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FOUNDATION FOR THE FIELD OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

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Contextually Inclusive Theory:

Foundation for the Field of Academic Advising

by

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ABSTRACT

Completion of a college degree has been highlighted as a prerequisite for opportunity (Obama White House Archives, February 24, 2009); necessary for a strong economy (Koropeckyj, et al., 2017). Yet, the rate of completion in the United States remains lower than desired, directing focus toward efforts to promote student success and degree attainment. Within this out-comes oriented climate, academic advising is often viewed solely in terms of its utilitarian value, a means for ushering students toward the final goal of college completion. Without a clear conceptualization of the role of academic advising within higher education, it will continue to be susceptible to political, institutional, and economic forces, making it difficult for either the practice or the scholarly field of study to progress. More importantly, the absence of clear theoretical foundation leaves the profession vulnerable, diminishing the potential to effectively support students. The dissertation will contribute to the theoretical literature on academic advising.

Drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) a contextually inclusive theory of academic advising is introduced, laying conceptual foundation in which interpretation is central, meaning and truth are iterative, and understanding is structured by the conditions of human existence. I maintain that effective academic advising involves recognition of *how* things have

meaning, from where, within what context, and as impacted by the (dis)connections students have with others, over time. Such an attunement offers foundation for equitable practice, inclusive of all students, validating their experiences (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), identifying obstacles that might impede their performance (NACADA, 2022), allowing them to feel a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018), and providing a space for students to experience meaningful accomplishment. Overall, the dissertation argues that academic advising ought to be educationally driven, learning-focused, concerned with student completion, and informed by an understanding of the human being, the individual student, as a contextualized interpreter. This theory points us to reconsider advising caseloads, training, and institutional information sharing, in an effort to support the interpretive processes necessary for effective academic advising. Moreover, it offers a space to think deeply about the nature of academic advising, what it ought to entail, and how to effectively support students.

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The central themes of this dissertation have been under consideration, in one shape or another, for over a decade. I have discussed them at conferences, written about them, and contemplated the connection between hermeneutics and advising with family, colleagues, and friends. The journey has been long, beginning from a place of fear, a certainty that the "mountain was too high," that if I ventured too far, failure would inevitably ensue. This "fear of falling" has been a regular theme in my life. It has been difficult to believe in myself, to trust that I have intellectual capacity, to see value in my own thoughts and capabilities. It would not have been possible for me to muster the courage to imagine I might have something to say, for my thoughts to take shape, to complete this dissertation, without the support of the people in my life. I wish them all sincere gratitude for believing me capable of this work, for encouraging me to think deeply, and for persuading me to trust my instincts.

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CHAPTER ONE

Foundation for Academic Advising: Conceptualizing the Student

Academic advising in its current form is still in its infancy, a nascent profession and field of study, working to establish its identity and seeking legitimacy within higher education. While the role began in the 1630s as indistinct, involving supplemental instruction and disciplinary oversight (Lucas, 2006), it continues to evolve and establish itself as both a profession and an intellectual field of inquiry. Today there are tens of thousands of professional academic advisors, success coaches, advising administrators, faculty advisors, and an ever-expanding body of scholarship devoted to the topic. The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA, 2023) reports a membership of over 12,000 advising professionals. Sitting within a complex system of higher education, it is influenced by political trends, institutional pressures, and global forces.

The impact of this context is acutely prominent when taking into consideration the relationship between higher education and economic stability. The value of a college degree, its impact on the financial well-being of those who complete a degree and the society within which they participate, have become a primary focus of consideration for higher education in the United States. A college degree is no longer considered a luxury, but rather the prerequisite for opportunity (Obama White House Archives, February 24, 2009) and a "potential pathway to a stronger economy" (Koropeckyj, et al., 2017, p. 33). Yet, at a rate of 64% (NCES, 2022), completion remains below optimal levels in the United States. As a result, American higher education has become focused on the mission to increase completion, championing this goal

through the rhetoric of "student success." Yet, success is often narrowly defined, viewed as the opposite of student departure (leaving before completing a degree), conceptualized in terms of student persistence (student's ability to continuously enroll) and degree attainment. It is within this outcomes-oriented climate that the field of academic advising is situated, searching for professional legitimacy, and developing within higher education.

The collective focus on college completion, degree attainment, and student success has led to a substantial production of research focused on student departure, persistence, and degree attainment. Such literature has signaled a connection between effective academic advising and increased rates of retention and completion (Pascarella & Tarenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1999), amplifying the significance of advising and drawing positive attention to the profession, validating its importance, and establishing its worth as a "necessary component of higher education" (Grites, et al., 2008). However, within a framework in which student success is equivalent to completion (the attainment of a degree), the educative aspects of advising and its connection with intellectual and personal transformation of students are often lost. Nevertheless, advising is more than the mere practice of stewardship, the utilitarian function of guiding students toward degree completion. It is an educational process that facilitates learning (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Hemwall & Trachte, 1999, 2005; Lowenstein, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2014; White & Schulenberg, 2012), establishing a relationship between the student and their education (Hunter & White, 2004), connecting them with resources, straddling a space between the academic, co-curricular, and personal spheres. Overall, advising involves the activity of guiding students through their academic journey (Troxel, 2018). While there is little dispute about this characterization of academic advising, it lacks a robust theoretical foundation and clear definition.

Most definitions are vague and not easily separated from similar practices and disciplines (Himes, 2014), making it difficult to "describe both the practice of academic advising and its scholarly identity independent of other fields and professions" (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, p. 44). While application of theory from fields such as counseling, psychology, and sociology have been used to help establish legitimacy for the profession (Hagen & Jordan, 2008), this activity has limited the growth of the profession and scholarly field of study, leaving us tied to the language and literature of other disciplines. Conceptualized through such scholarship and crowned as essential to student success, academic advising is valued for its role in retaining students, and yet often perceived as merely a service necessary for outlining the curriculum, prescribing courses, preventing departure, and supporting increased rates of completion. Of course, academic advising has an essential role in supporting efforts to increase college completion, there is value in such utilitarian function; however, it is misleading and even harmful to the growth of the profession to characterize advising primarily in this way. It leaves out consideration of the educational elements of the endeavor and overlooks the transformational aspects of facilitating students' intellectual and personal growth.

Resolution of the tension between these so-called competing characterizations of advising requires further development of a foundational theory, one that draws out the integration of all aspects of academic advising, underscores the educational elements of the practice and its unique function within higher education, includes recognition of the impact of the sociohistorical context of each individual student, and is grounded by an understanding of the iterative nature of the human interpretive process.

Problem Statement

As a burgeoning profession and area of scholarship in search of legitimacy and significance, academic advising is susceptible to the political, social, and academic trends of the time. Beginning at least as early as 1981, scholars (Crockett, 1985; Habley, 1981; Metzner, 1989; Tinto, 1987) began making use of data in support of the claim that effective academic advising plays a role in student retention and degree completion, providing merit for academic advising as an essential component of the student support ecosystem. Even further, renewed focus on college completion rates and "student success" generated during the Obama presidency have further influenced and defined the field of academic advising. In some cases, even prompting institutions to rebrand advising offices as "student success centers" staffed by "student success coaches." Some scholars and practitioners in the field of academic advising enthusiastically emphasize the importance of the connection that has been drawn between advising and degree completion, and yet others have grown concerned about the way in which this agenda has overshadowed other equally significant aspects of advising.

Within the powerful rhetoric of student success, it is difficult to defend and explore the positive connection between advising and completion and to pay close attention to the educational mission of advising. Such focus on student success, has impacted how higher education is conceived and delivered, narrowing the focus of the practice and scholarship of academic advising. Consequently, the field of academic advising has remained underdefined, perceived in terms of its utilitarian value. Without a clear and fully articulated foundation, the field will continue to be misunderstood and undervalued.

The dissertation is an attempt to open our perspectives about the foundational aspects of academic advising. It is a philosophical endeavor to unearth core elements of what ought to,

ideally, be involved in the practice of academic advising. The product of the dissertation is meant to address advisors directly. I use the term advisor openly to include faculty advisors, primary role advisors, advising administrators, and those whose work includes academic advising but is not solely focused on the activity of advising. I will engage in this project as an academic advisor myself, from the perspective of an advising practitioner, thinking about the activity and the corresponding field of scholarship. I will explore the history of academic advising within American higher education, outline the evolution of the field, and introduce the literature and scholarship that has emerged over the last five decades. In particular, I will point to the theoretical literature that has shaped the scope and direction of the practice and scholarship on the subject. Even further, I will discuss the impact of the movement to decrease student departure, increase what has been coined "student success" and the political and practical mechanisms employed to increase rates of college completion.

Ultimately, this dissertation will address, philosophically rather than empirically, questions about how best to conceptualize advising, to think through how we as advisors should come to the practice. So, rather than identifying and describing what advising is empirically in its current reality, I will explore ideas about how we ought to envision this work, incorporating current views articulated by a variety of scholars. This dissertation is an attempt to ask and answer philosophical questions about academic advising and what it should entail. Yet, it is *not* meant to impose one essential theory or reduce the practice of advising to some abstract metaphysical conceptualization. Instead, the dissertation will introduce an additional element to our normative philosophical conceptualization to further ground the practice and scholarship of academic advising. This dissertation will build on the work of others already practicing in the profession and producing scholarship on academic advising. As a philosophical project it is

designed to problematize current ideas about advising, to provoke questions, and to open a space for others to reply. It is my hope that it will be reviewed, debated, added to, altered, and open a dialogue for change and a fertile starting place for future research and scholarship.

The aim of this dissertation is threefold—to point out what may be overlooked when focusing solely on degree completion, to add to the discussion of learning-centered, educationally-focused academic advising, and to incorporate recognition of the ontological elements necessary for the relational aspects of this work. I will argue that the work of academic advising ought to be educationally driven, learning-focused, supporting student success and degree completion, and grounded by a recognition of the ontological elements of human existence, the sociohistorically situated "place" within which students interpret and understand the world. I will speak directly to academic advisors, adding to the literature that "provides… a common language and shared understanding of academic advising among practicing advisors" (Himes, 2021, p. 49). I will do so by engaging in an ongoing philosophical discussion about the foundational elements and distinctive characteristics of academic advising.

Current Scholarship through a Hermeneutic Lens

Current theoretical scholarship has been useful for the development of the field of academic advising. It has provided structure, techniques, and conceptualizations necessary for establishing the scope of academic advising, and yet it has overlooked the ontological context of the advisee, the conditions through which understanding takes place and meaning arises. This dissertation will engage with the existing theoretical scholarship on academic advising, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses and adding to the discussion and debate about the conception and practice of academic advising. I will rely primarily on the work of Martin Heidegger, drawing out the significance of the ontological elements of existence, establishing a

conceptualization of interpretation, what it entails and how it plays a role in human experience, and in turn academic advising.

Interpretation

Martin Heidegger's (1927/1962) hermeneutic framing allows us to reexamine the notion of human life and to introduce the imperative of a contextually inclusive theory of academic advising. His project unearths an ontological conceptualization of meaning and truth, moving us to reconsider what constitutes reality. In so doing, attention is drawn to the primacy of the interpretive process and the impact of the existential conditions through which human understanding is made possible. Meaning is not discoverable "out there" in the physical universe, but rather disclosed to us in a revealing of *how* things make sense to us. In this way, understanding entails the activity of realizing the significance of things, an "unconcealment" (Schmidt, 2006) involving the process of making sense of what we encounter through the conditions of our existence. As such, meaning is not an innate property "discoverable through objective analysis of the external world" but rather *is* interpretation itself "determined by the significance something has for an individual human being" (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013, p. 226). We are beings for whom interpretation is primary, characterizing how we move through the world, encounter and interact with what we experience, establishing what is meaningful.

World (*being-in-the-world*)

Interpretation takes place from within and through our everyday, contextualized, situation in the world. Rather than a physical location, however, the notion of world in this depiction is represented as an environment (Chanter, 2001), a sphere of concerns (Polt, 1999), the sociohistorical position within which human beings make sense of things (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013). Our world, the "environment" or "sphere of concern" is that within which we

exist and that through which understanding is shaped, and meaning is established. It is our sociohistorical position, our race, class, gender, nationality, age, and includes our experiences and our connections with others. Even further, it involves the corporeal elements of existence. While Heidegger may have privileged the intellectual, the mind, and failed to provide a full exploration of embodiment (Chanter, 2001, p. 80), such elements are equally influential in constituting human understanding. Meaning is shaped by both the intellectual and corporeal experiences within the conditions of our being-in-the-world, a world within which we are connected and disconnected to others.

Connectedness (*being-with*)

As Heidegger (1927/1962) has explained, our world "is a with-world. Being-in is being-with others" (p. 155). Understanding, the mode through which we make sense of things, is conditioned by our being-in-the-world with others. The people in our lives, these others, are not simply objects that we encounter, observe, and find useful or not. Instead, they are influential to our understanding and interpretation. Our being-with, the relational way we exist, connected, or disconnected with others, impacts how we make sense of things. The people we love, the people we hate, the people we engage with, our teachers, our friends, our family, our neighbors, influence how meaning is signified within our own sociohistorical context, our being-in-the-world. Our connections with others, our being-with, take place from within and through our sociohistorical context, our being-in-the-world, influencing and shaping our interpretation and understanding.

Time: Structure of Understanding

Interpretation is structured by time, the framework within which understanding is directed. Rather than a collection of individual moments as captured on a timeline or measured

by a clock, time is the horizon through which meaning emerges, unifying our present through the past, influencing how we view the future, all of which is conditioned by our situatedness toward the finality of existence (death). It is Heidegger's emphasis on death, our being-toward our end, that underscores the futural directedness of human understanding, unifying how things make sense for us in the world. We are futural, constituted as being-toward-death, with a past and a present, directed ahead of ourselves toward our future (death), interpreting the past and present through recognition of our end. There is an element of darkness, a morbid quality to such a view. Yet this conceptualization of time, illuminates the circular, iterative, nature of understanding. With every new experience and encounter, each shift in our world, our understanding is altered, reorganized, and redefined, directing us toward a continual becoming, allowing for a reimagining of our understanding and a continual reemergence of our interpretation. We are always in process, becoming who we will be, and uncovering what is meaningful in our world.

Reframing the Conception of Human Life

Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics reconstitutes the conception of human life, highlighting the ontological conditions of existence as that through which understanding is made possible. We are, each of us, beings for whom interpretation is primary, situated by our socio-historical context, directed toward the future, conditioned by our past, and influenced by our connections and disconnections with others. It is from within this position that a mechanism for meaning arises, a situation within which interpretation is made possible and human understanding takes place. With this portrayal we realize the significance of the ontological conditions of existence, how they impact who we are and how we make sense of things over time. What is more, we discover an explanation of understanding as evolving, iterative, influenced by our past and present as directed toward the future. Interpretation begins "with a

preliminary, general view of something...guid[ing] us to insights, which then lead...to a revised general view" (Polt, 1999, p. 98). Meaning is disclosed through our contextualized, lived experience, over time. Understanding is constituted by the structures of human existence, our being-in-the-world, with others, over time, and is continuously reinterpreted and refined. This scholarship offers an opportunity to revisit how we conceptualize the work of academic advising, our students, and ourselves. It leads us to consider the impact of sociohistorical context in the process of interpretation and the formation of meaning and establishes truth as iterative understanding.

Significance of the Dissertation

The current theoretical scholarship on academic advising is useful, nonetheless, it lacks recognition of the ontological elements of human existence. This literature establishes the scope of academic advising, offers means for interacting with the advisee, and argues for a particular outcome (i.e., developmental growth, academic learning, integrative understanding of the academic endeavor). At the same time, it overlooks the importance of recognizing the unique, sociohistorically situated individual human being. Consideration of the student is, of course, included but only as a categorical representation, the subject of the work of advising. A fuller conceptualization is necessary and ought to be grounded by a recognition of the contextualized existence of the individual human being and its impact on understanding. Advisors should be attuned to the existential modalities of their advisees, that through which they make sense of things, their education, and themselves. With such consciousness about these complexities and the impact they have on the educational journey of each student, it may be possible to more effectively support the needs of *all* students, positioning academic advising for more equitable practice.

Reframing the conceptualization of the student allows us opportunity to validate the experiences of each student (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), to support "culturally conscious frameworks" (Museus, 2017, p. 190), and potentially increases a student's "experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community" (Strayhorn, 2018, p. 4). How we support our students impacts their sense of belonging (Kitchen, 2022), influencing their level of engagement with their studies, and in turn their well-being and the likelihood they will persist (Gopalan & Brady, 2020, p. 134). As a result, the manner in which advisors begin their work, the way that the advisee is conceptualized, and *how* advisors engage to support their students, is crucial to consider both for the profession and the students' it serves.

Yet, some are skeptical about the relevance of a normative theory of academic advising without reference to the specific empirical realities of the individual institutions within which the work is employed (Bridgen, 2017; McGill, et al. 2021). They point to an underlying conceptual tension between empirical reality and a normative ideal. This tension should not be overlooked, but instead embraced as a source to provoke change and to inspire a new reality. Moreover, some worry that normative theory may reify harmful hegemonic structures unintentionally by "imposing dominant cultural behaviors which could marginalize nondominant groups" (McGill, et al., 2021, p. 28). They suggest that any conceptualization of academic advising ought to be dynamic, culturally responsive, and continually evolving. Such a criticism is valid, warrants attention, and will be considered carefully throughout this project.

As Himes and Schulenberg (2016) have suggested, "the views and philosophies held by [advising] practitioners have influenced the direction and perception of advising…and students' learning experiences" (p. 15). They point us to MacIntosh (1948) who argued that "[b]efore we

can tackle the problem of advising and directing our students satisfactorily, we must develop a philosophy on which to base our action" (p. 135). This goal remains, new theory and philosophy develops, and academic advising as a profession continues to evolve. Theoretical scholarship helps to build foundation for our understanding of academic advising, to illuminate its function, and to establish stability for the practice and the professional field of study. It helps us to identify "the qualifications needed for advising professionals…strategies [to] best meet the goals of advising" and parameters for determining what constitutes effective academic advising (Himes, 2014, p. 12).

The product of this dissertation will add to the philosophical scholarship supporting the evolution of the field of academic advising, articulating what it ought to entail, contributing to the development of a common language and shared understanding of academic advising (Himes, 2021). The dissertation expands the literature on equitable practice within the realm of higher education scholarship, adding to the discussion of culturally inclusive support, validation, and student belonging, providing new foundation for the work of academic advising. Yet, such a reconceptualization of the human being, the student, has implications for the work of other student affairs practitioners as well, underscoring the importance of recognizing the sociohistorical context and its impact for each individual student. Normative philosophical theory allows us to envision an ideal, to argue for change, and to strive for something greater than what presently exists, for academic advising, for the work of student affairs, and for higher education more broadly.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the project, summarizing the context, defining the problem, and offering an introduction to the

theoretical literature to be used in this project. Chapter two includes an overview of the field of academic advising, framed within the current American political context, and includes a discussion of the impact of the modern economy and its influence on the necessity for increasing rates of college completion. Even further, the chapter will outline a portion of the literature on student departure and discuss the rhetoric of student success. Chapter three provides a synthesis of the current foundational theory within the field of academic advising, tracing the movement between developmental models of advising and those focused on academic learning. The strengths and weaknesses of such theory are sketched, and an overview of the importance of normative theory is discussed. Drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger, chapter four offers a response to the current state of scholarship on academic advising, adding to the theoretical scholarship. An argument is made for a reconceptualization of the student, the advisee, one that is grounded by recognition of the human being as a contextualized interpreter. Finally, chapter five concludes with an overview of a contextually inclusive theory, implications for future policy and practice, and suggestions for future scholarship.

CHAPTER TWO

Academic Advising in Context: A Brief History

Whether carried out by a primary-role advisor or a faculty member, there is little dispute that the "overarching purpose of academic advising is…to assist in the academic journey of students" (Troxel, 2018, p. 21). Nevertheless, the field of academic advising lacks a clear definition and theoretical foundation. It is often portrayed through analogy with similar practices and disciplines, viewed through competing characterizations, stifling development of the profession and its related scholarship. What is more, within the current American political agenda to increase college completion rates, often discussed in terms of "student success," academic advising has been called out as critical to this mission. While there is a clear and important connection between good academic advising, student persistence, and degree completion, such focus overshadows other essential aspects of advising. In what is to follow, I will discuss the modern necessity for increased rates of college completion, summarize a portion of the literature on student departure and introduce the rhetoric of student success. I will then provide a brief characterization of academic advising as well as an overview of its history. I will conclude by suggesting that resolution to the tension between competing characterizations of advising requires development of a foundational theory, one that is flexible and focused on axiological elements of advising.

College Completion, Departure, and Student Success

Today's modern knowledge economy, supported by intellectual capacity rather than physical labor or natural resources (Drucker, 1969), has established the necessity for higher

education. Once considered a luxury, "[c]ollege has become this society's chief mechanism for individual advancement, upward mobility, economic growth, and social equity" (Minz, 2017, para 12). New jobs favor those with more education (Morris & Western, 1999) and differences in earning are shown to be tied to educational attainment (Day & Newburger, 2002). In addition, higher education is found to increase civic engagement and boost tax revenue (Carroll & Erkut, 2009; Cress, 2012; Hillygus, 2005; Perrin & Gills, 2019), undergirding social and economic stability. Higher levels of education are associated with increased wages (Gould, 2020), which in turn raise the level of tax contribution and support for Social Security and Medicare (Carroll & Erkut, 2009). Citizens with more education are shown to rely less heavily on government programs and, hence, reduce the cost of these programs, "a value to taxpayers who would otherwise have to fund these programs at a higher level" (p. 2).

Yet, rates of college completion remain lower than desired, hovering at 64% (NCES, 2022). In 2009, then President Barack Obama asserted that we "have to ensure that we're educating and preparing our people for the new jobs of the 21st century" (Obama White House Archives, 2009), signaling the start of what is often referred to as the college completion agenda in the United States. As a result, there has been a collective effort to increase rates of completion. Organizations such as Complete College America, the Lumina Foundation, the John Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, the Gates Foundation, among others, have expended resources and effort to understand the factors inhibiting an increase in completion rates in order to develop solutions to this challenge. The rhetoric of student success has been employed as the language through which the college completion agenda has been conveyed.

Student success has become a buzzword, "a driving force behind policy and institutional efforts underway in postsecondary education" (Higher Learning Commission, 2018, p. 1). For

many institutions of higher education, increasing rates of persistence and degree completion are paramount, characterizing the notion of student success (Kuh, et al., 2005). The concept of success is vague, defined in terms of some desired educational achievement, often a credential of some kind or another. As Hagen (2018) indicates, "[w]e measure student success by calculating a graduation rate" (p. 4). While some offer more nuanced accounts of student success (Habley et al., 2012; Kuh, et al., 2007), generally speaking, it is characterized by its antithetical relationship to student departure; understood as the opposite of leaving, and instead defined in terms of student persistence and degree attainment. Student success, therefore, is defined in binary. It either exists or does not exist. Success simply equals completion.

Such a definition of success seems ill conceived for the purposes of guiding models of student support, and in turn, academic advising. While helpful in establishing the parameters for research focused on creating the variables prohibitive of persistence and graduation, such a narrow definition hinders the ability to think more deeply about what success should entail, the educational endeavor and the process of learning. Habley, Wesley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) argue that we might approach things differently if "we put retention and degree completion in the background and focused our attention on a more comprehensive definition of student success" (p. 345). The way in which student success is characterized alters how scholars, practitioners, and policy makers determine what and how students should learn, and how best to support them. As indicated by The Higher Learning Commission (2018), "…student success is more than metrics and interventions; it is a mindset that guides the work and decisions" (p. 8). While Kuh, et al., (2007) offer a more robust notion of success, one that entails "…academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; and attainment of educational

objectives" (p. 10), measurement of success remains focused on the final goal of completion and attainment. Increasing the number of students that reach this final goal becomes the primary focus of investigation and practice. Of course, such a goal is worth achieving and merits attention; yet understanding how to effectively engage and connect with students requires a clear sense of what those interactions ought to entail. That is, supporting the process of learning, the educational endeavors of higher education, will require more than shepherding students toward completion. If, as Troxel (2018) suggests, the "overall purpose of academic advising is…to assist in the academic journey of students" we will need to support the voyage, the process of becoming educated, rather than solely ensuring successful passage to the final destination.

Literature on Student Departure & Connections to Academic Advising

The literature on student departure is foundational to the discussion of student success and is anchored by the work of Vincent Tinto (1975, 1986, 1987, 1993, 1998, 2006). Beginning with his classic 1975 article, Tinto posits that lack of persistence is not simply due to a student's insufficient accountability. Instead, he holds institutions accountable for creating and maintaining environments that allow students to thrive and achieve. It is this point that provides theoretical explanation of the empirical research on student departure. Tinto argues that departure is influenced by the level of integration a student experiences within both the social and academic realms. He explains that colleges are systematic entities "…comprised of a variety of linking interactive, reciprocal parts, formal and informal, academic and social" and that making sense of student departure requires us to take note of "…the full range of individual experiences" that occur within both the social and academic institutional systems (Tinto, 1993, p. 118). When the two systems are supportive of each other they work together to reinforce integration and support retention.

Building on the work of Social Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960), Tinto (1993) adheres to the notion that success is marked by three distinct stages of passage—separation, transition, and integration. In this view students move through a stage of separation reducing their interactions with and adherence to the views, and norms of past associations, followed by a stage of transition during which the student interacts with members of the new group, and then enters a phase of integration taking on the patterns of the new group, and becoming a full participant as a member of the community. Within this framework students either pass through each stage and successfully achieve incorporation, or they do not. Therefore, the less integrated a student becomes, the more likely they will be to "withdraw voluntarily prior to degree completion" (p. 50). Here departure is understood as influenced by the level of integration students experience within both the social and academic realms.

Several culturally sensitive critiques of this model have emerged over time reminding us to consider how ethnicity, race, gender, and economic factors shape the way in which one experiences their environment. Samuel Museus (2014) provides a substantial grouping of the most notable critiques of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory. For nearly three decades, scholars have pointed to the way in which Tinto's theory of integration has disadvantaged students of color (Attinasi, 1989; Rendón, et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). The language of integration is essentially "the voice of white middle-class education professionals speaking about 'problem' groups and about the solutions to the problems posed by diversity" (Olneck, 1990, p. 163). Tierney (1992) points out that the model of integration requires students of color to leave behind their own cultural heritage, insert themselves into the dominant culture, and "simply" assimilate. The process of integration renders cultural hierarchies invisible, bolstering support for those in

the, so called, mainstream and disenfranchising those cultures outside the hierarchically privileged.

Drawing on the work of Rendón, et al. (2000), Museus (2014) argues that Tinto's theory "overemphasizes students' roles in succeeding in college, without adequately acknowledging the responsibility of institutions to foster these students' success" (p. 196). Without emphasis on the role of institutional responsibility to support *all* students, those with less external support in particular, the burden remains on the individual students themselves. This sort of individualistic approach most readily effects underserved, low-income students, and students of color, who may come to the institution already challenged by other social, cultural, and economic factors.

Museus (2014) underscores what he calls the "integration viability critique", referencing the work of Braxton and Lien (2000), Braxton, et al. (1997), Hurtado and Carter (1997), and Swail, et al. (2003) who question the viability of academic and social integration as predictive of college student persistence and degree completion (Museus, 2014, p. 197). Moreover, he argues that current literature reveals only modest empirical support for the connection between academic integration as a predictor of college student persistence citing the work of Braxton and Lien (2000) and Braxton et al. (1997). Further, Crisp (2010) indicates that "research has shown mixed findings regarding whether integration and commitment constructs can predict community college persistence" (p. 53). It is also important to note, as outlined by Hurtado, (1994) and Hurtado and Carter (1997) that measures of social integration have often "failed to include modes of social participation that are common among students of color" and have therefore "operationalized the social integration construct in ways that measure behaviors that are more common among White college students and more accurately capture White undergraduates' experiences" (Museus, 2014, p. 198).

This list accounts for only a portion of the problematic aspects of Tinto's theory; however, his work remains central to the discussion of student departure and student success and continues to be referenced in relation to models of student support and academic advising. As Kimball and Campbell (2013) suggest, Tinto's work outlines retention as "…a by-product of a good educational experience" and "…focus[es] on intentionally defining and shaping a quality educational experience" (p. 10), one in which institutions of higher education take responsibility for establishing the systems necessary for students to persist and achieve. Tinto (n.d.) argues that there are five conditions that "stand out as supportive of retention, namely expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning" (p. 2). He points to the domain of academic advising as that in which students are guided toward an understanding "about what is expected of them and what is required for successful completion of a program of study" (p. 2). Here he connects advising to the mission of retention, degree completion, and student success, implying that academic advising provides students with the resources that help them to "understand the road map to completion" (p. 2). His work could be said to suggest that "effective retention programs reflect policy maker understanding that academic advising underpins student success" (Kimball & Campbell, 2013, p. 11). Additionally, "advising is viewed as a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them" (Kuh, et al., 2005, p. 214), fostering the kind of institutional commitment to student integration that Tinto argues is so necessary for student success (Kimball & Campbell, 2013).

Tinto's work outlines the requirements for a good educational experience, the foundation necessary for student retention, placing merit in the work of academic advising. Yet, while effective academic advising is promoted, his work creates the beginning stages of a narrowing of scope, relegating advising to utilitarian function. It seems clear that academic advising provides

students with the resources and support needed to complete their degree, yet Tinto's thin description fails to acknowledge the way in which advisors facilitate learning and aid in the construction of students' educational journeys. Instead, student learning is delineated as that which occurs within the context of a learning community, is facilitated by faculty, or arises in solitary study. Discussion of learning within the sphere of student support, mentoring, or academic advising does not surface as a central tenet of his work. Tinto's project at once elevates the work of academic advising and segregates its focus from the educational process of learning, opening space for lines of inquiry about the correlation between retention and academic advising without drawing connection to student learning or development.

Emphasizing the connection to retention even further, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) identify a number of empirical studies that provide evidence linking academic advising to increased rates of retention. Doubleday (December 6, 2013) reports that colleges are turning to academic advising as a means for boosting retention. The linkage between retention and academic advising provides compelling evidence for the importance of academic advising within higher education, notwithstanding its impact on the scope of the profession. Yet, scholars of academic advising, leaders in the field, and advising professionals themselves are often concerned about the singular focus of retention and degree completion (Bridgen, 2017; Hagen, 2018; Lowenstein, 2014; White & Schulenberg, 2012; Winham, 2015). As Marc Lowenstein suggests in an interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, if the focus of advising becomes simply "…to improve degree completion, we are not going to have [the] opportunity to focus on learning" (Doubleday, 2013, December 6, para 7).

Academic Advising: Characterization and History

A significant amount of intellectual energy has been expended to establish the legitimacy of academic advising within the academy. Over the past three decades scholars of advising have gathered data in support of the connection between advising and retention, making the case for its positive connection to retention and completion rates, and its overall support for student success. As such, academic advising is "recognized as a viable and necessary component of higher education" (Grites, et al., 2008, p. 462). Such research has helped to establish justification for the importance of academic advising within higher education; however, it has also created unintentional boundaries for the role it has consequently been established to play. Academic advising clearly provides support for increased levels of retention and completion, and yet its purpose and function should not be defined solely by such measures.

The scope of work involved in academic advising is broad and complicated, and as some argue, dependent on institution, student population, and overall context (Campbell & McWilliams, 2016). At its core, advising is more than the mere practice of stewardship, and offers more than increased rates of retention and completion, however noble the cause. While academic advising unquestionably provides students with the kind of information necessary for them to understand what is required to complete their degree, the kind of roadmap to completion that Tinto (2012) outlines, it also seems to involve something deeper, nuanced, and complex. The purpose of academic advising involves more than establishing increased rates of retention and completion, and the practice of advising facilitates more than student persistence.

No singular definition of academic advising exists in the field. No agreed upon primary focus is discussed in the literature; nevertheless, scholars of advising and practitioners express several shared ideas about the practice and purpose of advising. Complicated by the current

emphasis on student success, the mission and scope of advising are often obscured by the national drive to increase rates of completion. Generally speaking, those in the field view academic advising as an educational process, one that facilitates learning and supports the institutional conditions necessary for student persistence (Campbell & Nutt, 2008). Hunter and White (2004) suggest that advising helps to establish the connection between the student and their education.

Often described as the "hub of the wheel" (Habley, 1992; King, 2008), advisors sit at the "crossroads of student supports" (TytonPartners, 2019, p. 6) connecting students with resources, straddling a space between the academic, co-curricular, and personal spheres. As an educational endeavor advising supports the process of learning and provides the space for reflection and collaboration with a skilled professional. Nevertheless, definitions of academic advising are vague and are not easily decoupled from similar practices and disciplines (Himes, 2014; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). In order to avoid perceptions of subordinate status and to reinforce its legitimacy within higher education, academic advising has often been described through application of the theory and practice found in the fields of counseling, psychology, and sociology (Hagen & Jordan, 2008). Such application plays "a key role in developing current ideas and perspectives" on advising but does not provide means for establishing normative ideas about advising itself (Himes, 2016, p. 5).

Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) suggest that the field "…struggles to articulate its unique role in higher education" and "lack[s] the language needed to describe both the practice of academic advising and its scholarly identity independent of other fields and professions" (p. 44). They provide a range of literature demonstrating the ways in which analogy and metaphor from other fields have been used to describe the process of advising (Hemwall & Trachte, 2005;

Lowenstein, 2005; Melander, 2005; NACADA 2007b; Rawlins & Rawlins, 2005). Such literature describes the practice of advising in terms of "counseling, learning, mentoring, guiding, encouraging, advocating, navigating, educating, teaching, and even as friendship" (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, p. 43). These characterizations of academic advising further compound the impervious nature of advising itself and provide only a rudimentary view of advising as "primarily service oriented" (p. 44). Viewed through the lens of such scholarship and obscured by the rhetoric of student success, academic advising is valued, therefore, as little more than the utilitarian practice of outlining the curriculum, prescribing courses, preventing departure, and supporting increased rates of completion.

The Historical Context of Academic Advising

The history of academic advising within the United States has been traditionally conceptualized to include three separate eras, including advising as indistinct, advising as defined but unexamined, and advising as defined and examined (Frost, 2000; Kuhn, 2008). Recent scholars suggest an additional fourth era (2003-present) in which academic advising is viewed as a profession actively, one that is intentionally developed and articulated (Cate & Miller, 2015; Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). Within the *first era* (1636-1869) academic advising in the United States was indistinct from other roles, students all adhered to the same prescribed courses, and the ideal college community was envisioned as a family (Kuhn, 2008; Rudolph, 1962). Young tutors often supplemented the instruction of students and acted as overseers in charge of the discipline and well-being of the students in their custody (Lucas, 2006). Between 1800 and the mid-1850s colleges such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton experienced a wave of rebellious behavior, expressed through the creation of bonfires on campus, explosions in the classrooms, and by throwing food in the dining halls (Bush, 1969). In response, much of

collegiate life was mitigated by a set of formal and rigid rules and enforced by means of punishment (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016; Thelin, 2011). At this point in history, colleges and universities made no discernable connection between the work now characterized as academic advising and rates of degree completion.

The second era (1870-1970) began at the inception of an evolving student curriculum. During this period academic advising was recognized, yet generally left unexamined (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). By the 1870s many institutions introduced students to curricular choice allowing them to find and pursue their own desired path. The introduction of the elective system and more practically focused "alternatives to Greek, Latin, and other additional courses" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 5) ushered in a new age of academic advising, one requiring individual guidance beyond that of the increasingly professionally focused faculty (Rudolph, 1962).

Idealized by some in this era, Gilman (1886) described academic advising as the friendly exchange between student and counselor, an activity involving listening, instructing, and advocating in support of the undergraduate experience. Not all authors shared the same idealized view of academic advising. Kuhn (2008) identifies those who later described advising as a series of brief and impersonal encounters, perfunctory in nature (Veysey, 1965), doing little more than addressing students *en masse* for the purpose of approving courses, or perhaps providing occasion to share a short meal (Morrison, 1946). In contrast, and perhaps offering support for Gilman's (1886) idealized characterization of advising, Louis Hopkins (1926) suggests that academic advising requires specialization. Data gathered as part of his study of the state of student services at 14 institutions suggests that advising requires the ability to draw out the particular interests of each student, to identify necessary areas of support, and to communicate openly and honestly, signaling the need for an organized profession and field of study.

By the 1920s enrollment in higher education had nearly doubled (Geiger, 2016) and colleges and universities began establishing a variety of counseling systems "giving organized expression to a purpose that had once been served…by a dedicated faculty" (Rudolph, 1962, p. 460). Student support became viewed as a clinical procedure, rather than an educational function of the faculty, shifting focus away from the educational aspects of advising. With reference to Williamson's (1937) account of student personnel work, Himes and Schulenberg (2016) note that during this period "psychological counseling, vocational guidance, and academic advising" were often used interchangeably and "informed by clinical methods developed in psychology" (p. 8).

By the late 1940s after the introduction of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, often referred to as the GI Bill, institutions of higher education were flooded with returning soldiers. College attendance tripled between 1940 and 1970 (Geiger, 2016). Enrollment increased and the kind of students attending college changed, pressing institutions to think differently about student support. Some institutions addressed this shift with purpose, considering how best to support the "many students…handicapped by wartime interruptions of their academic careers" (Harvard University, 1949, p. 161). As a result, student support began to take on a more holistic approach, one in which a "poor scholastic record" was viewed within the larger context of a student's life (Harvard University, 1940, p. 135). In 1949 the American Council on Education published the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPOV) in which holistic support was outlined and justified, advocating for an education that involves "the student's well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually—as well as intellectually" and included the student as an active participant in their own development (American Council on Education, 1949, pp. 17-18).

While the *SPPOV* provided legitimacy for the work of academic counseling within higher education (Kuhn, 2008), advising remained undervalued, often associated with little more than the bureaucratic and clerical aspects of the occupation. In 1958 James Robertson compiled and analyzed data on academic advising from 20 institutions. He argued that professional advisors help students dispel "difficulties and confusion" and uncover problems "which lay below the surface" (p. 231). His analysis suggested, even further, that administrative and clerical work was too often made the primary focus of advising, depriving students facilitated answers to the "why of their programs," the kind of understanding that would "result in a more profitable intellectual experience" (p. 233). Robertson's work underscores the need for a clear articulation of the purpose of academic advising. He argues that "[n]othing is so essential in creating the climate for an intelligent, effective advisory program than…formulation of a basic philosophy" (p. 236). During this era the undergraduate curriculum expanded, enrollment spiked rapidly, and the professorate continued to professionalize. These changes underscored the need for professional advisors working to facilitate the student academic journey and trained to consider, holistically, the well-being of the individual student.

By the end of the second era, during a period in higher education characterized by what Jencks and Riesman (1968) describe as *the academic revolution*, the academy was filled with a sense of optimism and burgeoning areas of study (Geiger, 2016). However, the hope and optimism of this period was quickly overshadowed by the protests and demands expressed by a radicalized student population full of outrage over the war in Vietnam and the atrocities of racism.

The third era of academic advising (1970 to 2003), therefore, began in the midst of a new landscape in higher education, one imbued with students who viewed themselves as agents of

change, socially driven, and increasingly vocationally focused. The undergraduate population had become steadily more diverse and heterogeneous in the areas of race, ethnicity, and academic ability (Smith, 2008). While the number of students attending colleges and universities continued to rise, increasing from 6.3 million in 1970 to over 9 million by 1980, and expanding an additional 26 percent between 1980 and 2000 (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; US Census Bureau, n.d.), the number of students completing a four-year degree by 2000 hovered around 55% (NCES). Institutional attention shifted to issues of retention and completion amidst the rising rates of attrition. Even prestigious institutions such as Stanford had become concerned about student analytical and writing skills (Hargadon, 1978), prompting the need for new models of student support. Institutions turned to "professional advising…teaching and learning centers, expanded student services" and various other tools to "increase the odds that a student persisted and graduated" (Thelin, 2011, p. 329).

During this period, academic advising occupied a distinct role within higher education, one that involved more than simply guiding students through course selection and the process of registration (Kuhn, 2008). The number of primary-role academic advising positions increased at many institutions, and in keeping with the emphasis on psychology and counseling from the previous era, positions were often filled by those academically trained in the human services (Gordon, 2004; Himes & Schulenberg, 2016; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). In keeping with this trend toward the human services, and influenced by the American Council on Education's 1949 *Student Personnel Point of View*, a developmental model of academic advising emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016), primarily established by the work of Crookston (1972/1994/2009) and O'Banion (1972/1994/2009). Here, advising is understood as a process of teaching, one that entails the facilitation of student development and cognitive

growth. Unlike the traditional, prescriptive model of advising in which advice is authoritatively

given, developmental advising is said to involve facilitation of the rational process, advisor and

advisee negotiating control and responsibility, working together to problem-solve and make

decisions. Such an approach provided foundation for the modern practice of academic advising,

broadening the scope of work, and re-directing the conversation toward the concept of teaching.

This period brought increased introspection about the process of academic advising and

the beginning of the NACADA professional organization (currently known as NACADA: The

Global Community for Academic Advising). The organization was incorporated in the spring of

1979 and held its first official conference that same year (Beatty, 1991). In her first presidential

address, Toni Trombley asserted that:

1. Advising has measurable impact upon students.
2. Advising must be recognized within the institution.
3. Advising must have well-articulated goals.
4. Components and criteria for quality advising must and can be isolated for the purposes of research, improvement, and evaluation.
5. Research is essential to discover new advising methods and to improve present methods.
6. Central coordination of advising is necessary to prevent fragmentation and to maintain advising excellence. (p. 8)

Here the beginning stages of the struggle to articulate the identity of academic advising is

signaled. It was during this period that the nascent body of research on student departure,

beginning with Tinto's (1975) landmark article synthesizing research on the phenomena of

student departure, started to take shape. In 1981, in an effort to create and disseminate

scholarship on academic advising, NACADA published the first edition of its journal. Three

years later, in 1984 the National Institute of Education launched an investigation into the quality

of higher education, finding that many faculty were not engaged in advising, and even further,

viewed it as little more than perfunctory; therefore, regardless of the burgeoning professionalism

and scholarship in the field, its contribution to student learning continued to be overlooked, and the practice itself undervalued and misunderstood (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016).

Regardless, or perhaps because of the lack of faculty concern for academic advising, levels of professional academic advisors continued to rise. Colleges and universities, increasingly focused on issues of persistence and retention, began to acknowledge the necessity for expending resources in aid of the development of more robust student services, academic advising included (Thelin, 2011). Cate and Miller (2015) identify research indicating that the percentage of institutions employing professional advisors rose from 2% in 1979 (Carstensen & Silberhorn, 1979) to 72% in 1997 (Habley & Morales, 1998). Nonetheless, the struggle to establish educational legitimacy continued to permeate the profession. With the conversation about persistence and retention looming large in higher education, and perhaps responsible for, at least in part, the rise in professional advising, advising scholars attached their work to the research on student departure, drawing connections between academic advising, decreased departure rates, and increased retention.

Beginning as early as the 1980s scholars such as Crockett (1978, 1985), Habley (1981), Tinto (1987), and Metzner (1989), identified and made use of research in support of the claim that effective academic advising plays a key role in the retention of students. As such, the rise of the primary-role academic advisor begins alongside development of the concern for student retention and persistence and the corresponding production of research on student departure. In an effort to justify the impact of the advising profession, adhere to the current trends in higher education, and remain aligned with the scholarship on student departure and retention, the focus of academic advising was bifurcated. The mission of the endeavor is split in two, characterizing the practice and the profession in different ways. This signals the beginning of the co-

development of two separate foci—advising as an educational process focused on learning versus advising as means for promoting student success, retention, and degree completion.

In 1986 the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) outlined the first iteration of the standards for academic advising (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012), helping to establish benchmarks for the practice of the profession. However, as Himes and Schulenberg (2016) note, between 1970 and 1990 a wide variety of models of academic advising existed, a diverse pool of theoretical underpinnings, and a range of ideas about the goals of academic advising. While the increase in scholarship supported, developed, and disseminated through NACADA and its publications expanded ideas about the purpose, practice, and goals of academic advising, the conversation remained deeply rooted in the connection between advising and retention. A discussion that continues today through the rhetoric of student success.

In the *fourth era* (2003 to present) academic advising is challenged to clarify and further shape its role (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). During this time, institutions of higher education have experienced a change in both the composition of students and patterns of enrollment. Students come from all kinds of backgrounds, families, and demographics, and enroll in college in different ways. Powell and Snellman (2004) describe the modern economy as a new frontier requiring knowledge-intense activities and an increased need for an educated workforce. This shift in the economy has galvanized a nation, if not a global, conversation about the importance of increased levels of degree attainment in higher education. Persistence and retention continue as central foci and are now a matter of political importance carrying with it pressure from state and federal governments and shifting models of funding that have heightened the influence of private philanthropies in agenda-setting processes (McGuiness, 2016; Mumper et al, 2016). As a result, pressure to retain students, to support completion, and to foster student success, is

heightened in this era and retention and completion become a central topic of discussion. Indeed, during this period, much of the scholarship within higher education, academic advising scholarship included, has developed around issues of persistence, retention, and completion, expressed through the language of student success. As such, student success becomes the goal of academic advising at many institutions, hijacking the conversation, forcing focus on the finish line, and narrowing the scope of work.

Within the context of student success, it is difficult to gain traction to investigate and develop a full conception of academic advising and to defend and explore the positive connection between advising and completion. Regardless of the pressure to hone in on issues related to student success, a learning-centered paradigm has gained significant footing in the field influenced by the work of Hemwall & Trachte (1999, 2005), Lowenstein (1999, 2000, 2005) and others. The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education highlights the role of learning and teaching (Cook, 2009) and in 2003 NACADA's then Associate Director, Charlie Nutt, "popularized the phrase, advising is teaching" (Cate & Miller, 2015, p. 40) by taking hold of Crookston's (1972/1994/2009) developmental characterization of advising. That same year the editors of the NACADA journal were approached by soon to be guest editor, Peter Hagen, about the potential of publishing a special edition on the theories of academic advising. Hagen (2005) argued that academic advising was "in a new phase of theory building" (p. 6) offering the opportunity for a multitude of perspectives and the chance to explore, collaborate, and build a foundation for this growing profession.

In 2006 NACADA launched an advising concept statement outlining academic advising as "integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education" (NACADA, para. 5), while in 2008 the organization formed a Task Force on the Infusion of Research in Advising

to establish philosophical foundation for the importance of consuming and producing scholarship on academic advising (Troxel, 2018). Researchers and practitioners have produced scholarship to explain and further develop what they do, deepening the characterization of advising as both a professional endeavor and a scholarly field of study (Bridgen. 2017; Himes, 2014; Lowenstein, 2013; McGill, 2019; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Smith, 2013). A number of new books have been published on academic advising over the last few years (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013; Folsom, et al., 2015; Grites, et al., 2016; Hagen, 2018; McGill, et al., 2022) continuing the conversation about the purpose of academic advising and the connection between theory and practice (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016).

In 2017 NACADA published an additional pillar document, detailing the foundational core competencies that support academic advising. Like the 2006 advising concept statement, a learning-centered paradigm undergirds the discussion, yet the 2017 publication emphasizes the need for evidence-based assessment collected through measurable markers of student success (NACADA, 2017). Advising continues to be viewed, at least by those within the profession, as an educational endeavor, yet pressure to demonstrate support structures that increase completion have created a division of focus, underscoring the co-development of two competing paradigms—learning-centered versus student success oriented. Such tension has undermined the development of the profession and the production of a comprehensive theoretical articulation of academic advising.

The Future of Academic Advising: Foundational Theory

The field continues in its struggle "to articulate its unique role in higher education" (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, p. 44). As a growing field and profession, it is crucial that there is adequate foundation from which to establish and define the scope of academic advising.

Nevertheless, at present it lacks a well-established, flexible foundation, and instead continues to rely generally on analogy with similar practices and disciplines, viewed through competing characterizations. Further complicating this task is the co-development of two separate foci in the field—advising as an educational process versus advising as a means for promoting student success, retention, and degree completion. The two are not mutually exclusive, though, they each provide a separate picture of academic advising. Academic advising is most certainly concerned with student success and the production of increased rates of degree completion, and yet should not be defined solely in these terms. Advising continues to take place without the "necessary comprehensive theoretical base from which to inform practice" (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016, p 15), making it difficult to determine the effectiveness of practice and define the scope of the profession and field.

Although, over the last several years, some scholars have begun the work of developing aspects of a foundational theory. Recent empirical research considering "what occurs during the process of academic advising" (McGill, 2021, p 95) provides grounded theory suggesting that academic advising facilitates an iterative process through which students establish their beliefs, generate decisions, synthesize their experiences, and make meaning. Even further, philosophical scholarship has been set forth to articulate a theory of advising, one that is normative and conveys the essential components of the activity (Lowenstein, 2014). Lowenstein (2014) suggests that academic advising is 1) an academic endeavor, 2) enhances and facilitates learning, 3) provides a space for students to develop an integrative understanding of their education as a whole, 4) requires active student participation, and 5) is transformative rather than transactional. Such work provides an opening for further conversation about the fundamental nature of academic advising and its place in higher education. Yet, there is an absence of deep discussion

about the fundamental purpose of academic advising within higher education, leaving room for

development. In the chapters that follow I will explore these theories, outlining their strengths

and suggesting how they can be bolstered by further inquiry and additional theory.

CHAPTER THREE

Current Theory in the Field of Academic Advising

Foundational theory can situate our understanding, guide our trajectory, and frame our conversation on a given topic. As Lowenstein and Bloom (2016) explain, "theoretical issues lead to practical consequences; that is, an advisor's ideas about the purpose of advising will affect his or her [*sic*.] practice and organization, assessment, and evaluation" (pp. 125-126). Therefore, a theory of academic advising is essential for future stability of the field. Nevertheless, academic advising continues to struggle for educational legitimacy and to articulate its function broadly, despite increasing levels of professional academic advisors within higher education. As outlined in the previous chapter, the powerful rhetoric of student success and the connections between good academic advising, student persistence, and degree completion have overshadowed our understanding of other essential aspects of advising. Much of the theoretical scholarship in the field, however, has situated the conversation from within a different context, emphasizing the goals of growth and learning.

Yet, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, a standard approach, argument, or theory about the nature of academic advising and how it ought to be carried out has been absent for much of the history of academic advising. Some argued for the necessity of philosophical foundation in support of a clear ideation of the purpose of academic advising (Robertson, 1958), suggesting that "[t]he administration, with faculty help, must formulate and publish a clear philosophy of advising" in order to create "the climate for an intelligent, effective advisory program" (p. 236). Such discussion was internally referential, concerned with advising programs and practices at an individual institution rather than within higher education more broadly. Here,

advising is viewed as idiosyncratic, a practice internal to an individual institution, rather than a broad function within higher education viewed alongside such activities as teaching and research.

In this chapter I will trace the evolution of foundational theory within the field of academic advising, outlining the move from developmental models of advising to those focused on academic learning. I will draw out the need for normative theory development, addressing critics skeptical of the impact of such non-empirical scholarship, and move forward to outline Marc Lowenstein's (2014) normative articulation of an integrative learning theory. I will suggest that while Lowenstein's work establishes a baseline for the practice and scholarship of academic advising, it creates an unproductive dichotomy privileging the goal of academic learning and rejecting facilitation of personal growth as a component of academic advising. In so doing, such a framework leaves out the experience of the student, the embodied, sociohistorically situated elements of human existence and denies access to elements of the human interpretive process. In closing, I will argue that to focus solely on academic learning without consideration of the personal elements of existence artificially divorces one aspect of human existence from another and, as such, inadequately grounds a normative theory of academic advising.

Developmental Model: Advising as Teaching

Beginning as early as the 1970s the developmental model of academic advising emerged and was widely accepted. This new model was highly influenced by twentieth century research and theory on human development, primarily from the field of psychology (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999). The model of child development authored by Jean Piaget (1926, 1928) "was rediscovered in the 1950s and fueled new studies of human development" (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999, p.5). Yet, it was Erik Erikson's (1950, 1959) move from the focus of childhood and instead toward

investigation of development from adolescence to adulthood that grounded examination of

traditional-aged college student development (Patton, et al., 2016). Drawing on Erikson's work,

Arthur Chickering's *Education and Identity* (1969) introduced a theory of psychosocial

development which "quickly became a mainstay for professionals interested in student

development and in psychosocial development in particular" (Patton, et al., 2016, p. 13). During

this same period, William Perry (1968) described a nine-stage scheme of cognitive and ethical

development based on analysis of interview data from 140 traditional-aged undergraduate

students, 112 from Harvard (male), and 28 from Radcliffe (female).

It is from within this context that advisors began to reflect about the purpose and practice

of academic advising. Burns Crookston (1972/1994/2009) argued for a developmental model of

academic advising, one in which the whole student was considered, the advising relationship was

viewed as an equal partnership between advisor and advisee, and the activity itself was

conceived as facilitating the developmental process. He argued that such facilitation required a

particular kind of relationship between the advisor and advisee, one that is different from "the

traditional relationship…[which] may be described as prescriptive" (Crookston, 2009, p. 78).

Authority within the traditional prescriptive model, as between doctor and patient, is

unidirectional moving from the expert (advisor) to the individual receiving advice (advisee). The

advisor conveys guidance, and the student receives and follows that guidance. Alternatively,

within the developmental model, "the relationship itself is one in which the academic advisor

and the student differentially engage in a series of developmental tasks" (2009, p. 79).

Drawing on the work of Oetting (1967), Crookston (1972/1994/2009) explains that a

developmental task is one that initiates personal growth, and involves "experiences that are

essential to [the] full development of the individual within his [*sic*.] environment" (Oetting,

1967, p. 383). Therefore, Crookston's developmental model of advising calls for a process through which advisor and advisee work together to accomplish and process the developmental tasks generated throughout their experience in higher education. The basis of this kind of relationship is educational, co-constructive, one in which advising is understood as teaching, the goal of which is learning for the student and advisor alike. As outlined in the previous chapter, developmental advising involves facilitation of the rational process, advisor and advisee negotiating control and responsibility, working together to problem-solve and make decisions.

In complement, O'Banion (1972/1994/2009) explained that the purpose of academic advising is to help students identify a course of study and to achieve their "total potential" (2009, p. 83). Adhering to emerging ideas about the importance of considering the whole student (American Council on Education [ACE], 1949), O'Banion (1972/1994/2009) outlined a sequence of academic advising in which the process of advising and the progression of the student are conceptualized as an integrated whole. He argued that the process of academic advising involves five key dimensions: "(1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocational goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses" (2009, p. 83). To borrow an image from Thomas Grites, former senior editor of the *NACADA Journal* (Grites & O'Banion, 2012) the work of Crookston (1972/1994/2009) and O'Banion (1972/1994/2009) can be viewed graphically each representing an axis. O'Banion's work provides the structure through which students experience academic advising (the vertical axis), while Crookston's work provides that along which students' progress (horizontal axis). Taken together, both from within the framework of teaching and learning, they describe an institutional structure for guiding students through the developmental trajectory.

The developmental model of academic advising has positively impacted the direction of the field, establishing an educationally centered conceptualization of "advising as teaching," and has offered a structure within which to envision a set of standards for the profession (Himes and Schulenberg, 2016). Still, some have suggested that the developmental model provides an ideal goal without opportunity for plausible and practical application (Strommer, 1994). While others argue that such comparison and conceptualization are "too obvious to be striking or tell us anything new" about the advising profession (Hagen, 1994, p. 86), or that in relying on developmental theory and its stages we are unable to consider the process of transition and "ongoing personal and academic growth" (Laff, 1994, p. 48). Even further, it has been suggested that this model characterizes advising as interchangeable with counseling, underscoring the goal of "self-actualization or personal growth" which in turn overshadows the importance of academic learning (Hemwall & Trachte, 2005, p. 74). Hemwall and Trachte (1999) explain that such a view has "de-emphasized or ignored academic learning" (p. 7).

Learning-centered Model: Advising as Teaching

In support of this line of criticism, Hemwall and Trachte point to an article in which Chickering (1994) proclaims that "the fundamental purpose of academic advising is to help students become effective agents of their own lifelong learning and personal development" (p. 50). Such an understanding of advising shifts the focus toward personal growth and severs the tie between advising and academic learning. Instead, Hemwall and Trachte (1999) argue that advising should engage students in "praxis," an activity involving both reflection and action in order to "understand and analyze the beliefs, norms, assumptions, and practices that give meaning to his or her [*sic*.] world" (p. 8). The practice of academic advising, from this view, is organized through the paradigm of learning and involves dialogical discussion between the

advisor and advisee about the meaning and purpose of the student's educational choices. Situating the conversation about advising in this way highlights the role of *academic learning* and, therefore, the goal of advising is reconsidered. While the notion of advising as teaching remained central to conversations in the field, the goal of psycho-social development and personal growth has been destabilized opening space for a reimagining of the conceptualization of advising.

Questioning even further what had become the hegemonic approach to academic advising, Lowenstein (1999) called for an examination of the developmental model of advising and a similar reimagining of its conceptualization. He argued that much of the field embraced the notion of developmental advising as the result of its emphasis on the collaborative aspects of its approach. Crookston's (1972/1994/2009) model put forth an alternative to what he described as the prescriptive approach to advising, one in which the relationship is hierarchical and the advisee passively receives guidance. Such a framework presumes that "one must embrace either developmental advising or prescriptive advising" and, moreover, implies that "prescriptive advising is not acceptable [and] therefore, one must embrace developmental advising" (Lowenstein, 1999, para. 3). Lowenstein (1999) argued that such characterization is inauthentic and carries with it a false dichotomy. He explained that "developmental advising is not the appropriate opposite of prescriptive advising" (para. 6). Prescriptive advising can be understood as a style, yet developmental advising involves something further. While developmental advising does include a particular approach or style (i.e., collaborative rather than hierarchical), it is grounded by a theoretical conceptualization "about the content of advising" (para. 6). Instead, Lowenstein argued that a more appropriate theoretical comparison might be drawn between what he described as the academically centered paradigm and the developmentally centered paradigm.

He explained that "[i]n the simplest terms, developmental advising focuses on the student's personal growth and development, while academically centered advising centers on the student's academic learning" (para. 12). Of course, there may be a comingling of the two in our everyday practice of advising, yet each paradigm has a different aim. Lowenstein's work persuades us to consider the academically centered model as more beneficial to the establishment of the field of academic advising and to the students we advise. He has suggested that "the academically centered model…lays out a role for advising that is uniquely necessary in a higher education setting…[the] academic facilitator" (para. 18). Unlike the argument put forward by Robertson (1958) in which philosophical foundation is argued as necessary in order to create "the climate for an intelligent, effective advisory program" (p. 236), Lowenstein's suggestion establishes philosophical consideration for academic advising within higher education broadly. That is, Lowenstein's advocacy for an academically centered model of advising provides foundation for a conceptualization of advising, one that is broadly conceived within higher education.

Embracing the academic paradigm further, Lowenstein (2005) argued that similar to teaching, academic advising ought to be learning-centered, guiding students toward an integrative understanding of the "logic" of the college curriculum (2000). He argued that academic advising ought to engage the advisee in understanding "the interrelationships among the parts of one's education, identifying an organizational scheme that makes the whole suddenly more than the sum of its parts" (para. 7), an experience analogous to that of the student developing an individualized major. This integrative understanding, later described by Lowenstein as integrative learning (2014, 2015), is articulated in terms of the "logic" of the

curriculum, a notion that involves:

- an overall goal (possibly more than one)
- sub-goals that are parts of the overall goal or steps towards it
- groups of courses chosen to address each sub-goal
- relationships among these courses – which can include building on each other, providing complementary perspectives on common subject matter, relationships among ideas encountered in different courses, and perhaps others as well. (para. 8)

At the heart of Lowenstein's (2000) account of academic advising, is the notion of integration, an integrative understanding of the whole of a student's education. He argued that advising ought to facilitate student recognition of the interconnectedness of their academic experiences, allowing them to identify and understand the relationships between each area of their study. As with the process of grasping a piece of artwork, when properly instructed, one "thinks about the spatial relationships, the use of perspective, the color scheme, a possible allusion to an earlier artist's version of the same subject [and]…creates the work anew for oneself" (para. 14). In this view, the academic advisor facilitates learning, specifically an understanding of the "overall curriculum" (2005, p. 69). The role of the academic advisor in this sense, is to teach, to help students process their academic experiences, organize interrelationships, and actively integrate and develop a logical structure for their educational journey. In short, the aim of advising is to help students organize and make sense of their education. Here, Lowenstein leans into the analogy of advising as teaching, spending time to articulate exactly how advising is similar to teaching and what advisors teach (Lowenstein, 2005). The notion of advising as teaching, offers a framework through which to discuss the practice and aim of academic advising, yet makes it difficult to articulate its distinctive role in higher education.

Normative Theory: Advising is Advising

Establishing, defining, and articulating the unique function of academic advising within higher education has become an elusive goal. Much of the scholarship on academic advising centers on the *practice* of advising, relying on the use of "analogy and metaphor drawn from related fields" to explain and suggest how to approach this work (Schulenberg & Lindhort, 2008, p. 44). While helpful in offering means for describing the practice of academic advising, the use of analogy inhibits our ability to make lucid the unique purpose of academic advising and stunts the progression of the field (Himes, 2014; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). As suggested by Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) in their article *Advising is advising: Toward defining the practice and scholarship of academic advising*, to move the discussion further we ought to "engage in a deeper discussion of the professional field in its own terms and to flesh out the current understanding of the research, scholarship, and theory building that must support advisors' distinctive practice" (p. 43).

Helping to focus this conversation, Himes (2014) provides an analysis of the theoretical scholarship on academic advising, beginning with an exposition of several current theories in advising. She outlines the developmental theories of Crookston (1971/1994/2009), Raushi (1993), and Creamer and Creamer (1994); provides an overview of Kegan's (1982) self-authorship theory and Baxter Magolda and King (2008) and Pizzolato's (2008) application of this theory; outlines the use of philosophical hermeneutics as expressed by Hagen (2008) and Champlin-Scharff (2010); introduces the postmodern view of advising as described by Stowe (1996); and draws out Hemwall and Trachte's (1999) learning-centered model of advising. Influenced by the work of Preucel and Hodder (1996), Himes suggests that "advising theories,

developed in isolation, should not be treated as either opponents or parts of a linear progression, but rather as contemporaneous, overlapping, and interacting" (Himes, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, rather than emphasizing one theory over another, she argues that support for the "diverse goals and unique position [of academic advising] within higher education" requires practitioners to synthesize existing theories in an effort to "meet the complex goals of academic advising" (p. 13). She persuades us that theory used to inform practice should be combined not just in creation of an effective approach to the practical work of advising, but also as means for developing "an intentional normative theory" foundational to establishing " the role of academic advising within higher education" (p. 13). Such a normative theory of academic advising, Himes suggested, ought to be devised through the amalgamation of those theories currently applied to academic advising.

Lowenstein's Model for the Normative Ideal

Lowenstein (2014) continues this conversation, setting forth to "establish the main principles of a theory of advising" (para. 1). He draws a distinction between theories *of* advising and theories *in* advising. Explaining that theories *in* advising are those taken from other fields and applied to the particularities of academic advising. As, for example, the way in which developmental theories are drawn from the field of psychology and applied to the practice of academic advising.

Much has been made of the importance of engaging a wide range of theories *in* advising (Hagen, 2005; Hagen & Jordan, 2008; Himes, 2014). Hagen (2005) refers to such theory as analogic, conveyed and established through analogy and metaphor, a translation of "phenomenon under study and some other phenomenon for which theory statements already exist" (p. 6).

Unlike Himes (2014) who argues that a normative theory of academic advising ought to be grounded in an integration of current theories in advising, Lowenstein suggests that such theories do not establish the kind of normative foundation we seek. Such theories *in* advising are useful, but "do not help us distinguish advising from other activities or to understand it as a unique field of practice and scholarship" (para.10). So, while theories *in* advising, applied from other fields, can be useful in providing practical techniques for the work of academic advising, from Lowenstein's perspective, they do not articulate the unique function of academic advising within higher education.

He argues that theories *of* advising, on the other hand, elucidate what is essential to academic advising, describing characteristics that are unique to its function. Rather than providing a review of the incidental components of advising, they explain that without which advising would not be advising. They provide normative statements about "the ultimate purpose of advising, of what advising ideally should be, not necessarily what advising is" (Lowenstein, 2014, para. 17). Such theories cannot be evaluated empirically, but instead are meant to establish an ideal at which to aim. Normative theories *of* advising, provide foundation for the practice of advising, helping to establish ideals about the purpose of the endeavor and that toward which to strive. Even further, Lowenstein suggests, normative theories *of* advising also provide means for determining: 1) good advising as opposed to bad advising, 2) the value of advising and why it should be supported by our institutions, 3) foundation for measuring outcomes, and 4) who is qualified to advise and what kind of training is required. Such an outline is persuasive making the case for the importance of developing normative theories *of* advising.

Yet, what are the goals and criteria necessary for a theory *of* advising? Before moving forward to establish such normative theory, Lowenstein provides a list of the necessary criteria for a theory *of* advising. He explains that it ought to:

- be tied to a philosophy of higher education…
- identify common elements in all the disparate activities, settings, populations that fall under the heading of advising…
- distinguish essential from incidental characteristics of advising…
- identify what advisers do, both for those inside and for those outside the advising community, and show why advising is critical.
- imply a standard for what students and other stakeholders can expect from advisers…
- inspire advisers to reach for a vision of excellence. (para., 48)

Therefore, a theory *of* academic advising ought to involve explanation of its core components. It should name its fundamental activities, including who and what they entail. It is meant to provide students with an explanation about what they can expect and a framework for advisors to understand their work. Finally, it should establish the unique function of advising within higher education and provide inspiration for advisors.

Integrative Learning Theory

With these criteria in mind, Lowenstein summarizes what he calls an integrative learning theory, laying out "a plausible and comprehensive statement of the essential nature of advising" setting it "apart as a distinctive area of practice and thought" (para. 78). This theory *of* advising is organized into six parts in which academic advising: 1) is an academic endeavor, 2) enhances and facilitates learning, 3) provides a space for students to develop an integrative understanding of their education as a whole, 4) requires active student participation, 5) is transformative rather than transactional, and 6) is that through which the logic of the curriculum is understood, making it central for the mission of any college or university. It is important to note that "these are not

descriptions of actual practice" but rather his summative account of "what a theory of advising does and…what advising ideally should be" (para. 50). In articulating advising in this way, he argues that academic advising is learning-centered, educational, distinguishing it from the therapeutic activity of developmental counseling. While development may be a natural occurrence and may take place throughout the course of a student's education, it also takes place for those outside of higher education. Advisers and advisees work together to achieve the goals of higher education, those associated with the advisee's role as a student. Therefore, academic advising is meant to facilitate learning, to transform, and to guide the advisee, as an active participant, to an understanding of the whole of their educational experience.

Empirical Reality and Normative Ideals

Lowenstein's work provides an opening for further conversation about the fundamental nature of academic advising and its place in higher education. Such work focuses the discussion and provides clear criteria for laying out and evaluating the merit of any future theory of academic advising. Lowenstein both inspires and reinforces the importance of critical analysis and logical argumentation. He helps guide us to consider the importance of identifying the essential rather than incidental components of academic advising, grounding a conceptualization of the profession (Schulenberg, 2021). While the conversations about the purpose of academic advising continue, "Lowenstein's contribution of a robust theory of advising that centers on integrative learning provides guideposts" for future scholarship (p. 57). However, some worry that such theory is too conceptual and far removed from the realities of institutions of higher education and the practice of advising itself (Bridgen, 2017; Himes, 2021; McGill et al., 2021).

Bridgen (2017) argues that the utility of normative theory is "limited because the context of the university determines the true identity of advising" (p. 19). Similarly, Himes (2021)

suggests that alignment between any normative theory of advising and the practice of advising would first require "the system in which we practice…[to] be changed" (p. 47). Both Bridgen and Himes underscore the tension between an ideal normative theory and the realities of everyday practice. Normative theory can center our conversation, make clear ideals for the practice and profession, and identify a target at which to aim; however, it may not directly align with our empirical realities.

Yet, the conceptual tension between empirical reality and a normative ideal is to be expected and does not imply that such a theoretical model is feeble or ineffectual. On the contrary, normative theory, in striving to describe an ideal state, may often uncover underlying problems in the reality of our current system, problems we ought to fix. One might look only as far as the Constitution of the United States for an example of the kind of tension that can arise between an ideal normative theory and the reality of everyday life. Nevertheless, rather than being persuaded that such a document and its normative ideals are without merit, I would suggest that they offer means to provoke change, to inspire a new reality. Therefore, such normative ideals ought to inspire, but also adapt, evolving to meet the challenges of their current realities so that they may remain productive to their cause. Unreflective reliance on normative ideals, however, can be dangerous, potentially reifying harmful and oppressive structures and norms. McGill, et al. (2021) suggest that we ought to be careful when establishing an ideal. With every attempt at an ideal we risk "imposing dominant cultural behaviors which could marginalize nondominant groups" (p. 28). They argue that any definition of academic advising, therefore, ought to be dynamic, culturally responsive, and continuously evolving. Normative theory, when produced and altered carefully and reflectively, can help establish foundation and set a projected path at which to aim.

Contextualized Meaning-making: Complicating a Theory of Integrated Learning

The introduction of normative theory has helped to deepen the discussion of and scholarship on academic advising, underscoring the need to articulate both the practice of academic advising and its fundamental purpose. As van den Wijngaard (2021) explains in a summative account of an interview with Lowenstein, "a normative theory of advising proposes a paradigm that sets a standard for practice and defines a specific domain for research" (p. 65). Such theory opens a space for "advisors to disagree and to provide different perspectives and well-crafted arguments for what advising is about and its role within higher education" (p. 69). Lowenstein's (2014) normative conceptualization of the purpose of academic advising establishes a baseline for the practice and scholarship of academic advising, but also provides space to begin further discussion and debate.

It is with this opening, that I turn to a discussion of Lowenstein's (2014) integrative learning theory. Within this framework he outlines the elements of integrative academic learning, and suggests that advising is an academic endeavor, facilitates learning, allows students to develop an integrative understanding of their education as a whole, requires active participation, is transformative rather than transactional, and is that through which students understand the logic of the curriculum. Such a characterization of academic advising captures the essence of the ideal outcome and activity of an academic advising relationship; however, foundational elements involved in understanding and meaning-making are overlooked.

Lowenstein begins his theory from within a place of antagonism, either advising is academically centered, or focused on personal growth and development. This dichotomy seems to arise in reaction to hegemonic acceptance of the developmental model of advising. He argues that at its core advising is academic. However, in his attempt to re-center advising as academic,

focused on learning and the logic of the curriculum, he overlooks key elements of meaning-making and their essential connection with the contextualized existence of the student as a human being in the world. Instead, his integrative learning theory focuses on the rational, the logical, the mind as a sort of disembodied entity in the midst of an exercise of synthetic organization with the goal of increased intellectual capacity.

Of course, it would be antithetical to the mission of higher education to claim that one should not focus on the goal of increased intellectual capacity. I do not dispute the importance of academic learning or the goal of facilitating a student's integrative understanding of their education as a whole. However, I would argue that Lowenstein's theory implies something in particular about what is entailed in learning, what should and should not be involved in the facilitation of a student's integrative understanding. Placing academic learning in juxtaposition with personal growth, denies us the ability to include the lived experience of our students and ourselves. Such an antagonism denies connection between intellectual and personal growth and establishes an opposition between support for academic growth and support for personal growth. This kind of separation is artificial, divorcing one aspect of existence from another, denying support for the whole student experience and the context through which meaning is generated. While I would argue, as student affairs professionals have for decades, that support focused on the whole student experience is beneficial, what I hope to emphasize is something further. Focusing solely on the academic without including the personal, the lived experience, the contextualized existence of the student leaves unconsidered the mode through which understanding, and meaning is made possible.

Lowenstein leaves out, intentionally or unintentionally, consideration of the lived experience of the student, the embodied, sociohistorically situated elements of human existence.

While such contextual components are not essential merely for the purpose of academic advising, neither are they incidental. That is, these contextual components are primarily the ontological elements through which meaning is generated and understanding is made possible. In order to situate integrative learning and facilitate student understanding, we ought to include a conceptualization that is grounded by a recognition of the complexity of meaning-making, the role of contextualized interpretation, and the ontological conditions of human existence. So, rather than siphoning the personal elements of existence from the work of academic advising, they ought to be acknowledged and identified as integral to student understanding and, therefore, the purpose of academic advising.

Theory *of* Advising, Normative Ideals, and the Need for Ontological Considerations

Over the last several decades a standard approach, argument, and theory of academic advising has surfaced. From the work of Crookston (1972/1994/2009) and O'Banion (1972/1994/2009) in the 1970s, Hemwall and Trachte (1999, 2005) in the early 2000s, and Lowenstein (1999, 2000, 2005, 2011, 2014) in the 2010s, theoretical scholarship in the field is evolving. Yet, even as the field of advising has progressed conceptually, drawing on research from developmental psychology and the professionalization of the field of student affairs, there is a continual struggle to identify and articulate its unique place within higher education (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). As we have seen, many have begun to draw out the need for a normative theory of advising, arguing that such theory is necessary to establish its distinctive role within higher education. Himes (2014) suggests that a normative theory will 1) help to orient new advisors, 2) underscore the value of the practice, in turn rallying administrative support, and 3) create foundation for future scholarship in the field. Lowenstein (2014) sets the stage for developing a normative theory of advising. He provides a list of key factors necessary and

distinguishes between theory applied as a tool to improve the practice of advising (theories *in* advising) and normative theory meant to identify the nature of academic advising and what, in an ideal world, it ought to entail (theory *of* advising). The current state of literature, aided by the work of Schulenberg & Lindhorst (2008), Himes (2014), and Lowenstein (2014), underscores the need for development of a normative theory of advising.

Yet, some scholars suggest that normative theory, without reference to the empirical particularities of the individual institution at hand, is ineffectual (Bridgen, 2017; McGill, et al., 2021). The work of such authors underscores the conceptual tension between empirical reality and a normative ideal. Such tension is to be expected and ought to be drawn out to improve the situational reality and/or to alter the theoretical. Rather than establishing practical application, normative theory is intended to provide a framework for conceptualizing an ideal. As Lowenstein explains about his own normative theory of advising, "these are not descriptions of actual practice" but instead offer a summative account of "what advising ideally should be" (2014, para. 50).

Lowenstein's work draws us back to the academic, shifting the conversation away from advising as merely an activity of therapeutic developmental support for personal growth. He describes the advisor as that of "academic facilitator" (1999, para, 18), a role unique to higher education, setting the stage for philosophical consideration of academic advising within higher education broadly. His work moves us closer to articulating the purpose of academic advising, an ideal at which to strive, and establishes a space for debate and further normative conceptualization. Nonetheless, his emphatic rejection of the claim that advising involves facilitation of personal growth, reinforces a dichotomy between advising as academically centered versus advising as focused on personal development. Rather than antithetical, these

ideas are interrelated. To focus on one without the other, weakens any theory of academic advising.

In drawing out this connection, I do not adhere to any particular developmental scheme or set of stages that advisors should understand and use as means for guiding students. Instead, I point to the underlying notion of change and growth that is captured in the spirit of the developmental model of advising. There is a connection between individual growth and academic learning, and between the kind of meaning-making Lowenstein outlines in his integrative learning theory and the continual actualization of a human life. Even further, academic learning takes place from within the embodied, sociohistorically, situated elements of an individual human life, moving the student forward through existence and establishing a trajectory for continually becoming who they will be. To focus solely on the academic, is to deny the human interpretive process, to overlook the way in which meaning and understanding emerge. Here I emphasize the notion of interpretation and suggest that these contextual components of existence provide the horizon through which meaning takes shape (Heidegger, 1962). Therefore, to properly orient the process of integrative learning and facilitate student understanding, we ought to include recognition of the complexity of meaning-making, the role of contextualized interpretation, and the ontological conditions of human existence. So, rather than rejecting the personal elements of existence and growth as unrelated to the work of academic advising, they ought to be acknowledged as integral to student understanding and included as fundamental to any normative theory of academic advising.

CHAPTER FOUR

Contextually Inclusive Academic Advising: Hermeneutic Foundation for the Field

Well over a decade ago Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) argued that the field of academic advising struggled "to articulate its unique role in higher education" (p. 44). In 2021 Schulenberg reiterated her concern about the lack of a "unified definition" and argued that as a result academic advising is in danger of becoming "a catch-all area where any new initiative meant to affect student success can be carried out" (p. 55). These scholars maintained that without a clear sense of its distinctive function it would be difficult for either the practice of advising or the scholarly field of study to advance. Despite this concern, much has been written about the practice of advising and its development as a profession and a field of scholarly inquiry since (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; McGill, 2019; Shaffer, et al., 2010; Troxel, 2018; Troxel et al., 2021). Even further, as outlined in the previous chapter, a body of theoretical literature has also emerged in an attempt to directly address Schulenberg and Lindhorst's (2008) concern (Bridgen, 2017; Himes, 2014; Lowenstein, 2014). The focus of this work is not investigative of the empirical realities of academic advising within higher education, although empirical research may be referenced and incorporated, instead the aim of this work is to think reflectively, analytically, and critically about advising. Such theoretical literature helps to build foundation for our understanding of academic advising, to illuminate its function, and to establish stability for the practice and the professional field of study.

While the developmental models outlined by Crookston (1972/1994/2009) and O'Banion (1972/1994/2009) do not address the issue articulated by Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008), as

suggested previously, such theoretical discussion has impacted the direction of the field of academic advising, focusing our attention on the educational elements of this work, leading to the influential conceptualization of "advising as teaching", and providing a structure in which to build professional standards (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). Still, many objections to the developmental model have been raised, the most striking of which suggested that such a model provides little distinction between advising and counseling and privileges support for personal growth, in turn de-emphasizing academic learning (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999, 2005).

Hemwall and Trachte (1999) argued that advising should be viewed as primarily an educational endeavor and emphasized the role of academic learning. Their work has focused on the notion of "praxis", an activity that is described as combining both student reflection and analysis of their own "beliefs, norms, assumptions, and practices" in an effort to understand what is meaningful in "his or her [*sic*] world" (p. 8). Organized toward this objective, advising involves dialogical discussion between the advisor and advisee about the meaning and purpose of the student's educational choices. This view has shifted the discussion of academic advising, challenging assumptions about the centrality of the role of facilitating psycho-social development and personal growth, instead emphasizing academic learning.

While the notion of "advising as teaching" still remained, and developmental models of advising continued, others began to question the merit of emphasizing the process of facilitating the student's journey through the psycho-social stages and toward personal growth. Lowenstein (1999) objected to the content and aim implied as a result of focusing on developmental theory as the paradigm for academic advising. He argued that there exist two different models of academic advising—developmentally centered and academically centered—with the developmental model focused on "personal growth and development and academically centered

advising" focused on "the student's academic learning" (para. 12). Lowenstein argued that each model imposes a distinct structure shaping how we view the goal of advising, how we envision the work of advising, who should be hired to advise, how advisors should be trained, and where advising is overseen within the institution (table 1).

Table 1

Comparing Academically Centered vs. Developmentally Centered Paradigms

	Developmentally Centered Paradigm	**Academically Centered Paradigm**
Goal of advising	Facilitating student's intra-personal growth and development, including cognitive affective, etc.	Facilitating the student's ability to interact with and draw maximum benefit from the academic program and curriculum
Paradigm relates advising to…	Counseling	College teaching
Who should do it?	Student development staff	Faculty and other academics
How shall they be trained?	Focus on the behavioral sciences, presumably developmental psychology in particular	Broad but coherent liberal arts education, with almost any specialization
Who should oversee it?	Student Affairs	Academic Affairs
How should we hire advisers?	Look for specialists in the advising field who have studied student personnel or student development at the graduate level	Look for people who may or may not have advised before, but who are student centered and mentally agile and understand curricular relationships

Source: Lowenstein, M. (1999). An alternative to the developmental theory of advising. *The Mentor*, 1(1999).

https://journals.psu.edu/mentor/article/view/61758/61402

Lowenstein (1999) argued that the developmentally centered model conflates the role of academic advisor with that of developmental counselor and in the process overlooks what is distinctive about academic advising. The academically centered model, on the other hand, "lays out a role for advising that is uniquely necessary in higher education settings…[the] academic facilitator" (para. 18). That is, while psycho-social development and personal growth may be directed by a counselor to anyone anywhere, including outside of the higher education setting, academic advising is exclusive to higher education and involves the facilitation of academic learning. This sort of dichotomy oversimplifies and applies what I would contend are artificial boundaries around each model. I would argue that there is a comingling of these two paradigms in our everyday practice of advising. Yet, many of the tenets of Lowenstein's argument are crucial and help us remain attuned to components of the issues involved in any attempt to strengthen foundation for the field of academic advising.

It is critical that longstanding hegemonic beliefs applied with little question require evaluation and potential destabilization. Developmentally centered views of academic advising have been discussed and applied for nearly fifty years, making it clear that it is time for a critical reconsideration. Unlike Lowenstein, however, I do not agree that such a reconsideration should require full abandonment of all elements of the developmental model of advising. Yet, I concur that when followed closely, the developmental model leads to a misaligned sense of the goals of academic advising and focuses on the indistinct components of this work. What is more, I want to underscore the sentiments of Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) and argue that in order to advance the practice and scholarship of academic advising we need "to articulate its unique role in higher education" (p. 44). Lowenstein's (1999, 2000, 2005, 2013, 2014) work moves us closer to such an articulation, not by means of empirical research, although others have begun to make

progress in this area (Bridgen, 2017; McGill, 2021), but through hypothetical conceptualization of what advising should be ideally. He puts forward an argument outlining a normative view envisioning what academic advising ought to entail. As I have discussed previously, there are pitfalls that need to be taken into account when engaging with normative language about what should and ought to be the case. I will address this issue in detail later in the chapter. For now, I will simply outline Lowenstein's theory to demonstrate its current contribution to the field.

Like Hemwall and Trachte (1999, 2005), Lowenstein's work emphasizes academic learning, shifting the focus away from the notion of advising as merely an activity of therapeutic developmental support for personal growth. He describes the advisor as "academic facilitator" (1999, para 18), underscoring its unique role in higher education. Yet, he progresses beyond the simple argument against the developmental model and toward an advocacy for the centrality of academic learning. Lowenstein (2014) proceeds to consider "the ultimate purpose of advising, of what advising ideally should be, not necessarily what advising is" empirically (para 17). He begins by laying out, in Aristotelian fashion, the essential rather than incidental components of academic advising, those things without which advising would no longer be advising. He concludes by outlining what academic advising ideally ought to entail, providing a normative account of advising—an *integrative learning theory*. Within this paradigm academic advising is envisaged as an academic endeavor, enhancing and facilitating learning, providing space for students to actively engage in the process of developing an integrative understanding of their education as a whole. He articulates advising as transformative rather than transactional; characterized as an activity through which the logic of the curriculum is understood.

Lowenstein's work has established a normative paradigm, setting up a "standard for practice" and parameters for the "specific domain for research" (van den Wijngaard, 2021, p.

65). This work has opened a space to identify what should, ideally, be involved in academic advising and has helped us to establish some clarity, if only preliminarily, about what might be considered its unique function within higher education. At the same time, he has also introduced several issues of concern. First, I would argue that he has introduced a false dichotomy, an artificial separation, between advising as primarily focused on personal growth and development and advising primarily focused on academic learning. As I have indicated previously, placing academic learning in juxtaposition with personal growth denies us the ability to include the lived experience of our students and ourselves. While I agree that academic advising ought to focus on academic learning, divorcing one aspect of existence from another is antithetical to the process of academic learning itself, and in turn the work of academic advising. Such a separation denies support for the student experience, what Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) would call the ontological elements of human existence, the context through which meaning and understanding are generated.

Second, I am concerned about Lowenstein's account of normative theory and what it assumes to be the case. He presupposes a metaphysical conceptualization, one in which everything is conceived of in terms of a kind of "higher order" of "essential" meaning, where truth is interpreted in terms of an unchanging essence. This sort of conceptualization presumes an idealized notion of what *is*. As Heidegger (1927/1962) might explain, it misrepresents the way in which meaning is ontologically disclosed to us through our everyday "*being-in-the-world*". While we may come to a metaphysical representation about the Truth of the universe through pure rationality or empirical science, such representation does not help us make sense of and, therefore, understand our everyday, lived experience. As one author suggests, "to understand something is to experience it as having a certain meaning" (Carlshamre, 2020, p. 39). Within the

confines of a metaphysically conceived normative theory, however, truth is determinative of what ought to be the case, what is and should be in an absolute and universal sense. As a result of this conceptualization of normative theory, it is difficult to retain epistemic humility, to be honest with ourselves about the limitations of the human cognitive capacity, and to remain open to the notion of truth as an evolving sense of understanding. Yet, normativity need not be grounded metaphysically, establishing the Truth of some "higher order" by outlining what is essential universally.

What is missing from these theoretical conceptualizations of academic advising—the developmental model, the academic learning model, and the normative integrative learning theory—is fundamental recognition of the student as a human being, a being for whom interpretation and understanding is constituted by the conditions of existence. Each of these theoretical models has set up a particular way of conceptualizing how we ought to relate to and understand the academic advisee, the individual student, without taking into account the ontological conditions of human existence. To draw out this point, I turn to the work of Martin Heidegger and the field of hermeneutics. Heidegger's work invites us to consider questions about meaning and truth and to reflect about the impact of our everyday experience as human beings in the world.

In this chapter I will provide a brief introduction to the theoretical field of hermeneutics, focusing primarily on the work of Martin Heidegger. Following the analytic framework of Nakkula and Ravitch (1998), I will outline four key components of Heidegger's (1927/1962) ontological hermeneutics—interpretation, world, connectedness, and time—to illuminate a particular view of the human being, and in turn the individual academic advisee. I will highlight the way in which Heidegger's work reframes our conception of human life, underscoring the

fundamental role of contextualized interpretation. I will argue that recognition of such ontological contextualization, that through which meaning is generated for each individual student, is crucial to academic advising and is absent from each of the prominent theories associated with academic advising today. Even further, I will draw attention to Heidegger's description of interpretation and understanding as iterative and will emphasize the importance of grounding normative theory with a conceptualization of truth as evolving, continuously in need of refinement, rather than finite. I will maintain that the theoretical foundation for the field of academic advising should begin with an attunement to the ontological conditions of human existence and the iterative process of understanding, meaning-making, and human becoming. Overall, I will signal the importance of a contextually inclusive, hermeneutically grounded, theory of academic advising.

Hermeneutic Recognition of the Human *being*

Hermeneutics is the theoretical field of study concerned with interpretation and understanding. The term hermeneutics originates from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, translated in English as "to interpret" (Palmer, 1969, p. 12). As one author recounts, "from its first appearance, the term *hermeneuein*, along with its later Latin equivalent 'interpretari', was associated with the task of understanding some kind of spoken or written communication" (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 3). A full exposition of the history of hermeneutics is outside the scope of this project, yet it is important to understand the breadth of the field in order to clarify the particular hermeneutic lens I will advocate for as foundation for further theoretical development in the field of academic advising.

Over the last several hundred years hermeneutics has evolved, beginning as a form of biblical interpretation, moving to Freidrich Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) conceptualization as

the "art of understanding spoken and written language" (Schmidt, 2006, p. 6), developing further as a systematic approach for understanding the historically situated human being as outlined by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), and shifting toward Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) ontological view in which understanding and interpretation are the modes through which human beings exist. Development of the field of hermeneutics continues further through the work of Hans-George Gadamer, Emilio Betti, Jurgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur, among others. For this project, I focus on the ontological hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger. I will outline the basic elements of his interpretation of human existence and understanding, as means for signaling a particular way of viewing the human being, and therefore each academic advisee.

Heidegger: Ontological Hermeneutics

Martin Heidegger's work invites us to engage in questions about meaning and truth, metaphysical and ontological; to consider the impact of our orientation, the trajectory of our understanding by the content of our presumptions, as we seek to interpret, move to recognize, or aim to produce knowledge. The project of *Being and Time* points to the dangers of conceiving of everything in terms of a kind of "higher order" of "essential" meaning, where truth is interpreted in terms of unchanging essences, whose full and complete presence at every moment makes them the ultimate objects of knowledge, the Eternal Truths of the universe, often manifested in a "highest being." We see this illustrated in Plato's notion of the Forms, in Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover," and in Descartes' notion of Nature. Yet, all of this, Heidegger contended, has been presumed to be true, taken as given, without looking closer at the everyday, grounded, embodied, lived experience of being.

So, while philosophers have attempted to identify the absolute truths of the universe, have sought to reckon with the Being of all that *is*, Heidegger questions whether this is useful.

He has suggested that without first working out what is in front of us, the everyday being of how things are for us in the world, we are misguided to conceive of any "higher order" notions of what is metaphysically True. His project leads to an ontological conceptualization of meaning and truth, one in which the elements of human existence structure interpretation and understanding. Following the four-pronged framework laid out by Nakkula and Ravitch (1998), I will outline the key elements of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics: interpretation, world, connectedness, and time as means for underscoring the nature of human understanding and its relationship to the work of academic advising. Even further, I will draw out the distinction between meaning and truth, highlight the impact of our embodied, sociohistorical context as human beings, and outline a conceptualization of understanding that involves an evolution of thought rather than an establishment of any "higher order" universal truth. I will begin this discussion with an overview of the centrality of interpretation in Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics.

Interpretation

In his classic commentary on hermeneutics, Richard Palmer (1969) explained that "Heidegger's analysis indicated that 'understanding' and 'interpretation' are foundational modes of man's [*sic*] being" (p. 42). Humans are characterized by their manner of being interpretive, by the process through which understanding arises and meaning is possible. Interpretation is fundamental to human existence, the mode through which human beings exist as understanders of meaning. That is, the everyday reality of our existence as human beings involves ongoing interpretation of that which we experience, and in fact, this interpretive activity is fundamental to *how* we exist and move through the world. We are interpreters, beings engaged in the everyday activity of understanding and making sense of things. The everyday reality of our existence,

interpretation, involves a sort of revealing of *how* things make sense, a disclosure of meaning through contextualized lived experience. Following Heidegger's language, Schmidt (2006) articulates this notion of meaning and truth in terms of an *unconcealment*. He explained that "unconcealment occurs in or is constitutive of the lived experience itself and not a later judgement by a subject about an already experienced object" (p. 54). In this way, interpretation is the activity of realizing the significance of things, making sense of what we encounter through the conditions of our experience of some *thing* in the world. The meaning of what we understand, therefore, is disclosed to us in our everyday interpretation.

Heidegger's work "redefines [how we understand] reality itself by moving it from 'out there' in the world to 'in here,' within each person" (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998, p. 14). This shift draws our attention to the way that meaning is signified, disclosed for each individual human being. Conceptualized in this way, meaning is generated through the human interpretive process. Reality, therefore, "*is* one's understanding or interpretation of" what they encounter, placing "primary emphasis on the interpreter" rather than what might exist objectively (pp. 14-15). That is, meaning is "not some innate property discoverable through objective analysis of the external world [but rather *is*] interpretation determined by the significance something has for an individual human being" (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013, p. 226).

World (*being-in-the-world*)

Heidegger (1927/1962) explains that interpretation is constituted from within the basic mode of our existence—our "being-in-the-world" (p. 53). As Jean Grondin (1994) explained in his *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, "understanding lives in or from a certain situation-specific interpretive disposition" (p. 96). That is, understanding takes place from within and through a particular contextualized situation in the world. From this perspective, the *world*,

represents an environment (Chanter, 2001), a sphere of concerns (Polt, 1999), the sociohistorical

position within which human beings make sense of things (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013).

The *world* is "one aspect of Dasein's Being [human existence], and so must be understood

existentially" rather than objectively (Mulhall, 1996, p. 47). Instead of a physical place, the

world is the "environment" or "sphere of concern" within which things take on meaning. It is the

situation we are in, and exist through, that shape our understanding of things.

In this sense, our being-in-the-world includes sociohistorical context, our race, class,

gender, birthplace, age, but also experiences and connections with others. Unlike the traditional

notion of the world as a physical location, Heidegger's description provides "an account of the

relational way in which Dasein [human being] exists in the world" (Chanter, 2001, p. 80). As

such, meaning, the reality of things, comes to fruition from within the individual "sphere of

concern" (Polt, 1999) as shaped by our relational interpretation of how things are integrated to

make sense. Yet, his depiction falls short. While he has provided clear illustration of the

conditions of our existence, drawing our attention to the way in which they shape our

understanding of things, he has overlooked the corporeal, the condition of experiencing the

world through the body. He has underscored the relational aspects of interpretation, yet failed to

provide a "fuller exploration of embodied existence" even as he has articulated the way in which

human beings are connected with the aspects of their world (p. 80). Chanter (2001) argued that

Heidegger's work, has privileged the intellectual, the mind, by focusing on the development of

the conceptual elements of understanding and has overlooked any substantial incorporation of

embodied experience. She contended that, as is the case in most of Western philosophy, "the

legacy of a disincarnate intellect" remains in Heidegger's work, "bound to that of theoretical

clarification" (p. 81). To remedy this issue, we must remember to recognize and highlight not

only the intellectual components involved in understanding, but also the material experience of and through the body. Meaning involves an environment in which both intellectual and embodied components are integral to interpretation. Understanding is shaped by the intellectual and corporeal experience from within our own individual sphere of concerns, the context through which things hold significance, our being-in-the-world.

Connectedness (*being-with*)

Heidegger (1927/1962) tells us that "[t]he world of Dasein [human being] is a with-world. Being-in is being-with others" (p. 155). As part of our being-in-the-world, we exist with other human beings and, as such, interpretation is shaped, in part, by our connections and disconnections with others. Just as being-in-the-world is a condition of human existence, and fundamental to the mode through which we make sense of things, so too is our connection to others. Our being-with is a condition of human existence and shapes interpretation and understanding. Other human beings are not merely physical objects that we encounter, observe, and make note of. Our interpretations do not, "involve a subject-object relation, as if…the subject, stood opposed to another Dasein [human being], the object, and objectively recorded its findings" (Schmidt, 2006, p. 55). Others are beings that influence our understanding. They are not simply things "out there" in physical space, objectively present and useful to us in one way or another. Our being-with, our connections and disconnections with others, affect how we interpret and make sense of things, shape our understanding. The people we are close to, the people we like or dislike, our neighbors, our parents and siblings, our teachers, and friends, influence how meaning is signified for each of us within our being-in-the-world, our environment, sphere of concerns, the sociohistorical context within which we exist.

This account highlights the role of social influence and clarifies the extent to which being-with affects the human interpretive process. Yet, Heidegger's explanation of how to live authentically casts a shadow on any positive recognition of our being-with others. His portrayal of the other, being-with, "yields a largely negative picture and is dominated by…'the they' (das Man)" a term used to articulate the way in which opinions of those in our social world unconsciously dominate and shape our thinking (Chanter, 2001, p. 91). As Chanter points out, at least in the section of *Being and Time* to which she is referring, this view of being-with leads the human being to make sense of things and itself "in terms of opinions that it unthinkingly takes over from the public realm" leaving "little room for any systematic consideration of the possibilities of informed, thoughtful, or authentic collective social or political action" (p. 91). As such, Heidegger is primarily interested in spelling out the impact of others, our being-with, as means for describing its negative impact on our ability to interpret the world authentically from our own view. He cautioned about the impact of our being-with and characterized the notion of the other negatively and as a conditional aspect of being-in-the-world. That is, the Other, is discussed in terms of our being-with, is regarded as merely a component of individual human existence; it "is in every case a characteristic of one's own Dasein [human existence]" (p. 157). So, while Heidegger points to the social elements of our existence, underscoring the relational aspects of our understanding, he does so confined by an individualistic notion of human existence, one in which the other is constituted only as a condition of our being-in-the-world and negatively impacts the possibility of living authentically.

In the first division of *Being and Time*, Heidegger's view of connectedness, the other, being-with, contains at least two substantial shortcomings—it is defined solely in terms of a condition of human existence and is largely characterized negatively as stunting our ability to

live authentically (Chanter, 2001). Moreover, the way in which Heidegger has articulated authenticity, living a truly meaningful life, requires separation, a "stand[ing] alone" from others (p. 94). This view, the notion that one must separate from the other in order to "move on", to develop, to be truly one's own self, to grow as a human being, to be successful, is shared throughout the history of Western scholarship. We find this view as an element of the Socratic dialogues, developmental psychology, and even Tinto's (1975, 1986) exposition of the necessary preventative measures for student departure, to name just a few. In positioning human connection with the other negatively, and conceptualizing separation as the indication of success, growth, and/or authenticity, we overlook to some extend or another, the positive and often culturally significant aspects of who we are, will be, and are becoming. I contend, therefore, that we ought to move forward taking into account, both positive and negative elements, of our being-with, our connectedness to the social, the way in which the others we are with in the world shape our understanding and, therefore, ourselves.

Even while highlighting these shortcomings, I continue to be persuaded that Heidegger's ontological account of interpretation, and its depiction of the role of connectedness, provides useful insight about the conditions of human understanding. Yet, employment of such a view ought to involve critical interrogation of his portrayal of the Other, being-with, pushing back against Heidegger's negative characterization and structural account as merely a condition of Dasein [human being].

Time

Ordinarily we think of time in terms of a collection of individual present moments captured on a timeline or measured by a clock. Heidegger's portrayal involves something quite different. Instead, time is the horizon through which meaning emerges, unifying the present

through our past and organized toward our future. He has explained that "the fundamental structures of Dasein [human being]…are all to be conceived as at bottom 'temporal' and as modes of the temporalizing of temporality" (p. 352). This complicated statement simply indicates that the structures of human existence, of interpretation and meaning, are temporally framed. As such, time is conceived of as that through which meaning is disclosed. Our understanding of the present is shaped by our past, influencing how we view the future, all of which is conditioned by our situatedness toward the finality of existence (death). The whole of this temporal structure, then, is organized by our being-toward-death, our future, our end. Within this frame the future is, for Heidegger, the most crucial aspect of temporality, directing and unifying how things make sense for us in the world (Polt, 1999). We are futural, constituted as being-toward-death, beings with a past and a present, directed ahead of ourselves toward our future (death), interpreting the past and present through recognition of our end.

This sounds quite morbid, but it illustrates the circular, the iterative shape of the interpretation, meaning, of human existence. As we move through life, experiencing new things, inhabiting new places, encountering new people, we take with us all that we have experienced in the past, and are continuously situated toward the future; and if living authentically, we grasp how the finality of our future impacts both our understanding of the present and the past. Yet this depiction of human existence, interpretation, and meaning, privileges the end of life without truly considering the impact of birth (Chanter, 2001; O'Byrne, 2010). In so doing, we overlook our connection to beginnings, to the maternal, to the experience of a feminine being, and of the impact of natality more broadly. As Chanter has suggested, "Heidegger's relative emphasis on the future (as it relates to ending life) over the present, is a relative neglect of the past (as it relates to beginning life)" leaving us to question how the "female experience of motherhood

might inform an alternative account of temporality…[emphasizing] birth" rather than death (Chanter, 2001, p. 100).

Taking Chanter's criticism into consideration, we might argue that natality, the origin of our existence, plays an equally significant role in shaping who we are and how we understand and make sense of things. We might depict an interpretive process that is circular with two poles—the start (birth) and the end (death)—both equally impactful on each other and our understanding. Here the sense of beginning, a being-from, we might say, affects our being-toward-death. Yet, whether we incorporate this sense of a being-from or not, Heidegger's work provides a portrayal of the process of understanding structured by our sociohistorical context and underscores the way in which becoming who we are is ontologically specific to the individual human being. With each shift in our experience, each new connection, each addition to our world, our interpretation is rearranged, re-organized, moving us toward the continual becoming of who we are and the continual interpretation and reemerging of our understanding. This underscores the evolving nature of human existence. We are always in process, becoming who we are and will be, uncovering what is meaningful in our world.

Ontological Interpretation and Iterative Understanding

Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics reframes our conception of human life, articulating the fundamental role of ontologically conditioned interpretation. We are interpretive beings situated toward the future and conditioned by our having been and our current being-in-the-world with others. Within this view, reality, the meaning of things, is constituted from within each human being and involves a revealing or "unconcealment" of *how* things make sense. Meaning is disclosed to us through our contextualized, lived experience over time. Articulated as such, we might think of Heidegger's hermeneutics as a description of human life "a means of

understanding the…human being…[and including] two of the most central functions…the ongoing *interpretation* and *articulation* of everyday experience" (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998, p. 4). From this view we take with us the sense that human beings are situated within their own particular "sphere of concerns" (Polt, 1999), "environment" (Chanter, 2001), embodied (Chanter, 2001), influenced by others, directed toward the future, and conditioned by the past as experienced in the present moment. It is from within this situatedness that interpretation and understanding take place and meaning arises for the individual human being.

Not only does this portrayal frame our view of human life, but it also alters the conceptualization of meaning and truth, highlighting the circular nature of interpretation and understanding. We begin with a particular understanding of things, shaped by our individual situatedness, and over time and through shifting experiences, contexts, and connections, we understand a new, and further our interpretation. In this way, "interpretation must begin with a preliminary, general view of something; this general view can guide us to insights, which then lead—or should lead—to a revised general view" (Polt, 1999, p. 98). From this perspective, the context of an evolving sense of human understanding and meaning-making, knowledge conceived of as essential or metaphysically true in some "higher order" sense is irrelevant. Such characterization leads to the production of theory focused on discovering the "*what*" of human existence, the essence of its Truth, rather than seeking to understand the "*how"* of existence, the reality of the everyday living of life. As Heidegger (1927/1962) has articulated, "a definite ideal of knowledge is not the issue…such an ideal is itself only a subspecies of understanding" (p. 195). Instead, understanding and interpretation are constituted by the structures of human existence, our own being-in-the-world, with others, over time, and is continuously reinterpreted and refined.

Heidegger's depiction provides an iterative view of interpretation and understanding ontologically grounded by the conditions of human existence. As a result, he sheds new light on the way in which human beings exist and make sense of things, and the nature of meaning and truth. Any theoretical foundation of academic advising ought to incorporate both this conceptualization of human understanding and the iterative, ontologically grounded notion of meaning and truth. Recognition of the embodied, sociohistorically situated context through which meaning is generated for each individual student is crucial to the work of academic advising. Furthermore, any normative theory of academic advising ought to be grounded by a conceptualization of truth as iterative, finite, and ever in need of refining. Theoretical foundation for the field of academic advising should begin with an attunement to the ontological conditions of human existence and the iterative process of understanding, meaning-making, and human becoming.

The advising relationship ought to begin with an awareness of both the student, and ourselves, as embodied, beings-in-the-world, influenced by others, directed toward the future, and conditioned by the past as experienced in the present moment. Therefore, rather than coming to the advising conversation by searching for a developmental category, or with the aim of moving toward an integrative theory of learning, we should begin with a recognition of the student's situatedness and our own. It is from our own individual situatedness, the context for interpretation, that we engage in an advising relationship in an effort to facilitate an education. In what is to follow, I will revisit the current theoretical literature in the field of academic advising—developmental model, academic learning model, integrative learning theory. While all of these theories are useful, each fall short, and overlook recognition of the way in which the student's individual situatedness shapes how they understand and make sense of things.

Developmental Model

      While the developmental model is one in which the whole student is considered, it is conceived of in a way that structures our view of each student in terms of their categorical presentation, their stage of development. One's relational approach to each student involves application of techniques suited to a given developmental stage or vector. Such an approach can be helpful in setting up productive interaction, yet our view of each student and our relational approach is filtered through the categories outlined by a given developmental framework. Therefore, within the developmental model we relate to and conceptualize students as organized through the categorical structures of psycho-social development. We are not attuned to consider that through which interpretation and meaning is possible for each student; we are not consciously directed to engage in the task of understanding the student as they are ontologically conditioned, as embodied and sociohistorically contextualized.

      Instead, the developmental model conceives of the advising relationship as "one in which the academic advisor and the student differentially engage in a series of developmental tasks" (Crookston, 2009, p. 79). The aim is to direct students through the stages of development, facilitating the rational process, working together to problem-solve and make decisions. Within this theoretical context, advising is meant to help students achieve their "total potential" realized by working through five key dimensions of academic advising: "(1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocational goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses" (O'Banion, 2009, p. 83). Advising students through these dimensions requires drawing out how each student interprets, understands, and constitutes the meaningfulness of these five elements, all of which is disclosed to the student through the parameters of their own contextualization. Each of these dimensions, therefore, points to an underlying weakness of the

developmental framework. It does not recognize or seek to uncover the ontological conditions from within which interpretation and meaning is generated for the student.

Academic Learning Model

In contrast to the developmentally centered model of academic advising, the academically centered model focuses on learning rather than "self-actualization or personal growth" (Hemwall & Trachte, 2005, p. 74). Therefore, advising is envisioned as an educational endeavor, emphasizing the role of academic learning. This model is meant to draw out the student's understanding of their own education, its significance, how it correlates with what they want to achieve, and their academic field of concentration. The focus is to guide students toward an understanding of what makes sense for their own learning, to help them engage in both reflection and action in order to "understand and analyze their beliefs, norms, assumptions, and practices that give meaning to…[their] world" (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999, p. 8). From this view, advising involves a dialogical discussion between advisor and advisee about the meaning and purpose of the student's educational choices. Yet, to guide this dialogical process productively we first need to recognize *how* meaning is structured for our students, identifying the way they make sense of things as sociohistorically situated in the world and establish what is significant. This is currently absent from the academic learning model.

The individual student comes to the advising conversation always already with an interpretive way of understanding, as situated within their own "sphere of concerns" (Polt, 1999), their "environment" (Chanter, 2001), making sense of things and experiencing what is important to them. The centrality of interpretation is already established and structured by their sociohistorical context, their embodied, being-in-the-world, as influenced by others, directed toward the future, and conditioned by the past as experienced in the present moment. They may,

for example, have entered higher education with a particular understanding of the purpose of their college education, influenced by their parents' experiences, their discussions with peers, and certain that their love of politics will direct them to law school. Without recognition of the ontologically structured way in which meaning is established for human beings, our students, our advisees, we overlook a crucial element in the relational work of academic advising. As such, any theory of academic advising should involve awareness of the ontological conditions of existence that shape what matters, what is significant, what constitutes meaning and ultimately leads to what is identified as purposeful for the academic advisee.

Integrative Learning Theory

Similar to Hemwall and Trachte's (1999, 2005) academic learning model, Lowenstein (1999, 2000, 2005, 2013, 2014) has advocated for an academically centered conceptualization of advising. His work has opened a new way of thinking about advising, responding to Schulenberg and Lindhorst's (2008) call for an articulation of advising's "unique role in higher education" (p. 44). He has described the advisor as "academic facilitator" (1999, para 18) and argued that, unlike other roles within higher education, this work involves means for students to understand the logic of the curriculum. Lowenstein's (2014) project has emphasized the importance of developing normative theory, working to articulate "the ultimate purpose of advising" (para, 17). Therefore, rather than capturing and describing what advising currently is empirically or relying on analogical use of theory from other fields, he has worked to establish a normative account of what advising ought to involve—an integrative learning theory. However, keeping in mind the ontological elements of human existence and their impact on understanding, meaning, and interpretation, as outlined by Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics, there are at least two weaknesses to the current iteration of this integrative learning theory. First, Lowenstein has

established a false dichotomy arguing that advisors must choose between either an academically centered view of advising or one in which personal growth and development is primarily the focus. Such a dichotomy artificially separates one aspect of human existence from another, presuming that personal growth occurs in isolation, rather than alongside, and as influenced by and impacting, academic learning and any integrative understanding of one's education. Second, the conceptualization of normative theory that Lowenstein (2014) has presented begins with a particular metaphysical assumption about the nature of truth, what it is in an absolute sense, and how it can be applied universally.

False dichotomy: academic learning vs. personal growth

Lowenstein (2000, 2014) has argued that advising is essentially an academic venture, facilitating student recognition of the interconnectedness of their academic experiences; a process allowing students to identify and understand the relationships between each area of their study. This integrative learning theory, as it has come to be called, has re-centered advising as academic and focused on learning. Such a conceptualization begins with a particular view of what is involved in learning and human understanding, shaped, at least in part, by its challenge to the developmental model. Like Hemwall and Trachte (1999, 2005), Lowenstein grounds his theory from a place of opposition, a paradigm in which advising is either academically centered or focused on personal growth and development. Establishing this kind of dichotomy makes it impossible to include key elements of the ontological conditions of human interpretation.

The integrative learning theory focuses on advising as an intellectual process involving the activities of the mind. Outlined in this way, advising is characterized as facilitating student rational thought toward the goal of a unified understanding of the whole of their educational experience and increased intellectual capacity overall. The personal, or individual, elements of a

student's experience are absent from this theoretical view, obscuring the impact on the shape of a student's understanding. There is emphasis on the rational, the logical, the mind as a kind of disembodied entity working toward the goal of integrated understanding and increased intellectual capacity. While a solitary focus on learning, and the academic elements of advising, allow us to move past hegemonic acceptance of the developmental model of advising, such a narrow view prohibits consideration of the personal, the individual, the sociohistorically situated student always already in-the-world, with others, making sense of things. Placing academic learning in opposition with personal growth, denies us the ability to include the lived experience of our students and ourselves. This kind of antagonism establishes an artificial separation, divorcing one aspect of existence from another, and denies the connection between intellectual and personal growth.

Lowenstein's conceptualization leaves out consideration of the lived experience of the student, the embodied, sociohistorically situated elements of human existence and, therefore, the context through which meaning is generated and understanding is made possible. In order to enable integrative learning and facilitate student understanding, we ought to include recognition of the complexity of meaning-making, the role of contextualized interpretation, and the ontological conditions of human existence. The work of advising should begin with an acknowledgement of the connection between the personal elements of existence, the individual sociohistorically situated advisee, understanding, and academic learning.

Normative Theory and Iterative Understanding

Lowenstein (2014) has underscored the importance of establishing a normative theory of academic advising, one in which we have identified the "essential, as opposed to incidental, characteristics of advising…[those] characteristics without which it would not be advising"

(para. 14). The aim of such an identification is not to describe, predict, or explain the empirical reality of the practice of academic advising, as one would expect when developing scientific theory. Instead, the aim is to establish an idealized view of what advising ought to entail. While scientific theory is grounded empirically, explaining aspects of the natural world through "extensive observation, experimentation, and creative reflection" (National Academy of Sciences [NAS], 1999, p. 2), normative theory involves abstract investigation about the nature of a given phenomenon, and what it ought to entail. As he has articulated, "[a] normative theory of advising will be a statement of the ultimate purpose of advising, of what advising ideally should be, not necessarily what advising actually is" (Lowenstein, 2014, para. 17). Therefore, a normative theory ought to establish an account of the unique function of academic advising within higher education and offer an ideal at which to strive, unifying the mission and purpose of the endeavor.

Lowenstein has suggested that such a normative account provides foundation for a unified theory, conceptualized as either comprehensive and universal, or as commonly accepted and giving rise to a "unity of purpose, a rallying cry, a sense of joint membership in a valuable enterprise" (para. 28). He has cautioned against allowing any one theory to hold "hegemony in the advising field" (para. 30) and has argued for critical evaluation of any commonly held theory; however, he also holds out hope for a much-needed comprehensive theory of academic advising. He has argued that normative theory specifies an ideal rather than laying out a specific strategy or approach, and as such, allows for the possibility of a universal theory that "applies to all advising, at any institution, and for any student" (para. 21). Yet, this conceptualization of normative theory is problematic. Underlying the notion of a comprehensive theory of advising, and perhaps even a common theory of advising, as described by Lowenstein, is an assumption about the nature of truth and the purpose of our theoretical undertakings.

Lowenstein encourages identification of what is distinct about academic advising and has suggested that theory building should employ a sort of Aristotelean search for the essence of advising. In so doing, his theory is grounded metaphysically; truth is conceptualized in terms of unchanging essences, conceived of as connected to a kind of "higher order" of "essential" meaning. In this view we ought to strive to achieve an understanding of the ultimate purpose of academic advising, come to a representation of the True essence of academic advising. This conceptualization presumes an idealized notion of what *is*, as Heidegger (1927/1962) would have it, and misrepresents the way in which meaning is ontologically disclosed to us through our everyday being-in-the-world, with others, over time. Understanding and interpretation are always in the process of being refined and shaped and are never completed or fully actualized. While it is useful to strive for an ideal, to look toward conceptualizing the ultimate purpose of academic advising, it must be done as an exercise, employment of a particular mode of scholarship that allows us to reflect about current practice and to envision change, but always with recognition of the ontological conditions of human understanding. We must retain epistemic humility, be conscious of the limits of the human cognitive capacity and remain open to the notion of truth as an evolving sense of understanding.

Normative Theory and Contextually Inclusive Academic Advising

Over the last five decades a body of theoretical literature has emerged, building foundation for our understanding of academic advising, illuminating its function, and beginning to establish stability for the practice and professional field of study. As Himes (2021) has suggested, such literature "provides an important mechanism to create a common language and shared understanding of academic advising among practicing advisors" (p. 49). With each addition, we gain a clearer sense of the profession and understand more thoroughly the distinct

function of academic advising within higher education. Yet, Schulenberg and Lindhorst's (2008) assessment of the need for a clear articulation of the role of advising continues to loom large. As Schulenberg (2021) suggested more recently, without a clear and agreed upon conceptualization of the role of academic advising, it is in danger of becoming "a catch-all area where any new initiative meant to affect student success can be carried out" (Schulenberg, 2021, p. 55). Therefore, it is critical that scholars and practitioners continue to work toward further establishing, what Himes (2014) described as an "intentional normative theory", one that will provide foundation for academic advising and an ideal at which to aim.

It is useful to strive toward an ideal, to work toward a conceptualization of the ultimate purpose of academic advising, yet such effort should be employed as a particular mode of scholarship, always anticipating the need for reconceptualization. We ought to be cautious about the use of normative theory, attentive to the limits of the human cognitive capacity, epistemically humble, and conscious of the iterative process of understanding. Drawing on Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics, I maintain that meaning and truth ought to be conceptualized as iterative, continually evolving with our individual experiences, and grounded by the conditions of human existence. Within this view, normative theory can be used to help us reflect about current practice, envision change and advancement, but cannot establish a fixed, essential, or universal sense of things. Therefore, while I argue for a normative theory grounded by an attunement to the sociohistorical context of each individual student, I do so conscious of the iterative nature of the human interpretive process and open to previous theoretical work.

Just as Heidegger's work illuminates a particular way of viewing the nature of meaning and truth, it has also revealed a new conceptualization of human life. He has captured the

importance and centrality of interpretation, emphasized the role of sociohistorical context, and established truth as iterative understanding.

The current theoretical scholarship has provided useful structures, techniques, and conceptualizations; however, it falls short, overlooking the ontological context of the advisee. Taking into consideration Heidegger's account of human understanding, interpretation, and meaning-making, I contend that the theory and practice of academic advising ought to be contextually inclusive, beginning from a recognition of the student's being-in-the-world, with others, over time. While developmental models of academic advising make use of psycho-social stages to provide categorical structure, directing our interactions with students, they do not consider what is meaningful to each individual student or allow for recognition of the impact of sociohistorical context. Academic learning models of advising focus on the dialogical discussion of the meaning and purpose of a student's academic path, but do not take into account *how* meaning is structured for each student.

Even further, the integrative learning theory places academic learning in opposition with personal growth, preventing us from incorporating the ontological, the lived experience of the student. Each of these theories begins by establishing the scope of academic advising, providing a modality for viewing and interacting with an objective subject, the advisee, and argue for a particular outcome (i.e., developmental growth, academic learning, integrative understanding of the academic endeavor). Yet, each overlook the individual human beings we interact with, the beings for whom interpretation is primary and understanding is conditioned by the ontological elements of existence. Of course, they include discussion of "the advisee", and rightly so, but only as the categorical representation of the subject of the work of advising.

That is, while the subject of academic advising, the student, is included in the discussion, it is a hollow, categorical conceptualization. Instead, we ought to ground the work of advising with a fuller conceptualization, one in which there is recognition of the contextualized existence of the individual human being. So, while there has been progress in the scholarship of academic advising, movement in the development of theoretical foundation, we have overlooked the importance of recognizing the ontological conditions of human existence and therefore the central role of student context. It is crucial that our scholarship begin with an attunement to the conditions of human existence and with an awareness of the way in which understanding is shaped by the student's individual sociohistorical context. Academic advising ought to be contextually inclusive, taking care to consider the way in which students make sense of themselves, their education, and the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Contextually Inclusive Theory

We are beings always in process, uncovering what is meaningful in our world, continually (re)forging new ontologically grounded understandings of things, becoming who we are and will be. Until now the theoretical literature in the field of academic advising has identified the human being, the student, the advisee, as the subject before us, described and analyzed objectively. The student as ontologically grounded, engaged as an interpreter of what they encounter through the context of their existence, has been unconsidered. Scholars have theorized about supporting "the student" through the stages of human development, made the case for the centrality of facilitating student academic learning, and have argued that advising ought to guide the student toward a recognition of the interconnectedness of the whole of their education. All of these theories have made important contributions to the development of the field of academic advising; nevertheless, the ontological circumstances of the individual student, their individual sociohistorical context is underestimated, perhaps even overlooked.

Yet, with each new theory the field grows and moves to establish itself further. The developmental model allows us to think about student growth, incremental change, directing advisors to support students as they move through each stage, increasing their sense of self, and acquiring the skills necessary to navigate through life. Yet critics of the developmental model underscore its limitations, quite rightly arguing that with focus on the psychosocial components of growth, predefined stages of progress, emphasis is shifted away from the academic, the educational elements of growth and learning. What is more, the developmental model obscures the distinction between academic advising and counseling, leaving definitions of advising

indistinct to higher education (Lowenstein, 2014). Therapeutic counseling and developmental growth occur both inside and outside of higher education. Such a developmental conceptualization, therefore, masks our understanding of what is unique to academic advising within higher education.

As such, it is clear that we must include consideration of the factors of academic advising that are distinctive to its role in higher education. Unlike counseling, academic advising is situated within higher education, charged with helping students navigate their academic journey (Troxel, 2018) and tied to the curriculum. Academically centered models of advising remind us of this distinctive feature, and underscore the educational elements of the endeavor, shifting our attention back to intellectual learning. From this context, advising is outlined as pedagogically structured, a role best described as "academic facilitator" (Lowenstein, 1999). Highlighting the academic in this way has reestablished advising as primarily an educational activity. However, with such emphasis, consideration of the personal, or individual elements of the student's experience are absent, removed from the theoretical model, perhaps even considered superfluous. Such absence obscures the student's embodied, sociohistorically contextualized experience and its impact on the shape of their understanding of things.

While such realigning toward the academic elements of advising has allowed us to question hegemonic acceptance of the developmental model of academic advising, it has narrowed our view in such a way as to overshadow the lived experience of the student, the contextually situated human being always already in the world, with others, making sense of things over time. Within the academically centered model, the student is cast as an objective subject, considered analytically, without reference to the ontologically situated human being. Within this framework, intellectual growth is separated from personal growth and the ontological

elements of interpretation and understanding are overlooked. This kind of separation denies support for the student experience, the context through which meaning, and understanding is made possible. As an activity of higher education, advising ought to be academic, educational, focused on intellectual growth, and yet support for such growth must be done with recognition of the impact of the personal, the ontological, the interweaving of the everyday, contextualized, experiences of human life. To focus on one at the expense of the other denies the reality of lived experience, ultimately doing a disservice to the students with whom we engage. To support intellectual growth, we must recognize and support personal growth and seek to incorporate the contextual elements of our students as human beings in the world.

In this chapter I will outline the components of a contextually inclusive theory of advising by considering the conditions of human existence, the impact of human understanding, and the iterative nature of truth and its relationship to the establishment of normative theory. I will introduce a discussion of diversity, inclusion, and sense of belonging and suggest that a contextually inclusive theory can be useful to the project of promoting inclusion and aid in fostering development of students' sense of belonging. Following this discussion, I will offer an outline of practice informed by a contextually inclusive theory and suggest that caseload size, advisor training, and institutional information sharing ought to be reevaluated to allow for the successful employment of advising practice informed by this theory. Finally, I will offer suggestions for future scholarship and argue that academic advising ought to be grounded by a contextually inclusive theory, educationally driven, learning-focused, concerned with student completion, and informed by an understanding of the human being, the individual student as a contextualized interpreter.

Contextually Inclusive Theory

Theoretical foundation for the field of academic advising should include consideration of the conditions of human existence, their impact on human understanding, the iterative nature of meaning and truth, and the role of interpretation. We are interpreters engaged in the everyday activity of making sense of what we encounter. The meaning of things, what is constituted as reality, is structured by our contextual situation, in our world, with others, over time. In order to engage with our advisees, we ought to be conscious not of what *is* meaningful, in a definitive objective sense, but *how* things have meaning, from where, within what context, as influenced by the connections and disconnections our students experience. It is critical to take into account *how* our advisees come to interpret and make sense of their education and themselves.

A contextually inclusive theory begins with a conceptualization of each student, as a human being in the world, a contextualized interpreter (see Figure 1), impacted by their own sociohistorical position, their relationships with others, as directed toward their future, making sense of things in the present as influenced by their experience of the past. Even further, this theory is grounded by the notion that academic advising is, at base, an educational activity, focused on learning, and dedicated to ensuring that our students reach the end goal and complete their degree. Moreover, it entails recognition of the interrelation between intellectual and personal growth, and an attunement to the effects of our student's individual experiences in shaping their understanding of things. In this way, the unique ontological components of each student's life are acknowledged as central to their understanding, impacting their education, and shaping the trajectory of their academic journey.

Figure 1

Contextualized interpreter
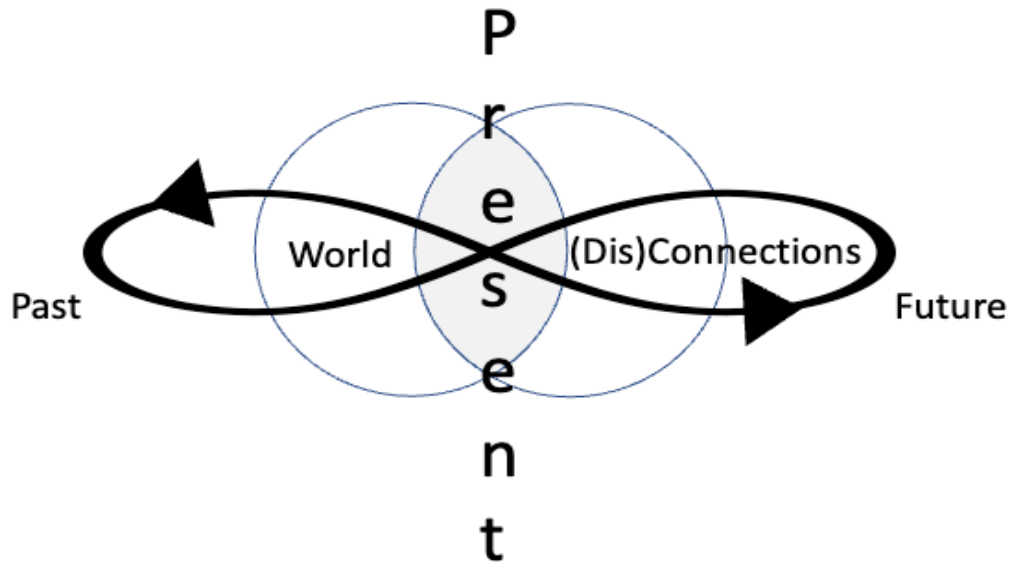
## The Conditions of Human Existence and Human Understanding

As an activity facilitating intellectual growth, a process that takes place through the ontological conditions of existence, academic advising entails an imperative that we recognize the unique contextualization of our students. Hence, we ought to be cautious about the use of generalized categories and their application to our advisees. We can imagine, for example, the well-intentioned search for "at risk" students, painting a picture of what will be most helpful to this group of students. However, in the process of casting this categorization, of grouping students together as "at risk", we misunderstand the ontological elements of an individual student's experience, *how* it impacts the mode through which they navigate and make sense of things. Even further, we should be equally cautious about application of developmental stages, such a generalized abstraction can be useful, but can also be harmful. If what we search for in

supporting our students is focused on discovery of what is similar to most, recognition of the

shared elements of a developmental stage, for example, we risk overlooking what is unique,

dissonant and ungeneralizable, for an individual advisee. It is critical that the activity of advising

is grounded in such a way that we remain attuned to the conditions of human existence, with

awareness of the human interpretive process, and the impact of our students' contexts.

Of course, there are moments when it can be useful and beneficial to our advisees to

apply these groupings or categorical generalizations; however, we ought to be actively aware of

the aspects of the individualized, lived experiences that we may intentionally or unintentionally

overlook with such application, careful to remain aware of the potential for pitfalls. We may

glean insight or identify how to consider supporting a particular student when making use of

these approaches, but there is also the risk of misunderstanding, alienating, or sending a student

in the wrong direction. To be sure that our support is useful, we need to begin our work with an

acknowledgement that student understanding, meaning, how students make sense of things and

proceed through their education, is shaped by the ontological conditions of their existence, their

unique contextualization (see Figure 2). To guide our students toward their goals, to help them

reflect, to facilitate their intellectual growth, we need to apply the principle of contextualization,

inquiring about their experience and engaging toward an understanding of their situatedness. We

should acknowledge and reflect about student context.

Figure 2

The Process of Understanding as Described by Ontological Hermeneutics
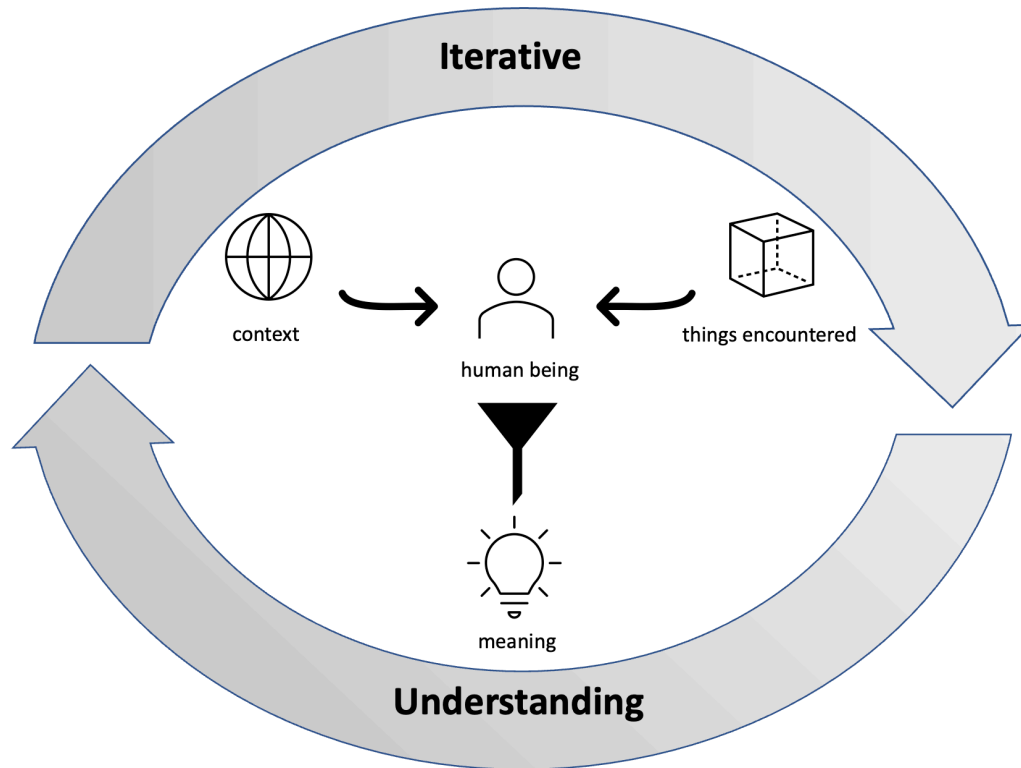
It could be constructive for the advisor and advisee to work together, uncovering the student's individual environment (Chanter, 2001), sphere of concern (Polt, 1999), sociohistorical position within which they make sense of things (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013). Still, many professional academic advisors are responsible for supporting hundreds of students, making it challenging to work at length with each student individually to identify the nuance of their contextualization. Regardless of this difficulty, a contextually inclusive theory maintains that academic advising ought to begin with a conceptualization of the student as an interpreter, a being in the world, influenced by their own positionality, their connections, and disconnections

with others, all experienced over time. It is crucial that we recognize the impact of contextualization, that we are careful when grouping students, or applying generalized categories about their growth or development. When possible, it is useful to engage our students in an exploration of their contextualizations, although, even without a lengthy exchange, conscious awareness of the influence of this context moves us productively forward. Conceptualization of academic advising, theoretical articulation, ought to begin, with recognition of the human being as conditioned by sociohistorical context, the advisee as an interpretive being, understanding and making sense of things through their unique position in the world. So, rather than simply an approach to the work of academic advising, a contextually inclusive theory mandates an attunement to the notion of contextualized interpretation, the means through which human understanding is made possible, as necessary for advancing the theoretical groundwork in the field of academic advising.

A contextually inclusive theory allows us to ground an articulation of the advisee, the student, the human being. With such a principle of contextualization, we recognize the individuality of our students, the uniqueness through which meaning and purpose are attached. Our advisees, each of them, are individual beings for whom interpretation is primary. Human beings, are ontologically situated, searching for, and shaping what is meaningful, continually (re)understanding, and becoming who we will be. A contextually inclusive theory, therefore, is not merely an approach, a suggested method for how best to effectively work with students. Instead, it is an articulation of the lived reality of our students, a reminder of the diversity of existence, and the impact of these conditions within the realm of academic advising. It provides critical foundation for academic advising theory, a place to begin, setting the stage for us to consider *how* our students experience and understand their world.

The Iterative Nature of Meaning and Truth: Normative Theory

In 2009 President Obama launched an initiative to increase levels of college completion in the United States. Often referred to as the college completion agenda, this initiative drew political and cultural attention to concerns about student departure and persistence. With such political weight amassed, pressure to retain and support students toward successfully attaining their degree has become an essential focus of American higher education. The momentum of the completion agenda, together with the language of student success, has hijacked the conversation, forcing focus on graduation as the finish line, narrowing what we conceive of as academic advising. Without a clear articulation of the distinctive role of academic advising within higher education, it will be susceptible to such political pressures and the immediate needs of our institutions, making it difficult for either the practice or the scholarly field of study to advance. Normative theory allows us to envision an ideal, to argue for change, and to strive for something deeper, more substantive, than presently exists.

As Lowenstein and Bloom (2016) have so eloquently articulated, "theoretical issues lead to practical consequences…[our] ideas about the purpose of advising will affect [our]…practice and organization, assessment, and evaluation" (pp. 125-126). While scientific theory, grounded by empirical data, helps to explain, and describe the current realities involved in the practice of advising, normative, philosophical theory provides means for thinking analytically about its function broadly within higher education; not what it *is*, but how it *ought* to be conceptualized. Such normative theory is meant to be foundational, focused on axiological considerations about what academic advising ought to entail, working to articulate its distinctive role in higher education. So, rather than involving an explanation meant to "describe, predict, or explain" (Lowenstein, 2014, para, 16) the reality of advising based on empirical data, normative theory

can offer an account of the unique function of academic advising and an idealized conceptualization of what it should involve. Furthermore, it can be used to create a "common language and shared understanding of academic advising" (Himes, 2021, p. 49), a collective starting place for each of us to begin our work with students and to engage in scholarship.

Lowenstein's (1999, 2005, 2014) work moves us closer to an articulation of the nature of academic advising, its unique role in higher education, a conceptualization of how it ought to be conceived in an ideal sense. He has outlined the beginning stages of a normative account of academic advising, setting up a "standard for practice" and the parameters for the "specific domain for research" on advising (van den Wijngaard, 2021, p. 65). Such scholarship has created a space to think deeply about what advising ought to entail and has helped to establish the groundwork for identifying its unique role in higher education. Yet, underlying his account is an assumption about the nature of truth and the purpose of our theoretical activities.

He has engaged us to consider what is distinct about academic advising and to, with Aristotelean spirit, search for the essence of academic advising. We are called to consider a kind of "higher order" of "essential" meaning, the ultimate purpose of advising, the Truth about its distinctive nature. As McGill, et al. (2021) so astutely point out, with every attempt to layout an essential definition about the nature of academic advising, we risk "imposing dominant cultural behaviors…marginaliz[ing] nondominant groups" (p. 28). This view of normativity involves finality, implying the possibility of achieving, at some point in the future, a conclusive depiction of the unmovable essence of academic advising. Such a conceptualization of normativity may be dangerous, potentially endorsing and supporting harmful and oppressive structures and fixed, inflexible norms.

While Lowenstein may not intend or agree with this conception of normativity, it remains, undergirding the structure of his project. In fact, Lowenstein's work points to a sort of iterative view of theory building. As van den Wijngaard (2021) has suggested, his theory is meant to open space for "advisors to disagree" and offer their own "perspectives and well-crafted arguments" about the nature of academic advising and its function within the context of higher education (p. 69). Irrespective of his intention, however, Lowenstein's work involves a metaphysically conceived sense of knowledge and truth, an underlying conceptualization of normativity that involves an articulation of what is "essential" and True in an eternal sense.

This view misrepresents the way in which meaning is ontologically disclosed to us. Viewed through the lens of ontological hermeneutics, understanding and interpretation are continuously in the process of becoming what they will be, iterative, evolving, never completed, influenced by our past and present as directed toward the future. Interpretation begins "with a preliminary, general view of something...guid[ing] us to insights, which then lead...to a revised general view" (Polt, 1999, p. 98). Understanding is constituted by the structures of human existence, our being in the world, with others, over time, and is continuously reinterpreted and refined (see Figure 2). This scholarship has offered an opportunity to revisit how we conceptualize the work of academic advising, our students, and ourselves. It leads us to consider the impact of sociohistorical context in the process of interpretation and the formation of meaning and establishes truth as iterative understanding.

It is useful to search for an ideal, to strive toward conceptualizing the ultimate purpose of advising. Nonetheless, such a scholarly endeavor ought to be carried out as an exercise, a mode of inquiry that offers a place for reflection about current practice and creation of utopian vision; at the same time, it ought to be grounded by a recognition of the ontological conditions of human

existence, open to the notion of truth as iterative, an evolving sense of understanding cast by the human interpretive process.

The Role of Interpretation

Academic advising involves interpersonal connection, it is "about building relationships with our students, locating places where they get disconnected, and helping them get reconnected" (Drake, 2011, p. 8). As emphasized in the core competencies for academic advising (NACADA, 2022) and by Troxel and Kyei-Blankson (2020) in their analysis of data from the *Driving Toward a Degree* project (2020), relational aspects of advising are clearly pivotal to this work. Successful advising relationships involve recognition of the complexities of the individual students and an approach that is "focused [on] care, respect, and curiosity" (p. 30). That is, if we hope to support the needs of *all* students, situated individually, it will be essential to begin the work of academic advising with a conscious awareness of the complexities that each student brings to their educational journey. Intentional validation of the lived experiences of our students and affirmation of the assets of their individual characteristics, allow students to be seen and valued (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011) and can lead to increased levels of attainment (Rendón, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). The statement on *Advising Across Race* (2021) from the University of Colorado Boulder, identified by Troxel, et al (2021), illustrates the need for this well:

> As institutions increase their attempts to diversify and expand the undergraduate college student population, there is a need to increase the academic resources and support services for their students, particularly for students of Color. Because of this, academic advisors play an integral role in the academic success and degree completion of their students. *The ways in which they advise and perceive their students can impact the way*

their students navigate and make sense of the college environment. [italics added] This

relationship between faculty advisor and student is just one aspect of the academic

advising experience. In addition to establishing a relationship with a faculty advisor,

students of Color *must also learn how their ethnic and racial identities influence these*

interactions and their larger college experiences [italics added] (para. 1).

This statement underscores the importance of recognizing who and where we are, advisor

and advisee, and *how* that impacts our understanding and our relationships. We ought to be

conscious of the situatedness of the advisee and ourselves, in an effort to facilitate learning, and

support the iterative process of student becoming. Academic advising is a process that engages

individuals relationally, advisor with advisee, human beings, each within their own particular

context, embodied, sociohistorically situated in the world. A contextually inclusive theory of

academic advising is grounded by a conceptualization of the human being, the student, the

advisee as conditioned by the elements of existence. Such a theory is attuned to the ontological

modalities of our students, that through which they make sense of things, their education, and

themselves. Even further, this view underscores the contextualized position within which the

advisor is situated. As an advisor, just as is the advisee, we engage from within our own

sociohistorical position, searching for understanding, and making meaning of what we encounter.

It is vital that we recognize the impact of context, the connection between the intellectual and

personal, and that we come to understand the significance of *how* things have meaning, for our

advisees and ourselves. Therefore, interpretation is central to the activity of academic advising.

We ought to acknowledge and conceptualize the human being, advisor and advisee, as

beings for whom interpretation is primary, experiencing the everyday, with others, over time,

making sense of things, continually (re)understanding, through our own sociohistorical positions in the world. It is critical that our theory and our practice begin with a conscious awareness of the situatedness of our students and ourselves. Consequently, interpretation undergirds the activity of academic advising, informing the work and our conceptualization threefold: (1) as it relates to a student's interpretation of their world and the things they encounter, (2) as it relates to an advisor's interpretation of their own world and the things they encounter, and (3) as it relates to the interpretation of each other, advisor and advisee. The process of interpretation is interwoven into the foundation of academic advising, the individual interpretation of each student, our interpretation of our advisee and ourselves, and the interpretation of each other. These phenomena ought to be acknowledge, embraced, and considered in the practice and scholarship of academic advising, particularly as it corresponds to the connections between advisor and advisee, the relational elements of the endeavor.

To productively support our students, *all* of our students, we must enter the work of academic advising with a clear conceptual understanding of the contextualized human being, advisor and advisee, beings for whom interpretation is primary, making sense of things from within their own environment (Chanter, 2001), sphere of concern (Polt, 1999), sociohistorical position (Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013). The work of academic advising ought to begin with a conceptualization of the human being as a contextualized interpreter, understanding and making sense of things through their own unique position within the world, with others, over time. We ought to recognize our own positionality, how it brings us to our interactions, shapes how we make sense of things, and determines what to suggest and draw out from our students. Equally as important, it is critical to acknowledge and engage to identify, when possible, the individual contextualization of each of our advisees. In short, A contextually inclusive theory of

is grounded by a conceptualization of the advisee as contextualized interpreter, understanding their world, their education, themselves, as conditioned by the ontological elements of their existence, impacting the course of their academic journey. Furthermore, it underscores the centrality of interpretation, of ourselves, our students, and what we make of things, all while emphasizing the iterative nature of meaning and truth. Thus, we should engage with our advisees not in an effort to uncover what *is* meaningful, in a definitive, objective, and final sense, but in an effort to identify *how*, from where, as influenced by what context, and impacted by what connections or disconnections things have meaning for our students. It is with this conceptualization that we come to the practice and scholarship of academic advising poised to establish equitable practice, inclusive of all students, and supportive of the realities of each advisee.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity: Sense of Belonging

Academic advisors ought to be "cognizant that inequitable environments and practices, whether inadvertent or by design, may result in obstacles" that impede student performance and opportunity to accomplish what they desire, and ought to work actively to "help students overcome such barriers" (NACADA, 2022, p. 17). Therefore, it is critical that we acknowledge and validate our students' experiences (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), and that we engage in action to help remove impediments when possible. Yet, for decades Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) *integration theory* has dominated our approach to student support, advocating the notion that persistence and achievement is linked to the extent to which a student is able to separate from their precollege communities, transition to college life, and integrate into the new college community (Museus, et al, 2017). Such scholarship has whitewashed our sense of the

student experience, outlining the components necessary for student achievement, without consideration of the cultural and contextual elements of existence.

Shifting attention to more "culturally conscious frameworks," scholars have begun to study the impact of sense of belonging, pointing to the "notion that students from different backgrounds can perceive and experience environments and their interactions with those environments in distinctive ways" (p. 190). A sense of belonging involves a student's "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community" (Strayhorn, 2018, p. 4). In this way, belonging enables a student to feel seen, understood, and appreciated for the authentic version of themselves that they bring to the educational space. Some argue that a sense of belonging is essential for the well-being and development of students within higher education, particularly for those "who identify as non-majority identities (racial/ethnic minorities, LGTBQ+, disability, and first generation) [those who] are at greater risk of feeling isolated and unwelcome" (Taff & Clifton, 2022, p. 122). Sense of belonging is positively associated with student persistence and well-being, suggesting that belonging engages students more "deeply with their studies" and leads to greater persistence (Gopalan & Brady, 2020, p. 134).

Some have argued that the process of belonging is "interwoven with the social identity development" of students and is shaped by campus environments, involvement, and relationships (Vaccaro & Newman 2022, p. 17). Others contend that belonging is fundamentally relational, characterized by reciprocal understanding and support from the members of our community (Strayhorn, 2018). In fact, relationships with peers, faculty, and staff can be foundational to a student's sense of belonging, with academic advisors well positioned to "nurture a students'

sense of belonging" by reaching out proactively and with care (Strayhorn, 2022, p. 28). Even further, low-income students who experience validation (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), affirmation about the asset of their individual context and experience, report a higher sense of belonging (Kitchen, 2022). Yet, when considering belonging within the framework of social identity development and as shaped by the "nuanced forms of oppression experienced" by our students, we ought to be careful to address systematic forms of oppression and the inevitable biases of those with whom our students engage on campus, including ourselves (Vaccaro & Newman, 2022, p. 4). To ensure that we contribute positively to our students' sense of belonging, and to establish useful and meaningful support, it is critical that we recognize our own context, that through which we come to the conversations with each of our advisees.

It is necessary, then, to recognize our prejudgments, our biases, the particular, contextually situated understanding with which we begin our engagements with our students. Highlighting this well, NACADA's *Academic advising core competencies guide* (2022), articulates the importance of considering such prejudgments. The guide draws directly from Beres et al. (2013) who suggest that effective academic advising should involve recognition of our biases, our "cultural, spiritual, and educational backgrounds" and how they "play into our relationships with students" (p. 10). This points directly to the impact of context, the importance of lived experience in shaping what is valuable, meaningful, and makes sense to each of us, our students and ourselves. A contextually inclusive theory creates an imperative for including consideration of the everyday lived experience of the human being, the ontological conditions of human existence, their impact on human understanding, the iterative nature of meaning and truth, and the role of interpretation. Thus, such a theory entails an acknowledgement of the unique contextualization of each human being, the diverse nature of their realities, and the influence

these have on our students' experiences as well as our own. A contextually inclusive theory lends theoretical support to efforts that promote inclusion and foster development of students' sense of belonging.

The Future of Academic Advising: Policy and Practice

To engage in practice informed by a contextually inclusive theory of academic advising, requires recognition of the contextualized interpreter, the human being, advisor and advisee, situated in the world, making sense of things as impacted by their sociohistorical position, their connections and disconnections with others, directed toward the future as influenced by their experience of the past. That is, we ought to be conscious of the impact of context for both our students and ourselves. Advisors will need to reflect about their own context, how it shapes their understanding of the world, their work, their students, and themselves. In addition, they will need to acknowledge and work to discover and interpret student context. Such discovery should involve gathering data from institutional information systems as well as through advising interactions. This process should be iterative, and requires ongoing interaction, interpretation, and data gathering (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

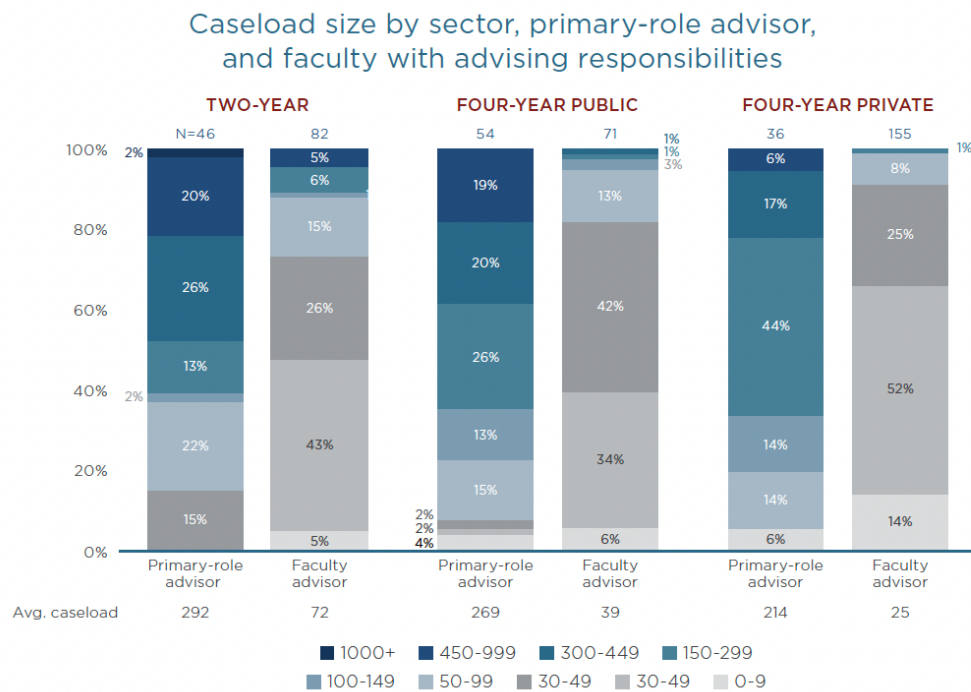*The Practice of Academic Advising Informed by a Contextually Inclusive Theory*
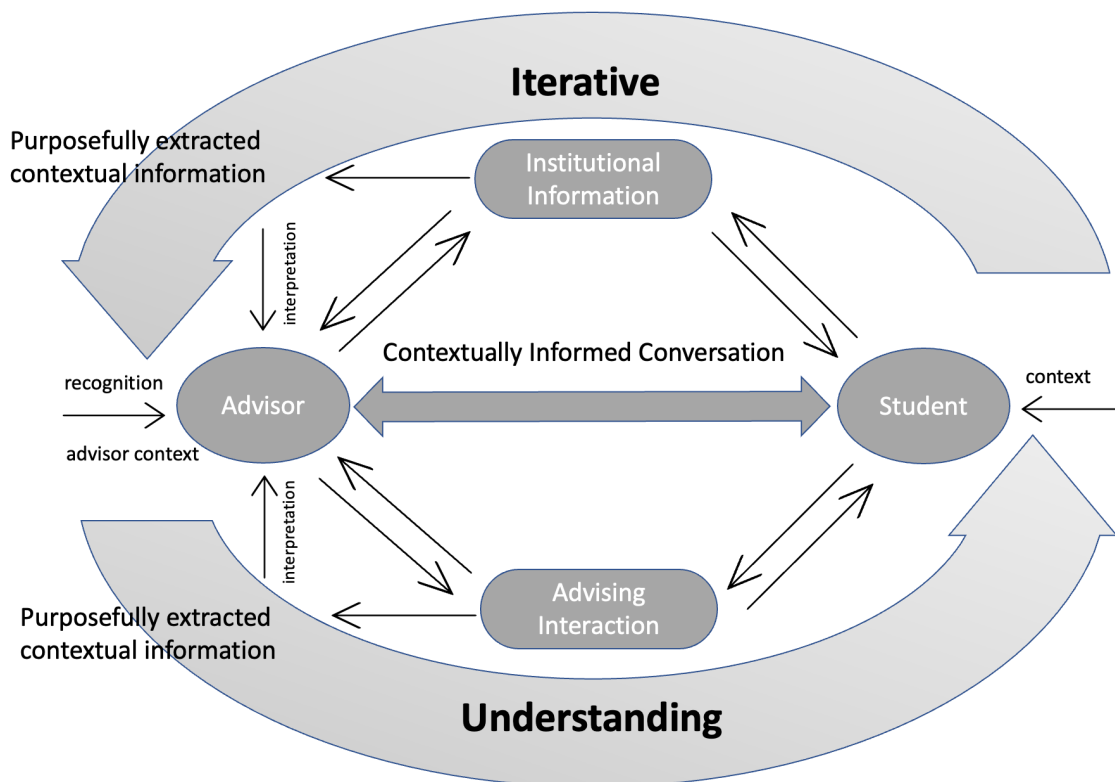
Advising practice structured in this way draws us to consider the importance of caseload size, advisor training, and institutional information sharing. To successfully engage in practice that is grounded by a contextually inclusive theory of advising, institutions ought to evaluate caseload sizes, develop advising training programs that provide advisors the instruction and resources to gather and interpret the necessary contextual information, and should ensure robust means for institutional data sharing and collaboration.
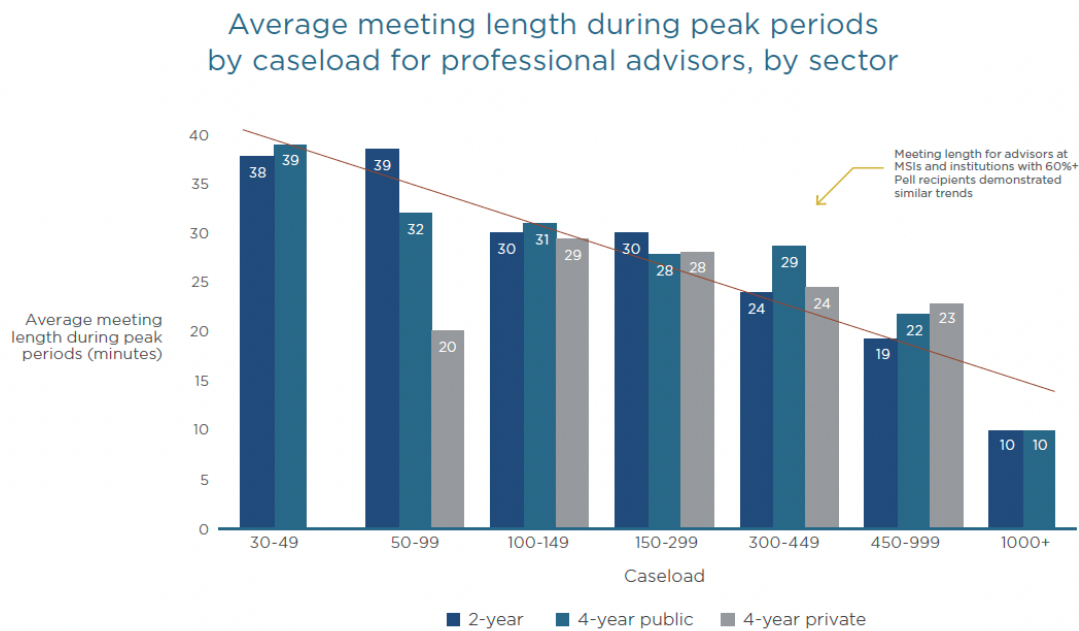
Caseloads

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) recommends that advising caseloads should be determined in accordance with such factors as "mode of

delivery, advising approach used, additional advisor responsibilities, student needs, and time required for this activity" (2019, p. 7). A recent report from the Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (UERU, 2022) urges institutions to lower advising ratios to effectively serve today's diverse and complex student populations. It is argued that "complicated academic career options and life circumstances require more, not less, expert academic and personal guidance" (pp. 32-33). Nevertheless, data indicate that academic advisors at many institutions continue to manage very large caseloads (Shaw, et al., 2022). The *Driving Toward a Degree* project, with data from nearly 2,000 respondents representing 1,022 institutions, including 136 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), 38 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and other Minorities Serving Institutions (MSIs), found a wide range of caseloads. Advisors reported managing caseloads as large as 1000 or more, and as few as 10 or less (see Figure 4). Analyzing the data gathered, they found that caseload size impacted the length of time advisors spent meeting with each student (see Figure 5). The larger the caseload, the less time advisors spent with each student.

Figure 4

Caseload size by sector, primary-role advisor, and faculty with advising responsibilities

From "Driving toward a degree – 2022" by Shaw et al., 2022, Tyton Partners, p. 9 (https://drivetodegree.org/).

Figure 5

Average meeting length during peak periods by caseload for professional advisors, by sector

From "Driving toward a degree – 2022" by Shaw et al., 2022, Tyton Partners, p. 10 (https://drivetodegree.org/).

Such findings might lead us to consider the importance of establishing manageable caseloads in support of a contextually inclusive theory of advising. Academic advising is relational, it involves interpersonal connection, advisor with the advisee. As Troxel & Kye-Blankson (2020) remind us, productive academic advising requires recognition and response to the complexities of the individual student. To do so, we ought to identify the contextual elements of our students' lives, the embodied, sociohistorically situated position within which each of them is situated in the world. Yet, if caseloads are too large, advisors may not have the time to gather contextual information or engage in the process of interpretation. In order to employ practice informed by a contextually inclusive theory, it will be helpful for institutions to begin by evaluating advisor caseloads to determine if they are prohibitive of this work.

However, while it may not be possible to achieve the desired level for all advisor caseloads, and thus unlikely for advisors to engage in lengthy conversations with their advisees, or gather and interpret significant levels of contextual information, it is still possible to facilitate practice that is grounded by a contextually inclusive theory through training. Advisor training programs can be structured in such a way as to orient advisors toward the particulars of this theory, helping them to recognize the student as a contextualized interpreter, to engage in advising as an interpretive process, and to provide guidance about identifying context through institutional documentation and even through brief interactions with students. So, while advisors might not always have expansive amounts of time to meet with each student, it is possible to train advisors to consider context, to be cautious about employing generalized categories, and to engage in the process of advising as an interpreter searching to understand the individual advisee.

Advisor Training

McGill, et al. (2020) identify a number of organizations that have helped to establish

"best practices for academic advising" (p. 3) and in turn help to shape advisors' professional

values, perceptions about the necessary skills and behaviors, and understanding of what training

should entail. They draw our attention to the standards outlined by NACADA, the John N.

Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, the Council for the Advancement

of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and to a number of resources detailing standards for the

related work of personal tutoring in the United Kingdom. Such standards offer guidance for

establishing the parameters of advisor training and while each of them, to one extent or another,

point to the importance of the relational elements of academic advising, there is no direct

discussion of the role of the ontological circumstances, the context, of each student. However,

there is consideration of the importance of inclusive communication (NACADA, 2022), respect

for each individual student (UKAT, 2023), and the value of developing a "genuine rapport"

(Lochtie et al., 2018, p. 39). Each of these elements point to the importance of validation

(Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), a recognition that *how* we support our students impacts their sense of

belonging (Kitchen, 2022) and in turn engagement with their studies, their well-being and the

likelihood they will persist (Gopalan & Brady, 2020, p. 134).

While it is essential that we acknowledge the importance of how we support students and

gain the skills necessary to engage in validating support, it is equally important that we recognize

how and from where our advisees come to interpret and make sense of their education and

themselves. As such, advisor training should include components that emphasize the impact of

the personal, the ontological, the everyday, contextualized experiences of our student's lives and

our own. Advisors should be reminded to consider from where, within what context, and as

influenced by what connections or disconnections, their advisees understand what they encounter. Training should be developed to: 1) support the interpretive process, 2) provide direction about how to gather and make use of contextual information, 3) demonstrate how to engage with scholarship and theoretical literature.

Learning to Interpret

Learning to accomplish the interpretive task of academic advising will be greatly improved with ongoing training, opportunity for practice, and engagement and discussion with fellow advisors. At the center of advisor training should be emphasis on the continual process of interpretation. Training can offer a venue to help advisors identify student context and recognize its impact on student understanding, their education and themselves. This might involve group activities such as review of case studies, observation of interpretive advising sessions, and discussion of relevant scholarship. It could also include direct collaboration with students themselves. For example, we might identify a small number of continuing students willing to reflect about their own context and share as part of a professional development series. A parallel discussion could also be offered in which advisors reflect about their own context. This kind of session introduces means for advisors to learn from students and from each other. As appropriate, advisors might also observe each other's sessions, reflect together about student situations, and challenge each other to remember the elements of sociohistorical context.

It is useful for advisors to learn from each other, to practice together, as they hone their skill, especially while beginning to establish practice grounded by a contextually inclusive theory of advising. Such opportunities provide space to think together with peers, to discuss how to approach the work, what to look for, how to identify context, and what it means to interpret. These kinds of activities could be included in both new advisor training, but also recurring

sessions for communities of practice. Training should involve activities that offer demonstration of a contextually inclusive orientation to advising, space for peers to collaborate, and means to practice this work.

Identifying Context

Training should involve guidance about how to identify and gather contextual information about our advisees, careful to consider legal and ethical matters. This information might be noted when scanning institutional documents, materials in the student information system, student comments in an email or text message, or while involved in conversation with an advisee. While each individual student will be different, and the impact of each contextual element unique to the student experience, we should train advisors to recognize elements such as race, class, socio-economic status, gender, educational background, family connections, place of origin, intellectual areas of interest, and expectations about their future. This is not an exhaustive list, but draws our attention to the way that our students are grounded, underscoring how they come to their education and to the advising relationship.

To practice this work, we might include relational role-playing exercises in which we imagine an advising conversation and the way context may be identified and understood. Such efforts can be further enhanced when incorporating virtual reality (VR) simulation. We ought to take a cue from the K-12 landscape in which pre-service teacher education programs have begun to use immersive VR simulations to help prepare teachers for the classroom. This kind of technology "offers promise in enriching learning opportunities" providing a space to augment our theoretical knowledge with practical experience (Billingsley, et al., 2019, p. 65). Such virtual simulation allows for practical experience in a "risk-free" environment (Ferguson & Sutphin,

2022). Platforms such as Mursion[1] could be used to help academic advisors practice identifying student context and engage in the process of interpretation.

In addition, advisors should have a clear sense of how to record and recall this kind of contextual information. As such, training might include hands-on demonstration of note taking techniques to capture contextual information. It may also be helpful to offer instruction on reading institutional documents for contextual information and how to integrate these data into the advising session and note taking scheme. Even further, training should emphasize the importance of reflection, allowing space to record observations and to make sense of what has been gathered.

Scholarship and Theory

Folsom (2015), drawing on the work of Habley (1995), has suggested that effective advising practice begins with an understanding of the foundational ideas and theories in the field. Echoing this notion, the NACADA (2022) core competencies underscore the importance of understanding the conceptual components of academic advising. This includes, among other things, relevant scholarship and theory. As outlined in the dissertation, current theories underestimate the ontological circumstances of our students, their individual sociohistorical position, in short, the impact of their context. While context may be acknowledged, even emphasized as critical to understand, there is an underlying tension between a contextually inclusive, interpretive understanding of our students' unique situatedness, and current theory applied in the field of advising. For example, Folsom (2015), in the *New Advisor Guidebook*, has articulated the need to know the individual advisee, their "strengths and challenges as well as the ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and personal factors" (p. 6), bringing attention to the importance

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[1] See https://www.mursion.com/

of the unique situation of each student. Yet, this mention of context is placed alongside discussion of student development theory and its importance. An imperative is implied, that advisors should understand and employ such theory to the practice of advising.

Such "ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and personal" (p. 6) context is critical to the way that each individual student makes sense of things, their education, and themselves. The application of developmental stages, the process of casting these general categorizations, can be useful in identifying "where" a student might be in their developmental trajectory, helping us think about how best to facilitate growth. However, applying such categorical stages, may also lead us to overlook what is unique, dissonant, and ungeneralizable for an individual student. Therefore, it will be important to offer training that acknowledges and draws out the tension between a contextually based interpretive understanding of our students' experiences and one that is structured by generalized theoretical categories.

Institutional Information Sharing

NACADAs core competencies suggest that "[b]uilding campus and community collaborative networks prepares advisors to assist students" providing the information and partnerships necessary to direct students toward services that will help them overcome obstacles (2022, p.23). Collaborative networks can also offer means for gathering further nuance about the context and situation of our students. For decades scholars have emphasized the importance of collaborating across campus to support student learning and achievement (Kuh et al., 2005, Kuh et al, 2006). In 2004, the National Association of Student Affairs Personnel (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) produced *Learning Reconsidered*. This report highlighted the role of student affairs professionals and stressed the need for a campus-wide partnership to facilitate student learning and growth.

Effective student support requires faculty, students, and staff to work together, and to share responsibility for student achievement. Yet, as recently as 2018, data revealed evidence of organizational silos and a lack of information sharing across organizational divisions (Parnell, et al). Without clear methods of information sharing or a sustained collaborative approach to student support, efforts to obtain and interpret contextual information may be inhibited. Institutions might look to their current systems to reimagine how to capture, use, and maintain information that can be accessed across campus. In a recent EDUCAUSE Review article, Howells (April 30, 2021) recommends that institutions unify "systems and repositories across departments or functional areas" to remove silos and better leverage and share information (para. 6). Such a scheme could allow all those supporting students access to the same information, making it possible to collect a more robust contextualized account of each student. One could imagine a Student Information System (SIS) that integrates note taking functions, allows for uploaded documents, admissions materials, grades, and a variety of other information that could be used by faculty and student support specialists such as academic advisors, among others.

In addition, it might be beneficial to develop an intake questionnaire requested centrally, the results of which could be archived in the SIS and shared broadly. This kind of survey could prompt for relevant contextual information, as established locally at each institution. We could also imagine various methods for collecting contextual information through other surveys, student reflection, advisor and faculty notes, as well as system generated data about course performance, and progress toward the degree. All of this information combined, and accessible across departments and organizations, could be used to help advisors, and others, understand and support students. Furthermore, academic advisors ought to employ such information to collaborate across organizational silos, to glean contextual information from colleagues, and to

provide a broader view of our students' individual situations. Literature outlining strategies for advising student-athletes lends support to the argument for such collaboration.

Drawing on the work of Hill, et al. (2001) and Kelly (2009), Rubin and Lewis (2020) suggest that effective support for student-athletes should involve "communication across campus units" (p. 94). Rubin (2015) further maintains that to ensure that student-athletes are able to successfully progress, advisors need to collaborate with offices such as "disability services, career services, admissions, international students and scholars office[s], tutoring center[s], counseling center[s]" (para. 8). Such recommendations are useful and ought to apply, not only to student-athletes, but to all students. To ensure that we continue the iterative process of interpretation, to maintain an ongoing and continually revised understanding of our students, advisors will need to engage across campus, identifying and sharing contextual information about our students. Advisors ought to play a central role in facilitating this collaborative endeavor. Still, it is not enough to simply share information. Academic advising grounded by a contextually inclusive theory suggests that such information ought to be employed to interpret our students, to help us understand how they make sense of things, and to capture what is meaningful to them in order to support and facilitate each student's academic journey.

Final Remarks and Future Scholarship

At its core, academic advising is more than the mere practice of stewardship, an activity focused solely on ushering students toward completion. Instead, it is the "hub of the wheel" (Habley, 1992; King, 2008) connecting students with resources, straddling a space between the academic, co-curricular, and personal spheres. As an educational endeavor it supports the process of learning and offers a space for students to collaborate and reflect together with a caring and skilled professional. Simply put, academic advising assists in facilitating "the

academic journey of students" (Troxel, 2018, p. 21). Yet, the process of academic advising itself is anything but simple. The stakes are often high, as students' lives and futures are involved in this work. Advisors facilitate the process of an education; they support and guide the trajectory of an individual human life. Academic advising, therefore, should begin with recognition of the human being, ontologically grounded. The process should include a conscious awareness of the impact of the elements of human existence. In order to support our advisees, to validate their experiences (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), to identify the obstacles that impede their performance (NACADA, 2022), to ensure they feel a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018), and to help them accomplish what is experienced as most meaningful, it is critical that we acknowledge and reflect about student context. Academic advising should begin with recognition of the impact of context, the iterative nature of understanding, and the centrality of the human interpretive process. Consequently, theoretical foundation for academic advising, ought to be grounded by a contextually inclusive theory.

Such theory underscores the importance of recognizing the conditions of human existence, their impact on the shape of human understanding, and provokes us to consider the everyday lived experience of our students and ourselves. It highlights the iterative nature of meaning and truth, reminding us that our understanding of academic advising, our students, and ourselves, is always in the process of evolving, shifting, changing, and hence, is never complete. At the center of this theory, is the role of interpretation, the principal activity grounding academic advising, that through which human beings make sense of things. Moreover, as a normative theory, it allows us to envision an ideal, to argue for change, and to strive for something more than what our current advising practice might entail. Yet, it also reminds us that any theory must be iterative, evolving, and never complete.

A contextually inclusive theory draws our attention to the significance of the contextual elements of each of our student's lives, the way that such context impacts their education, and in turn directs the course of their academic journey. It may bring to light underlying obstructions experienced in our students' everyday lives, help to promote inclusion, and potentially support development of our students' sense of belonging. Such theoretical foundation encourages us to identify student context, recognize its impact, and engage interpretively.

This project prompts us to think deeply about the nature of academic advising, what it ought to entail, and how to productively support our students. It challenges current ideas and theoretical literature on the topic, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of previous work, and adding to the discussion and debate about the conception and practice of academic advising. As a philosophical project, the aim has been to open discussion about the conceptual elements of academic advising, to problematize current ideas about its practice and related scholarship, and to provoke questions and debate. In addition, it is meant to contribute to the "shared understanding of academic advising among practicing advisors" (Himes, 2021, p. 49), to guide our trajectory, and to frame the conversation. Nonetheless, this theory should not be considered fixed or immovable. Instead, it should be questioned and reconsidered, offering fruit for future empirical and theoretical scholarship.

For example, it could be useful to explore whether there is evidence supporting a positive connection between sense of belonging and advising practice grounded by a contextually inclusive theory. Likewise, it might be beneficial to identify the impact of contextually grounded practice on the probability of increasing students' experiences of validation. We might also work to measure whether such practice increases collaboration across organizational divisions on campus. Further still, the theoretical conceptualization of human subjectivity used in this project

could be drawn out further or critiqued to strengthen our understanding of the advisee, or perhaps we might challenge underlying assumptions about the nature of higher education to broaden or narrow the view. There is much to be considered, but for now this project has outlined the importance of recognizing the contextual elements of human understanding, the lived experience of our academic advisees and ourselves.

The dissertation has focused on building theoretical foundation for the field of academic advising, speaking directly to advisors about the core elements of what ought to, ideally be involved in the practice of academic advising. Yet, it also communicates the parameters of the endeavor to academic leadership and to those outside of higher education. Academic advising ought to be learning-centered, educationally focused, and incorporate recognition of the impact of the ontological elements of existence. Nevertheless, rather than resolving, once and for all, questions about the nature of academic advising, this project is meant to provoke us to think further, to debate, and to challenge us to engage in future empirical and theoretical scholarship on the topic. In the end, a contextually inclusive theory adds to the discussion, making the case for the importance of considering how we ought to begin the work of academic advising.

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