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NACADA THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

The Path to Advising: Understanding Who Chooses the Profession

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The purpose of this article is to address how current academic advisors became advisors. In a survey of NACADA members, participants were asked about their demographics, educational backgrounds, and initial and continued interest in academic advising. Knowing this can help advising administrators gain a better understanding of advisor recruitment and retention, as well as help those currently in the profession understand collectively who they are in relation to other advisors, which in turn helps the profession further define the practice of advising.

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Like many student services roles on college campuses, academic advising does not require a linear educational path to work in the field. For this reason, student affairs work, defined loosely as those who "undertake student affairs functions regardless of their organizational placement" (Reason & Broido, 2017, p. 41), was called "a hidden profession" by Richmond and Sherman in 1991 (p. 8). About half of those who entered student affairs master's programs did not know it was an area of study until their late undergraduate years; others learned of the profession after earning bachelor's degrees (Taub & McEwen, 2006). In a study of athletic academic advisors, Rubin (2017) noted that athletic advising is also relatively unknown among undergraduates. Larson et al. (2018) wrote that "academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education" (p. 86). The purpose of this study is to identify who becomes an academic advisor and therefore to examine and analyze the current state of academic advising and improve the practice of advising. Furthermore, the focus of this study is full-time academic advisors.

Literature Review

Graduate students may enter a student affairs master's program because of their desire to work with college students; even then, they still may not perceive a career in academic advising as an option. Though a graduate degree seems to be a growing requirement, an online review of available academic advising positions reveals that a bachelor's degree is the minimum required educational background, with a master's degree listed as preferred. Donnelly (2009) surveyed NACADA members regarding their degrees and found most advisors held master's degrees. Recent studies show 80% to 85% of NACADA members have earned master's degrees (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2020) and 87% of athletic academic advisors hold master's degrees (Rubin, 2017). Donnelly (2009) and Rubin (2017) did not report gender or ethnic background percentages of their survey respondents, a gap this current study seeks to fill. Wilson et al. (2020) called for a deeper understanding of advisors' educational backgrounds, also addressed in this study.

This study seeks to identify gender, ethnicity, and specific educational backgrounds of professional academic advisors. For athletic advisors, the most common master's degrees were in "counseling, education, and student affairs" (Rubin, 2017, p. 43). Among those in student affairs master's programs, the top undergraduate majors were "liberal arts (22.7%), psychology/counseling (19.7%), social sciences (12.7%), business (12.3%), and education (11.3%)" (Taub & McEwen, 2006, p. 208). This study of academic advisors aims to dig deeper to identify specific undergraduate and graduate programs that advisors have completed. Because the career paths of academic advisors are not well understood, we also wanted to discover any commonalities in this regard. "Academic advising" and "advising" are used interchangeably. Furthermore, the word "advisor" generally refers to professional advisors.

Academic advising is a learner-centered activity (Himes, 2014) that has been identified as a critical process in the retention, persistence, and completion of undergraduate degrees (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987). While there is a need to better understand the outcomes of academic advising on the student (McGill, 2018), it is equally critical to understand who becomes an academic advisor. The practice of academic advising will continue to grow in complexity and importance as higher education becomes more intricate and as the diversity of the student body increases (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). The profession is at a critical juncture and this is an opportune time to investigate and understand who becomes an advisor, how they are recruited into or choose to enter the field, and how they are retained in the profession. This study seeks to find out who are today's academic advisors and how they got there.

Brief History of Academic Advising

Academic advising has been described as learning, mentoring, guiding, advocating, and even as friendship (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). First defined in 1841 at Kenyon College, advising was a service provided "to offer students counseling in academic, social, and personal matters" (Shaffer et al., 2010, p. 66). The field of academic advising expanded from broad practices of counseling into more specialized practices that recognized unique needs for students. This included first-generation students, those entering college with disabilities, and those connected to honors-related programs (Cook, 2009). Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) noted, "over time, the practice of advising became more sophisticated, as developmental psychology and higher education pedagogy replaced an earlier, more rudimentary understanding of advising practice as the prescription of course choices" (p. 47). Understanding the role of academic advising has forced scholars and practitioners to consider the curriculum and pedagogy that must go into the training, professional preparation, and continued professional development of those who seek to become academic advisors (McGill, 2017).

Who are Academic Advisors?

Most academic advisors did not plan to become advisors (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015). It happened later, after realizing that advising can be a career. Academic advisors are generally satisfied with their work with both students and colleagues, although they are frustrated by a lack of respect on campus (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Donnelly, 2009; Rubin, 2017), low salaries, and limited advancement opportunities (Donnelly, 2009). Taub and McEwen (2006) investigated why graduate students entered student affairs master's programs, offering parallels with the reasons individuals enter the academic advising profession (e.g., enjoying working with college students). They found that two-thirds of the students were women, most learned of student affairs as a profession late in or after their undergraduate experience, 80% entered the profession because of a mentor's influence, more than 72% desired to work on a college campus, and more than 57% said they desired "the opportunity to nurture the development of students" (p. 211). Less is known specifically about how academic advisors choose their careers. However, Rubin (2017) found, "no single pathway or training leads directly to a position" in athletic academic advising (p. 45). Even so, Rubin's survey respondents encouraged prospective athletic advisors to seek graduate assistant positions in this area.

Academic advisors may enter advising through their graduate work, but other avenues also exist, affirming the inconsistency in how individuals enter the advising field. Understanding who becomes an academic advisor, how they are recruited into the field, and how they are retained is significant to better understand the practice of advising and will help expand the body of scholarship related to the practice of academic advising (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Increased student diversity at institutions of higher education drives the need to strengthen diversity in faculty and staff positions. Academic advisors need to represent the demographic of students served (Museus & Ravello, 2010). Currently, White women are overrepresented in the field of student affairs (Taub & McEwen, 2006), and academic advising is no exception to this when reviewing NACADA membership.

Shaffer et al. (2010) and McMahan (2008) strongly emphasized the need for a master's degree upon entry into the field of academic advising. Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) identified that some advisors "stumbled" (p. 68) into the profession, some learned of it through their graduate programs, and others began other careers in higher education before transitioning to advising. Likewise, Rubin (2017) reported a similar finding with athletic academic advisors.

Issues in Advising

Limited opportunities for advancement and lack of recognition are challenges in retaining academic advisors. Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) found that academic advisors wanted more respect and prestige, specifically in terms of consistency in job title and training. In a case study of a single institution, Pellegrino et al. (2015) assessed the role of academic advising on campus to design a career ladder addressing this issue of retention in the profession. They found advisors wanted direct communication about next steps in their career, job descriptions with clear expectations, and conversations with their supervisor if those expectations or responsibilities were going to change. Pellegrino et al. (2015) argued that this commitment to help advisors continue to grow and develop would retain quality advisors.

Advisor responsibilities can vary across institutions (Imbeah, 2017); however, advisors must maintain continued engagement with students (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015), they must keep up with the changing needs of students, and they must challenge their advisees to think about lifelong learning (Lowenstein & Bloom, 2016). Additionally, advisors are responsible for knowing, understanding, and communicating academic policies, curriculum and graduation requirements, and strategies for student success (NACADA, 2021).

Training for academic advisors has predominately been on-the-job, though a push for quality academic training has become increasingly more important as the drive for specialization grows. Lowenstein and Bloom (2016) emphasized that academic advisors keep a pulse on what occurs on campus in a way that few others can replicate. Senior or lead advisors use philosophy and theory to understand what is happening both nationally and globally, as well as on campus, to further understand the impact on students (Lowenstein & Bloom, 2016). These responsibilities and foundational skills cannot simply be learned on the job and must be supported by additional training and development.

Methodology

Instrument

To explore academic advisor backgrounds and their career paths, we developed an online survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions for the target population: academic advisors in higher education. Quantitative questions included demographic information: gender, institution type, salary, satisfaction with salary, undergraduate and graduate majors, current position, satisfaction with current position, and intent to remain in current position (see Appendix). The open-ended question "How did you 'get into' academic advising?" was also asked. This question aligns with a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998) as we sought to understand the essence of what draws individuals to academic advising roles. Phenomenology is appropriate to "describe the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Another tenet of this framework involves researchers suspending preconceived notions.

After gaining Institutional Research Board and NACADA approval, the survey was distributed to NACADA members via its LISTSERV. The final sample consisted of those who completed the survey, 1,062 with representation from all 10 NACADA regions, 15 countries, and all 50 U.S. states.

Operational Definitions

We identify *academic advisor* loosely as institutions use a host of titles to identify those who work with students in advising capacities. Differences may exist for those whose primary role is academic advising, those who work in advising administration, and those whose primary role is faculty member with advising as a portion of their responsibilities. We define *primary-role advisors* as those whose advising responsibilities comprise 75% to 100% of their responsibilities. A small majority (53%) of the survey respondents were primary role advisors. For those who advised less than 75% of the time, their job titles often included "director of advising," "academic coach," "faculty advisor," and "academic advisor with other departmental responsibilities."

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative questions surrounding participants' institutions, salaries, gender, degrees, age, ethnicity, and number of years they intended to remain in their current positions. The question of how participants entered advising was examined by qualitative analysis according to Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) coding process. The research team members individually read more than 1,000 participant responses to this open-ended question. The data was coded by

Table 1. Ethnicity comparison percentages between survey participants and NACADA data

	Survey Respondents	NACADA Data on Members
Ethnicity		
White	82.37	61.64
African American	4.88	11.46
Asian American	3.44	3.56
Latinx	5.42	7.99
Mixed Race	1.54	2.18
Native American	0.99	0.68
Other	1.36	12.48
Total	100	99.99

"identifying text segments, placing a bracket around them, and assigning a code word or phrase that accurately describe[d] the meaning of the text segment" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 244). Codes were developed until a point of saturation was reached, meaning no new codes could be created. Codes were then analyzed to determine how they could be collapsed or combined with others to reduce the number of codes, which would become the major themes. The research team met after creating individual themes and there was clear consensus as the identified themes were discussed. This method of peer checking helps achieve confirmability, a trustworthiness criterion according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). Another trustworthiness criterion, credibility, was achieved by having a large number of participants share their advising story.

Results

The electronic survey included questions about demographics, educational background, how participants became advisors, and intent to remain in their position.

Gender and Ethnicity

Among the survey participants 82.37% identified as White, 5.42% as Latino, 4.88% as African American, 3.44% as Asian American/Pacific Islander, 1.54% as mixed race, 1.36% as other, and 0.99% as Native American, Aleut, or Aboriginal Peoples. Data obtained from NACADA shows White members make up 61.64% of NACADA membership, African American at 11.46%, Latino at 7.99%, Asian American at 3.56%, Native American/First Nations at 0.68%, and mixed-race at 2.18% (see Table 1). As shown in Table 2, 82.72% of participants identified as women, 16.62% identified as men, and less than 1% identified as nonbinary or other.

Table 2. Gender comparison percentages between survey participants and NACADA data

	Survey Respondents	NACADA Data on Members
Gender		
Women	82.72	71.90
Men	16.62	20.86
Nonbinary	0.38	0.08
Other	0.28	7.16
Total	100	100

We isolated gender and ethnicity and found White women represented 71.00% of the survey respondents, White men 14.00%, Latina women 4.80%, African American women 4.30%, and Asian American women 2.60%. We also reviewed gender and ethnicity of primary-role advisors and found White women represented 72.70% of all primary role advisors and White men 12.70% (see Table 3). The next closest group was Latina women at 4.40%, followed by African American women at 3.80%, and Asian American/Pacific Islander women at 1.90%. Among the 479 women in the sample who were primary-role advisors, White women comprised 86% of these women, followed by Latina women at 5%, African American women at 5%, Asian American/Pacific Islander women at 1%, and Native American women at 1%. Among the 91 primary-role advisors who identified as men, White men comprised 79%, followed by Latino men at 8%, Asian American men at 7%, African American men at 3%, and mixed-race men at 3%.

Educational Backgrounds

Participants were asked about their post-secondary degrees and majors at the bachelor's level and higher. Nearly all (99%) held bachelor's degrees, 84% held master's degrees, and 14% held doctoral degrees. As shown in Table 4, the top bachelor's degrees were psychology (17%), English (9%), communications (8%), business (7.5%), and education (6%). Of those with master's degrees, 38% were in higher education/student affairs, followed by counseling (18%), educational leadership (11%), business (5%), and English (4%). Nearly half (48%) of all doctoral

Table 3. Gender, ethnicity, and percent of those who work primarily as academic advisors (n=565)

	Women	Men	Nonbinary	Other
Ethnicity				
White	72.70	12.70	0.01	0.01
African American	3.80	0.05	0	0
Asian American	1.90	0.01	0.01	0
Latinx	4.40	0.01	0	0
Mixed Race	0.07	0.05	0	0
Native American	0.01	0	0	0
Other	0.04	0.01	0	0
Total	82.92	12.83	0.02	0.01

degrees were related to the education field with higher education first at 18%, curriculum & instruction and educational psychology with 16%, educational leadership at 13%, and psychology at 6%. The survey asked participants to indicate their NACADA region, which included an international region beyond the United States and Canada. Sixteen of these members indicated they had master's degrees, a stark contrast from the overall top majors of the larger sample. International master's degrees included political science, mathematics, biology, elementary education, journalism, human resources management, theology, social science, and law.

Job Satisfaction and Retention

Survey participants were asked how long they had worked in their positions, how long they intended to remain, their salary ranges, job satisfaction, and whether they believed their work was valued on campus. Across all salary ranges, participants were largely satisfied with their respective jobs (see Table 5). The lowest paid salary group ($30,000–$34,999) was the most likely to leave their positions within the next 2 years (39.39%; see Table 6). Two salary groups ($40,000–$44,999 and over $70,000) showed above 90% job satisfaction. Employees with salary ranges above $50,000 were less likely to agree that they would leave their positions within the next 2 years.

How Advisors Became Advisors

Findings from this study indicate there is no one clear path to becoming an academic advisor. Rather, five major pathways appear to lead to a career in academic advising. Participants responded to an open-ended question, which asked how they "got into" advising. The pathways that emerged from this study are (a) because of a career shift, (b) through graduate experiences, (c) intentionally, (d) by happenstance, and (e) involuntary.

Career shift. In easily the largest group at 39%, many advisors in this study indicated finding their role as an academic advisor after leaving a position that was either outside of higher education (secondary education, social work, or for-profit sectors) or from within another area of higher education (residence life, financial aid, and faculty). Those who made this career change suggested that the move was often an attempt to better align their own values with the expectations of their job. One individual saw advising as a perfect combination of their strengths and background, commenting that "advising was a perfect way to utilize my skills and it involved the best parts of teaching and counseling." A former high school teacher said, "I wanted to find another position where I

Table 4. Top degree programs of study among NACADA members

Bachelors	Masters	Doctoral
Psychology (17%)	Higher Ed/Student Affairs (38%)	Higher Ed (18%)
English (9%)	Counseling (18%)	Curriculum/Instruction (16%)
Communications (8%)	Ed. Leadership (11%)	Ed. Leadership (13%)
Business (7.5%)	Business (5%)	Psychology (6%)
Education (6%)	English (4%)	English (5%)

Table 5. Salary and job satisfaction and agreement that job is valued on campus

	Percent Satisfied with Current Job	Percent Feel Work Valued on Campus
Salary		
$30,000–$34,999	72.72	72.73
$35,000–$39,999	84.06	80.55
$40,000–$44,999	90.18	78.76
$45,000–$49,000	71.87	81.11
$50,000–$54,999	86.41	79.63
$55,000–$59,000	84.21	78.05
$60,000–$64,999	80.00	76.00
$65,000–$69,000	87.88	85.08
$70,000 +	90.07	81.40

could still support student development but not have to grade papers."

Even though most undergraduates encounter academic advisors, advising as a career remains largely out of one's awareness. One participant shared that when they went back to school and met with an advisor, they "mentioned an interest in possibly doing something like she did (academic advising). That conversation went exceptionally well."

Academic advising also attracts individuals who are already working in higher education. There were several who left other student affairs functional areas, adjunct positions, and even tenured faculty lines to become academic advisors. Admissions, study abroad, residence life, orientation, and TRIO programs were common functional areas where advisors had previous higher education experience. One former admissions counselor commented, "I worked in admissions for 9 years. Seeing the landscape of the institution, I knew I wanted to be more involved in the students' lifespan at the institution, rather than just getting them in the door."

Those who were in instructor roles, ranging from adjuncts to tenure-track faculty members, also made career shifts to advising. One former adjunct said, "I was looking for full-time employment and [an advising position] seemed like a good way to earn experience in other areas of higher education." Another commented that they came to advising "via the adjunct instruction route and the realization that academic advising was not understood or in some instances discounted by many faculty members."

Not all faculty members discount advising. For some faculty members, academic advising was a more suitable avenue. A former faculty member said, "After being a sociology professor, I wanted to spend more time with students and left a tenure-track job in order to begin pursuing an advising path." Another said, "I was dissatisfied with teaching and the academic world. . . . I like working with students, but not evaluating them academically."

Graduate experiences. Many respondents (22%) were either previously or currently graduate students who intentionally entered a student affairs graduate program because of their desire to work with students, though they may not have considered academic advising specifically until introduced to an opportunity through their academic program. Likewise, students may enter other graduate programs because of their interest in teaching or working with students. One participant commented, "I started out teaching freshman composition, but I quickly realized that I enjoyed working individually with my students and guiding them. So I moved from that into a TRIO program and fell in love with advising." For others, it was a

Table 6. Percent who indicated number of years to remain on job based on salary

	0–2 years	3–5 years	6–10 years	Through Retirement
Salary				
$30,000–$34,999	39.39	30.30	12.12	18.18
$35,000–$39,999	28.38	46.00	13.51	12.16
$40,000–$44,999	27.83	33.91	19.33	19.13
$45,000–$49,999	31.07	46.60	7.77	14.56
$50,000–$54,999	23.42	33.33	16.22	27.03
$55,000–$59,999	16.28	39.53	18.60	25.58
$60,000–$64,999	8.70	17.39	30.43	43.48
$65,000–$69,999	2.94	35.29	13.24	48.53
$70,000 +	**4.55**	**29.55**	**15.91**	**50.00**

practicum or assistantship with an advising office that introduced them to the role of academic advising. One advisor commented, "When I started graduate school, I was considering working with athletics, but I completed a practicum with the Academic Advising Center and never left!"

Academic advising as a career is not often at the forefront for graduate students. Once brought into awareness, many said they "fell in love" with advising ("love" was mentioned in a variety of ways more than 80 times). Similarly, some mentioned they realized they preferred working with students in one-on-one settings. For instance, "When I applied to jobs, I applied for both res life and advising positions. After grad school, I accepted a hall director position and I hated it. . . . That's when I realized advising suited me better." Though a graduate degree seems to be a growing requirement for advising positions (84% of the participants in this study held master's degrees), many advising positions continue to list a bachelor's degree as the minimum educational background.

Intentionally. Some advisors (17%) sought an advising career through graduate work or directly upon receiving their undergraduate degrees. They were inspired and motivated from their undergraduate experience and wanted to give back. However, other individuals intentionally sought out advising roles as they completed graduate work. One participant reflected on their undergraduate advising experiences: "My academic advisor was a very positive influence on me, and I helped a lot of my friends with advising-related issues. I figured I'd pursue that as my career." Another commented,

> I loved helping people schedule classes and asked my advisor what training advisors need. After taking a couple years off, I went back to school to earn a degree in student affairs. My first job was in orientation with elements of advising. My next job was as a program coordinator where I was trained as an advisor and advised my undeclared students. My next job was as an academic advisor.

Many of these advisors described how others encouraged them to consider advising. One commented, "I was a peer advisor for study abroad and loved helping students explore things they didn't know they could, which lead to the staff advisors encouraging me to explore the field." For some individuals, negative experiences motivated them to become advisors. One person described how it took them 8 years to finish their undergraduate degree, saying that "Ultimately, I wanted to be a resource that I didn't have, so that I could help prevent students from becoming 'like me.'" Similarly, another advisor explained, "I had a poor experience with an advisor, and I became determined to do it better."

Happenstance. Some 17% of the advisors in this study reported having "fallen into" becoming an academic advisor. A common theme of happenstance is captured by one quote: "It was never my intent to be an academic advisor." For another participant, advising seemed to come naturally:

> I fell into it. I started advising, without realizing it, when I was completing my student teaching. It then progressed as I worked at a technical school as I was the person students saw when they failed a term. Then, as the sole office person for my departments, and the only 12-month employee, advising fell on me as no one else was around or available to see students.

For some, it was the specific invitation to apply for an advising position from a mentor, friend, or family member. One individual said, "Someone else suggested that it would be a good fit."

Involuntary. Often the task of advising is an added responsibility to other job functions. Some 5% of advisors polled felt as though they did not have much choice. A few who already worked in an area of higher education were informed that their jobs were shifting to include advising. Others were charged with tasks such as beginning an advising center and departmental advising. One respondent recalled, "I was assigned to it within my department 41 years ago because senior faculty members could not be bothered with such 'needless' tasks." Another said, "I was told to start advising undecided students." Several advisors mentioned being a "trailing spouse" to their local geographic region and were therefore limited to whichever job opportunities were available. "A job is a job," one commented. Those who fall within this involuntary category did not express as much enthusiasm for advising, but it should be noted that although advising may not have been their preferred choice, these were nevertheless NACADA members, indicating some interest in continued professional development.

Discussion and Implications

Academic advising can be a rewarding career option for those seeking to work with college students. While some people have fallen into this career, many have intentionally become academic advisors. Many participants had never considered advising as a career. Just as the student affairs profession can be hidden as a viable career choice, the academic advising profession is similarly hidden. The current study reinforces the need to make academic advising a more desirable and apparent career choice. With 39% of advisors entering academic advising as a career shift and 17% by happenstance, most advisors did not initially set out on this career path. Similarly, a participant in Rubin's (2017) study expressed regret in not realizing advising was a career choice until well into their graduate program. Earlier outreach to prospective advisors could help them realize advising as a first-choice possibility.

Preponderance of White Women in Advising

In their study of NACADA members, Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) found 78% of their participants were female and 70% were White. Wilson et al.'s (2020) study of NACADA members revealed 78.5% were women and 76.4% White. Data provided by NACADA shows that at least 61% of the organization's membership self-identified as being White. Additionally, 72% of the membership identify as female. This data suggests little racial or gender diversity in academic advising. In reviewing the demographics of those who completed our survey (82.37% were White; 82.72% were women), the perspectives of academic advising could benefit from expanding. Women make up 75% of educators in U.S. primary and secondary education (Hansen & Quintero, 2018). However, a sharp decrease occurs in higher education, where women account for about 46% of faculty positions (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). Returning to Taub and McEwen's (2006) study of graduate students in student affairs programs, women participants represented about 75% of their sample. If individuals are drawn to academic advising for similar reasons that they are drawn to student affairs and teaching, similar gender percentages may be expected.

Retention of Academic Advisors is Concerning

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in higher education (CAS; 2019) suggested advisor training and ongoing professional development should include student development theory, advising best practices, information on the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, and "strategies for building strong relationships and connections with students from diverse backgrounds through a variety of advising interactions" (p. 38). McMahan (2008) suggested prospective academic advisors seek master's degrees in higher education or college student personnel to learn the essential skills necessary to working as advisors. However, advising administrators are encouraged to consider applicants of other disciplines as well. It is nearly impossible to tell from a résumé how skilled someone is at connecting with students.

Though 70% to 90% of the participants in the current study expressed satisfaction with their current positions, more than 39% of those with annual salaries under $35,000 plan on leaving their positions within 2 years. Perhaps more surprising, within the $45,000 to $49,000 salary range, more than 77% of participants intend to leave their positions within 5 years. It is important for administrators to recognize advising is a transient field where most advisors are constantly seeking opportunities. Rubin (2017) noted a similar finding with intent to leave and a high burnout rate among athletic academic advisors. Salary may be part—but not the whole—reason advisors seek other opportunities (see Table 6). Advising administrators can use this data to inform their recruiting practices.

Limitations

The current study has limitations. First, the international response was unanticipated and some forced-choice questions, such as salary and institution type, were developed on a U.S.-centric model. Second, not all academic advisors are NACADA members, and nonmembers are not represented in this study. Finally, although advisors were asked about job satisfaction, a valuable additional question would address what it would take for them to remain in their roles.

Future Research and Practice

This study identified several areas where further research is needed. One such area is understanding how graduate students of color are drawn to student affairs roles and specifically academic advising. As demonstrated through the demographic information reported by the survey participants in this study, the field of academic

advising is overrepresented by White women. Because academic advisors are so integral to the student experience and because it is critical for students to see faculty and staff members who look like them, academic advising must diversify.

Nelson (2020) framed his study of undergraduates enrolled in an introduction to student affairs course within Social Cognitive Career Theory (SSCT). This theory "explores the congruence between academic major/career aspirations and personal abilities, self-efficacy, and career performance/satisfaction" (p. 36). Within SSCT, background, personal goals, learning experiences, actions, self-efficacy (i.e., their belief in their ability), and interactions with mentors all contribute to career development. Each element could be explored within the context of academic advisors' career development. According to Nelson, in SSCT, "career choice goals inform career choice actions" (p. 162). An action of enrolling in a graduate program or seeking an advising internship/practicum directly stems from one's career choice goal of becoming an academic advisor. In addition, SSCT can be applied to one's realistic job expectations and satisfaction.

Lee (2018) described the importance and significance of academic advising and the discomfort that Black students at predominately White institutions (PWIs) often feel in working with academic advisors. Because PWIs are racialized organizations where Black students face racism on a consistent basis, it is critical to have advisors who can work with students on their holistic development, which includes racial identity (Lee, 2018). Institutions will need to identify hiring strategies that attract Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to these positions. Additionally, student affairs preparation programs should specifically introduce academic advising as an option within the broader field of working with students. These preparation programs could partner with institutional academic advising offices to provide training opportunities to graduate students of color pursuing student affairs and allow them to gain experience with the responsibilities of academic advising.

Conclusion

Academic advisors represent a multitude of academic backgrounds. Stoller (2015) noted, "a diverse set of academic backgrounds makes student affairs much more vibrant" (para. 4). A NACADA member in Aiken-Wisniewski et al.'s (2015) study stated, "if [education is] standardized, we may lose some of the diverse life experience that makes academic advising valuable" (p. 65). Having advisors from varying undergraduate and graduate programs strengthens advising teams as well as the advising profession and is an added benefit for students. Furthermore, based on our finding that international advisors did not have graduate degrees in student affairs and higher education, favoring certain degrees might exclude some members of the international population from NACADA's global aims.

Although their salaries cover a wide range, academic advisors are highly satisfied. They love their work with students, an important finding that Rubin (2017) also noted. The profession can continue to study supervision and mentoring, training programs, and career paths for advancement and how such development would affect individual advisors and their job satisfaction. Diversifying the composition of advising staff members is one significant step in ensuring the academic advising is meeting the needs of students. Academic advisors must also be culturally responsive and the advising they provide must be culturally relevant. Institutions need to take the initiative in providing training and professional development opportunities for current and future academic advisors to work on these competencies. Institutions should find ways to harness these strengths of prior knowledge while continuing to provide professional development.

Those who have attended schools in the K–12 system are familiar with the role of teachers, and some students will envision themselves as teachers, but few will imagine becoming academic advisors in higher education, particularly before attending college. Recall the NACADA adage that advising is teaching. Regardless of academic training, individuals are often drawn to teaching because they wish to make a difference in students' lives. Those who wish to make a positive difference in students' lives should be made aware that academic advising could be a viable career path. For many, academic advising remains an invisible career possibility, and an invitation or nudge to consider an open position might be enough to find qualified candidates. Adjunct faculty members who enjoy teaching may find success in advising. Similarly, those in counseling and social work roles already have the training to develop relationships with students and may have never considered advising.

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APPENDIX

Survey questions

Demographic information (gender, age, salary range, ethnicity, degrees earned)

What is your job title? _____

What is your institution's size? (small, medium, large)

What is your institution's type? (4 year/2 year; public/private; other)

What NACADA region does your institution belong to?

What percent of your time is spent in academic advising? (1–24%; 25–49%; 50–74%; 75–100%)

How many years have you worked in your current position? _____

How many years have you worked in higher education? _____

How satisfied are you with your current position? (extremely unsatisfied to extremely satisfied)

How long do you intend to remain in your current position? (0–2 years; 3–5; 6–10; through retirement)

Do you have a bachelor's degree? (If so, please specify your major)

Do you have a master's degree? (If so, please specify your major)

Do you have a doctoral/professional/terminal degree? (If so, please specify your major)

How did you "get into" academic advising? _____

Overall, your work is valued at your institution (strongly disagree to strongly agree)

As an undergraduate, how involved were you on campus? _____