising: A Phenomenography," by NACADA, 2018 (https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-17-041). Copyright held and permission given by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advisors.

disciplinary state. As most institutions do not require an advising-specific background to become an academic advisor, participants struggled with whether the field should necessarily evolve into an academic discipline, or whether the advising role should even require graduate education at all. Three primary issues were raised by the participants.

Issue 1: Specific Educational Levels for Academic Advisors

First, the issue of the appropriate level of education an advisor should have to perform the advising role, regardless of subject, was raised. In other words, how essential is it for an academic advisor to hold a graduate degree? Participant 3 levied questions about the value of the master's degree as a requirement for the advising profession, saying, "It might be desirable but not required to have a master's degree to do advising. I don't think there is something basic you learn in a master's program that would make you more successful than someone who has a bachelor's degree."

Participant 2 earned a master's degree in academic advising and pointed out that there is a significant practitioner emphasis in the program's curricula at the expense of preparing scholars of academic advising. Although a research methods course is required, the program does not culminate with a research experience. She said:

> We need to ensure there is a scholar track within the field. I think opportunities to do research, sharing what we learn and having a bit of transparency in what we learn in that research. We are not only creating well-rounded and solid professionals, but also scholars that examine academic advising. And we also need to start building our research base related to that, examine ourselves as a profession.

Overwhelmingly, participants advocated for the master's degree as being the necessary level of education for all advisors to achieve. Participant 16 explained advisors need the skills to be capable "to conduct research, conduct

assessments, and to be quite honest about it, to have some standing within an academic setting. Right now, I see that standing as having the advanced degree." Participant 9 reinforced the need for a master's degree as the threshold academic achievement necessary for advising employment:

> When I'm hiring, I always pick people who have a masters. They approach the job differently. They are invested in a career, and they have pursued credentialing to pursue the career. The competencies you learn and the experiences you have are important to students.

Others mentioned the need to be concerned with hiring academic advisors who show a true interest and commitment to the profession, which involves continued professional education. Participant 7 argued that advisors should not only have a graduate education, but one that specifically aligns with the needs of the advising role. However, Participant 7 also acknowledged that professional preparation can vary, and the level required for effective academic advising might depend on whether it is a practitioner's full-time responsibility:

> If somebody has a desire and drive to be a full-time professional advisor, then yes, they must have graduate preparation. Whether it's for credit, whether it's through professional development on the campus, whether it's through online or through conferences, whatever the case may be, there is still academic preparation for that. Everybody needs preparation and required long-term professional development in the field.

In sum, while many advising leaders believed the master's degree was a value-added credential, there was no consensus; some noted advising could also be performed well by bachelor's level practitioners.

Issue 2: Specific Educational Backgrounds

In addition to questioning the issue of requiring a master's degree for academic advising, participants addressed the issue of what type of advanced education is needed for the advising practitioner. Specifically, does an academic advisor need graduate training in academic advising or a related field to be effective?

Participant 3 argued for embracing advisors' diverse educational backgrounds and expressed concerns of being rendered inflexible in their career development:

> I worry vocational training for academic advising will pigeonhole us and make us not prepared to do anything else....See, this is the hesitation you're hearing in my voice. I don't feel it is wholly bad to have some sense, some idea of a curriculum to train advisors, but I worry about it being the core of our education. Because we learn things from all of these other fields.

Participant 1 expressed a similar concern, noting that an advisor's career trajectory often moves away from the act of advising. "And the career trajectory is out of advising into advising administration where one does much less academic advising." While Participant 1 struggled to identify an appropriate academic background for gaining necessary advising skills, Participant 12 asserted that good advisors needed more than a specific education; they needed particular skill-sets available from a variety of educational backgrounds. Participant 12 highlighted the skills that came with their particular educational experience:

> I use my counseling skills on a regular basis, and I didn't want to go into counseling, I wanted to do student affairs, but counseling skills is probably important. It made me effective not only with students but with my staff.

Participant 17 echoed an appreciation for counseling and expressed that while certain skills are paramount, other aspects of the advising profession are best learned on the job:

> We are not looking for a degree in counseling psychology but someone who can relate to students. We are looking for a personality more than an educational background. Although, the educational background helps, we've hired more English majors or humanities types, liberal arts types over the years than we've hired counseling psychology or other college of ed. types,

> because we are looking for somebody who's got the personality and patience to deal with students. The rest of it they can learn, like different approaches to advising and the different issues related to advising.

Participants expressed concern about limiting advisors in their career transitions or overlooking advising practitioners who may have gained valuable skills from adjacent disciplines. There was little consensus as to whether or not advising-specific graduate training would benefit practitioners throughout their careers.

Issue 3: Viability of Advising-Specific Graduate Programs

As participants discussed the need for an advising-specific education, they also questioned the viability of advising-specific graduate programs. Participant 12 directly questioned the value of an advising-specific degree, asking, **"**Do you really need a [degree in academic advising]?" whereas Participant 7 endorsed an advising-specific education as essential to the growth of the field:

> If we continue just to hire advisors to replace those who leave with the idea that anybody can advise because they have a college degree, then we are not going to see academic advising grow any further than we are today. So, when we have an open position, we've got to make a commitment to setting the expectation the people we hire have student development theory, learning theory, assessment, technology, etc., which means we need preparation programs to prepare advisors. Which need to be either graduate programs or certification programs. True professions have graduate preparation in the field.

Participant 15 expressed her pleasure with the emergence of graduate programs in academic advising and the implications of the emergence of the advising discipline: "There is a lot to learn and to become knowledgeable about in terms of academic advising. That is an important step for—lack of a better word—the profession."

Concerning the issue of advising-specific graduate programs, participants expressed a full spectrum of perceptions. While some participants believed an academic advising discipline was unnecessary to the field's development, others believed an emergent discipline to be essential. The three issues identified by advising leaders—specific levels of education, specific educational content, and the viability of academic advising graduate programs—are demonstrative of the resistance and disagreement that exists among emerging disciplines.

Case II: Methods and Findings

NACADA leaders in Case I identified issues around educational level for academic advisors, specific educational backgrounds, and the viability of requiring advising-specific graduate programs. One leader even envisioned potential courses for an academic advising curriculum. This prompted our second case in which we explored the current state of academic advising graduate education. Because only two institutions to our knowledge offer graduate degrees, we focused this analysis on the content of graduate certificate programs. The second case consisted of separate methods of data collection and analysis, described herein.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interested specifically in the number and content of graduate programs in academic advising, the first author conducted a Google search on September 20th, 2018, using the terms "graduate certificate" and "academic advising." The search concluded after no new programs emerged for 10 pages beyond the last found program. It was common to find "academic advising" *for* "graduate certificates," but these did not meet criteria for the study (i.e., a graduate program whose content focus was academic advising). A total of 10 relevant programs emerged from the search from the following institutions: Angelo State University, Arkansas Tech University, Eastern Michigan University, Florida International University, Kansas State University, Kent State University, Sam Houston State University, University of Calgary, University of Central Missouri, and University of South Florida. After identifying these programs, we sent out a call through relevant NACADA listserv and Facebook groups to see if we missed any programs. No new programs emerged through this call.

Next, the first author began collecting publicly available documents and artifacts about these programs; of particular interest were program descriptions and course requirements. The

curricula requirements (e.g., numbers and titles of courses, number of credit hours) were widely available for all programs. The first author conducted a content analysis of these courses (using their descriptions when necessary) to categorize the course requirements, which resulted in a typology of courses required in these programs. When additional authors joined the project, they informally reviewed this analysis and agreed on the "types" of courses these programs offered.

We conducted a second search on July 13, 2021, replicating the previous search process. This search produced one new program: Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The courses for this program were examined, and they fit within the established typology of courses.

Case II Findings: Common Course-Types

Our analysis produced varying consistency among course-types required for academic advising graduate certificate programs and yielded 11 distinct course-types. Most of the certificate programs required courses in the foundations of academic advising ($n = 10$), career development ($n = 9$), interpersonal skills ($n = 7$), student development theory ($n = 8$), and an advising practicum ($n = 6$). The remaining course-types were represented in less than half of the certificate programs: multiculturalism ($n = 4$), administration and leadership ($n = 4$), social/cultural/student groups ($n = 3$), foundations of student affairs services ($n = 3$), foundations of learning ($n = 3$), and assessment or program evaluation ($n = 2$). See Figure 1. Course-type consistencies include:

- Foundations of academic advising courses dealt with: advising delivery models, advising approaches, and theories used in the practice of academic advising.
- Career development courses dealt with career development theories and career counseling. These courses aimed to prepare academic advisors with a base level of skills and knowledge required to engage in career development conversations with students. Two programs offer more than one course in career development.
- Interpersonal skills courses were primarily rooted in counseling theories and included practicing active listening and facilitating group discussions.
- Student development theory courses covered theories in psycho-social development, cognitive development, identity development, environmental theories, and typology theories.
- Academic advising practicum experiences provided students with an opportunity to work with seasoned professionals in the field of academic advising in professional settings. Ideally, students applied theory to practice in these experiences. Florida International University requires this course for students who are not employed as academic advisors.
- Social/cultural/student groups courses dealt with student cultures on campuses across the United States. Examples of student groups included adult students, LGBTQIA+ students, racially minoritized students, first generation college students, and generations represented on campuses.
- Foundations of student affairs services courses covered topics such as functional areas in student affairs and the historical development of the field of student affairs.
- Foundations of learning courses covered topics such as theories of learning, pedagogy, and andragogy, but course focus varied by program. The University of Calgary offers two courses dealing primarily with adult learners and Kansas State University requires a course that examines learning theories more broadly.
- Multiculturalism courses differed in focus based on the program. The Florida International University course content was related to culturally responsive counseling skills while Sam Houston State University's was concerned with diversity on college campuses in general. The courses at Kansas State University and University of South Florida dealt specifically with advising diverse populations.
- Administration and leadership courses covered topics such as human relations, organizational theory, leadership skills, and issues relating to administration of student affairs or academic advising. The University of Central Missouri offers two such courses.
- Assessment or program evaluation courses varied in content by program. University of Central Missouri's course was more focused on the programmatic assessment

Figure 1. Course-types of Graduate Certificate Programs

	Social/Cultural/Student Groups	Foundations of Academic Advising	Foundations of Student Affairs Services	Foundations of Learning	Career Development	Student Development Theory	Interpersonal Skills	Multiculturalism	Administration & Leadership	Assessment/Program evaluation	Advising Practicum	Misc
Angelo State University	X	X	X		X	X						
Arkansas Tech University	X	X			X		X				X	
Eastern Michigan University		X	X		X	X*			X		X	X*
Florida International University	X*	X				X	X*	X*			X	
Indiana University of Pennsylvania		X				XX					X	
Kansas State University		X		X	X	X		X				
Kent State University					XX	X	X*X*		X*		X*	X*
Sam Houston University		X	X		X			X			X	
University of Calgary		X		XX	XX		X			X		X
University of Central Missouri		X				X	X		XX	X		
University of South Florida		X				X		X				X

Note. The figure depicts the course-types in the graduate certificate programs. Those with double Xs represent two courses of that type, whereas X* indicates course is an elective.

in student affairs in general, while University of Calgary's was focused on assessments used in career development scenarios. Notably, no programs required courses in the assessment of academic advising specifically. Kansas State University offers an assessment of academic advising, but as an elective for the master's program.

Discussion and Implications

The status of academic advising as a field of inquiry and scholarship has been studied (Habley, 2009; Kuhn & Padak, 2008; Shaffer et al., 2010); however, these studies are a decade old and considered entirely within a U.S. context. What are the implications and potential for academic advising as an academic discipline? A prior study exploring the perceptions of advisors regarding the professionalization of academic advising found that despite a majority of the group (59%) having at least a master's degree, most of the group did not find a graduate credential necessary to advise (Adams et al., 2013). Issue 1 identified in case I—specific educational levels for academic advisors—suggests this remains a tension in our field. As practitioners and scholars of academic advising, we find it alarming there remains little consensus regarding the need for a graduate credential to practice academic advising.

Although the Case I dataset demonstrated that many in advising leadership supported the attainment of graduate education as preparation for a career in academic advising, they disagreed on whether academic advising graduate programs were more desirable than other programs (e.g., student affairs, counseling, educational leadership, humanities fields). Given that discipline development is often undergirded in both controversy (Frickel & Gross, 2005) and social change (Arthur, 2009), this disagreement does not necessarily negate the development of academic advising as an academic discipline. Rather, advising leaders' inability to support an advising-specific education wholeheartedly may call into question the strength and composition of existing advising programs.

Participants in Case I generally agreed an interdisciplinary knowledge and skillset is necessary to advise students effectively (e.g., interpersonal communication, student development theory, learning theory, assessment, leadership, counseling, and administration). Based on this consensus, the programs in Case II (and potential new graduate programs in academic advising) may benefit from assessing what scholars and researchers in the field have found to be most important for advisors to know. Although participants expressed some concern about graduate programs in academic advising being too limited in scope and hindering career options for academic advisors, programs may overcome this perception by offering students multiple cognates from which to

choose (e.g., concentrations in administration, student athletics, or social justice). Likewise, this may attract more students to the program by offering a customized curriculum.

As disciplinary literature is the theoretical foundation that supports the discipline's development (Pavalko, 1988), our analysis found curricular oddities inconsistent with widely accepted advising literature. For example, different emphases on developmental advising, student development theory, learning foundations, and relational skills in the graduate certificates raised questions as to the scholarly underpinnings used in creating curriculum. A developmental approach to academic advising dominated the field for most of its history (Lowenstein, 1999); yet three of the certificates do not require a course in student development theory. While some have argued that student development is not the primary purpose of academic advising, it is widely accepted that student development theories are integral to the practice of academic advising (Folsom et al., 2015; Grites et al., 2016).

As with developmental advising, advising literature relies heavily on student development theory and developing the whole student (Lowenstein, 1999, 2020). Two of the examined programs do not require a course in student development theory, yet they do require a course in career development. Most textbooks on student development theory include career development as one aspect of student development and note that the many facets of student development (e.g., psycho-social, cognitive, moral, spiritual, career) are not mutually exclusive but intertwined. Thus, the absence of a student development course seems incongruent with literature that suggests such theory is vital to academic advising (Grites, 2013).

Perhaps the most striking finding is only two certificates require a course in the foundations of learning. If the work of academic advising ought to be focused on student learning (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999, 2005; Lowenstein, 2020; NACADA, 2006), it stands to reason that graduate preparation for this work would necessarily include some coursework on learning theory, andragogy and pedagogy, curriculum design, or learning sciences. A course focused in this area would enable academic advisors to develop appropriate learning outcomes, design the curriculum of academic advising at their institution, and/or incorporate appropriate pedagogy and instructional techniques into their practice; it might also position advisors to help students synthesize their learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Only half of the certificates require a course in interpersonal skills. This echoes literature that finds relational competencies in many training and development programs is lacking (McGill et al., 2020; Robbins, 2012). However, the relational component "is perhaps the most essential . . . since it seeks to address the actual processes by which the information to a student is delivered" (Ford, 2007, para. 9). Case I participants agreed interpersonal skills were important for advisors to possess—some going so far as to suggest the right disposition may be more desirable than a specific educational background. As such, graduate programs in advising could be strengthened by requiring courses in interpersonal skill and relational competencies. Courses dealing with group dynamics and conflict resolution might also prepare advisors to conduct group advising sessions and to help students navigate conflicts they might experience on campus.

In addition to curricular content, which is ill-aligned with the theoretical bases of advising, some graduate certificate programs contained offerings that were questionable for the preparation of primary-role advisors. For instance, most of the courses in the "miscellaneous" category were somewhat random, but University of South Florida required a "special topics" course in academic advising. Two programs require an administration and leadership course. Of these courses, only Kent State University has one focused on advising; the others focus on student affairs and higher education. While such a course might make sense for students seeking to become academic advising administrators, one might argue basic education in academic advising should be more focused on practice than leadership. Academic advising administration requires different skillsets than practitioners need; thus, these programs could benefit by removing this requirement for students solely focused on being practitioners and instead offer it as an elective.

Other than the addition of the foundations of academic advising course, it is unclear how this curriculum is substantially different from a standard student affairs concentration. Does this mean that, academically speaking, the home of academic advising is really in student affairs departments? If so, is that where it belongs, or would advising be better situated in other departments (e.g., curriculum and instruction, higher education, leadership studies, or adult learning)? Might there be courses in those departments that would better prepare academic advisors for the teaching and learning

aspects of their jobs (which some argue is the primary purpose of academic advising)?

Ultimately, the certificates we examined mostly seem to be composed of a hodgepodge of existing courses with the addition of a course in the foundations of academic advising (Kent State University is the only program without a foundations of advising course). This raises questions about the purposes and curriculum design of these certificates. Why were they created? What are the learning outcomes of these certificates? Were the learning outcomes crafted intentionally based on the academic advising literature or established models such as NACADA (2017) Core Competencies?

In the end, we wonder how the content in these courses (and by extension, the entire curricula for these graduate programs in academic advising) map onto NACADA Core Competencies. As noted in our first observation about the foundations of advising courses, it might behoove programs to think about dividing the foundations course into multiple courses so that the content can be bolstered and explored in further depth. For example, programs might consider if these graduate certificates would be strengthened by having at least one course in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The lack of consensus among participants in Case I and curricular discrepancies found in the programs of Case II highlight how crucial it is to keep literature at the forefront of academic advising's evolution from a general field to an academic discipline.

In addition to the content of these programs, it is important to think about the audience: the students who enroll. As these programs continue to be refined and new graduate programs are designed and implemented, institutions will need to consider the professional development needs and desires of their academic advisors and other potential students. The student demand for these programs can be a motivator for increasing not only the number of graduate certificate programs, but also master's and doctoral programs. This will necessitate a consideration of the program content to meet the ever-evolving literature and methodologies of academic advising. We believe the growth in number of graduate programs along with the expanding knowledge will make academic advising a bonified, recognized academic discipline.

Limitations and Future Research

This collective case study has some limitations and implications for future research. As all participants in Case I are NACADA leaders and live in North America, their ideas may not be representative of all academic advisors. Holding a leadership position in NACADA may indicate they have a strong vested interest in the field and its professionalization. Additionally, this study focuses heavily on primary role advisors of undergraduate students through a predominantly North American lens. It lacks viewpoints on graduate student advising, faculty advisors, and a global perspective. Most of the participants in Case I are administrators and their perspectives on professionalization may have shifted since advising is no longer a primary function of their position. Additionally, we have no evidence regarding the role academic advisors played, if any, in the construction of these graduate certificate programs.

Future research would benefit from a larger participant group with varied roles, locations, and backgrounds. Even so, it may be difficult to come to complete consensus across the field as the needs of students vary greatly requiring academic advisors to draw on different knowledge and skillsets. Additionally, future researchers could better understand the learning outcomes and impact of these programs (e.g., interviewing students and faculty, reviewing syllabi). Finally, future researchers could examine perceptions of how the current master's and doctoral programs (and other new programs as they emerge) contribute to the development of academic advising as an emerging academic discipline.

Conclusion

For a field that draws practitioners from every academic discipline, producing new work using innovative methodologies, such as natural sciences (Gizerian, 2022) and arts-based methods (Taffe Reed, 2022), will be critical (McGill et al., 2022; see letter to the editor, this issue). Even when scholars and industry leaders lack consensus as to the curricular requirements needed for interdisciplinary programs (McGuire & Cseh, 2006), curricular content required for an interdisciplinary discipline must respond to the changing needs of the population it serves (Lim & Rager, 2015). Because there is not a firm disciplinary foundation, researchers in the field need to work especially hard at connecting with others conducting research. If the field is going to advance in terms of its scholarship, it needs to produce researchers and encourage new voices to join the scholarly conversation. The literature makes the discipline.

The discipline should allow for the creation of the literature.

References

Adams, A., Larson, J., & Barkemeyer, J. (2013). Academic advising as a profession: How advisers in Utah view the occupation. *The Mentor, 15*. https://doi.org/10.26209/MJ1561277

Arthur, M. M. L. (2009). Thinking outside the master's house: New knowledge movements and the emergence of academic disciplines. *Social Movement Studies, 8*(1), 73–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830802591176

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. Routledge.

Folsom, P., Yoder, F., & Joslin, J. E. (Eds.). (2015). *The new advisor guidebook: Mastering the art of academic advising* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Ford, S. S. (2007). The essential steps for developing the content of an effective advisor training and development program. *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources*. https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advisor-Training-Steps.aspx

Frickel, S., & Gross, N. (2005). A general theory of scientific/intellectual movements. *American Sociological Review, 70*(2), 204–232.

Gizerian, S. S. (2022). Using methods from the natural sciences. In C. M. McGill, S. S. Gizerian, & P. L. Hagen (Eds.), *Scholarly inquiry in academic advising* (2nd ed.) [Manuscript submitted for publication] Stylus.

Grites, T. J. (2013). Developmental academic advising: A 40-year context. *NACADA Journal, 33*(1), 5–15. https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-13-123

Grites, T. J., Miller, M. A., & Voler, J. G. (Eds.). (2016). *Beyond foundations: Developing as a master academic advisor.* Jossey-Bass.

Groenhuijsen, M. S. (2009). Does victimology have a theoretical leg to stand on?: Victimology as an academic discipline in its own right? In F. W. Winkel, R. M. Letschert, G. F. Kirchhoff, & P. C. Friday (Eds.), *Victimization in a multi-disciplinary key: Recent advances in victimology* (pp. 313–331). Wolf Legal Publishers.

Habley, W. R. (2009). Academic advising as a field of inquiry. *NACADA Journal*, *29*(2),

76–83. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-29.2.76

Hemwall, M. K., & Trachte, K. C. (1999). Learning at the core: Toward a new understanding of academic advising. *NACADA Journal*, *19*(1), 5–11. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-29.1.113

Hemwall, M. K., & Trachte, K. C. (2005). Academic advising as learning: 10 organizing principles. *NACADA Journal*, *25*(2), 74–83. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-25.2.74

Houle, C. O. (1980). *Continuing learning in the professions*. Jossey-Bass.

Knox, A. B., & Fleming, J. E. (2010). Professionalization of the field of adult and continuing education. In C. E. Kassworm, A. D. Rose, & J. M. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 125–135). Sage.

Krishnan, A. (2009). What are academic disciplines? Some observations on the disciplinarity vs. interdisciplinarity debate. (NCRM Working Paper Series 03/09). ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/783/1/what_are_academic_disciplines.pdf

Kuhn, T., & Padak, G. (2008). From the co-editors: Is academic advising a discipline? *NACADA Journal*, *28*(2), 2–4. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-28.2.2

Lim, D. H., Song, J. H., Choi, M. & Kim, H. K. (2013). A comparative analysis of graduate HRD curricular content between the United States and Korea. *Human Resource Development International, 16*(4), 441–462. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2013.803752

Lim, D. H., & Rager, K. (2015). Perceived importance of curricular content of Graduate HRD programs in the U.S. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development, 27*(2), 13–27. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20099

Lowenstein, M. (1999). An alternative to the developmental theory of advising. *The Mentor*, *1*, 2–5. https://journals.psu.edu/mentor/article/view/61758/61402

Lowenstein, M. (2020). If advising is teaching, what do advisors teach? *NACADA Journal, 40*(2), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-20-90

MacQueen, K. M., McLellan-Lemal, E., Bartholow, K., & Milstein, B. (2008). Team-based codebook development: Structure, process, and agreement. In G. Guest & K. M. MacQueen (Eds.), *Handbook for team-based*

qualitative research (pp. 119–135). AltaMira Press.

McElreavy, C., Tobin, V., Martin, T., Damon, M. B., Crate, N., Godinez, A., & Bennett, K. (2016). The history of the academy and the disciplines. In R. DeRosa (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary studies: A connected learning approach*. Rebus Community. https://press.rebus.community/idsconnect/chapter/the-history-of-the-academy-and-the-disciplines/

McGill, C. M. (2019). The professionalization of academic advising: A structured literature review. *NACADA Journal, 39*(1), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-18-015

McGill, C. M., Gizerian, S., & Hagen, P. (2022). Toward an architectonic in academic advising: Scholarly inquiry in academic advising (2nd Edition). *NACADA Journal,* 42(1), In press.

McGill, C. M., Heikkila, M., & Lazarowicz, T. (2020). Professional development, performance expectations and academic advisors' perceptions of relational skills: A sequential explanatory mixed methods study. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 32*(4), 50–69. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20296

McGuire, D. & Cseh, M. (2006). The development of the field of HRD: A Delphi study. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 30*(8), 653–667. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090590610712304

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass.

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2006). NACADA concept of academic advising. https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/Concept.aspx

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2017). NACADA academic advising core competencies model. https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/CoreCompetencies.aspx

Namey, E., Guest, G., Thairu, L., & Johnson, L. (2008). Data reduction techniques for large qualitative data sets. In G. Guest & K. M. MacQueen (Eds.), *Handbook for team-based qualitative research* (pp. 137–161). AltaMira Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Pavalko, R. M. (1988). *Sociology of occupations and professions* (2nd ed.). Peacock Publishers.

Robbins, R. (2012). Everything you have always wanted to know about academic advising (well, almost). *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 26*(3), 216–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2012.685855

Rocco, T. S., Stein, D., & Lee, C. (2003). An exploratory examination of the literature on age and HRD policy development. *Human Resource Development Review*, *2*(2), 155–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484303002002004

Schulenberg, J. K., & Lindhorst, M. J. (2008). Advising is advising: Toward defining the practice and scholarship of academic advising. *NACADA Journal, 28*(1), 43–53. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-28.1.43

Shaffer, L. S., Zalewski, J. M., & Leveille, J. (2010). The professionalization of academic advising: Where are we in 2010? *NACADA Journal*, *30*(1), 66–77. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-30.1.66

Taffe Reed, S. M. (2022). Using arts-based research methods. In C. M. McGill, S. S. Gizerian, & P. L Hagen (Eds.), *Scholarly inquiry in academic advising* (2nd ed.) [Manuscript submitted for publication] Stylus.

Trowler, P., Saunders, M., & Bamber, V. (Eds.). (2013). *Tribes and territories in the 21st century: Rethinking the significance of disciplines in higher education*. Routledge.

Authors' Notes

Dr. Craig M. McGill is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs at Kansas State University. He teaches primarily for the masters and doctoral degree programs in Academic Advising. Dr. McGill holds master's degrees in Music Theory (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) and Academic Advising (Kansas State University), and a doctorate in Adult Education and Human Resource Development (Florida International University). Prior to his arrival to Kansas State University (in summer 2020), he was a primary-role academic advisor for nearly a decade at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (2009-2012) and Florida International University (2012-2018) and then transitioned to a postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of South Dakota. He is a qualitative researcher with an emphasis on professional identity, professionalization, feminist, queer and sexuality studies, and social justice. Dr.

McGill is an active member of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, having served a variety of roles over the past decade. Dr. McGill can be reached at cmcgill@ksu.edu.

Wendy Schindler (she/her) has 15+ years of experience as an academic advising and first-year experience professional. She is currently the associate director for TRIO Student Support Services at Northern Kentucky University. She earned her master's degree in Higher Education from Saint Louis University in 2005. Schindler has served in multiple NACADA leadership roles such as board member (2022-2025) and advising communities division representative council member (2020-2022). She is an experienced conference presenter, speaking on topics such as LGBTQA+ allyhood, intersectionality, and fat liberation from her position as a white, cisgender woman who is fat, queer, mostly able-bodied, middle-class, U.S. citizen by birth, and brain tumor patient. Schindler lives in Cincinnati with her spouse and rescue cats. She is a crafter, punk/goth enthusiast, gamer (video, board, and card), singer, cheese lover, and social justice warrior. She can be reached at schindlerw1@nku.edu.

Keira Solon is a faculty member in the Harmon College of Business and Professional Studies at the University of Central Missouri where she teaches courses related to Business Communication, Events Management, and Leadership. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri, pursuing her EdD in Educational Leadership. She earned a Master of Arts Degree in Technical and Professional Writing from Oklahoma State University, a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English from Kansas State University, and holds a national etiquette training certification from the Etiquette Institute in St. Louis Missouri. Having worked in higher education for nearly two decades, Ms. Solon began her career by serving as an academic advisor and then career development coordinator before transitioning to a full-time faculty position.

Dr. Sean Bridgen is the Associate Director for External and Institutional Partnerships at NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising and is a graduate faculty member in the Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs at Kansas State University. Prior to his appointment with NACADA, Sean worked on college campuses for over 20 years in various roles in academic advising and registrar's offices. Sean can be reached at bridgen@ksu.edu.

Dr. Sarah A. Mathews is an Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction/Social Studies Education at Florida International University. She has spent over 20 years working as a social studies and global educator. Her commitment to civic, global, and social justice education is also infused into her experience teaching courses pertaining to social studies teacher education, curriculum theory, and qualitative research. Dr. Mathews can be reached at samathew@fiu.edu.