Academic Advising in Ontario: A Multiple Case Study

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Although the practice of academic advising in North America has existed since the colonial era, it is only within the past century that an organized movement to shape the field has taken root. Most of the literature seeking to clarify the role, purpose, and function of academic advising is restricted to the United States. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore academic advising practices at four Ontario higher education institutions in terms of types of advising, institutional advising model, and roles and responsibilities of advisors. Through document analysis and interviews with advising personnel at four Ontario institutions, our analysis illuminates the state of academic advising in Ontario and offers recommendations for practice.

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Academic Advising in Ontario: A Multiple Case Study

Although the practice of academic advising in North America has existed in some form since the colonial era, it is only within the past century that an organized movement to shape the field has taken root (Shaffer et al., 2010). Scholars have analyzed academic advising through the lens of sociological literature, studying how occupations become accepted professions (McGill, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2010) and offering perspectives on its status as an academic discipline (Kuhn & Padak, 2008; McGill et al., 2022) and a field of inquiry (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Habley, 2009; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Professionalization is "the process by which a nonprofessional occupation is transformed into a vocation with the attributes of a profession" (Shaffer et al., 2010, p. 68). Academic advising is one field that strives for professionalization (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; McGill, 2018, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2010).

One of the primary challenges to professionalizing the field is the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition (Larson et al., 2018; Lowenstein, 2014; McGill et al., 2021). Multiple definitions have "been colloquially applied" because academic advising is understood and described differently not only across the nation but at times on the same campus (Larson et al., 2018, p. 81). Attempts to define the field often center on convenient analogues, the most popular of which has become "advising is teaching." In 2005, a NACADA task force proposed a *concept* of academic advising "based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education. . .[with] a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes" (NACADA, 2006, para 9).

Comparing advising to other fields of practice, however, only complicates clarifying academic advising as a distinct practice within higher education (Kuhn et al., 2006) and contributes to the confusion of defining what advising is and what it is not (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Without a clear definition, "advisors lack the language needed to describe both the practice of academic advising and its scholarly identity independent of other fields and professions" (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, p. 44). "For advising to enjoy self-jurisdiction, the field of advising must create a clear definition of the occupation, to include the responsibilities, procedures, scope of practice, and professional practices all advisers would follow" (Adams et al., 2013, para 10).

Adding to the widespread misunderstanding of academic advising is that most research on advising is focused on the United States (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; McGill, 2018, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2010). There is a lack of knowledge and literature *specific* to higher education in Canada, let alone the college system in Ontario. In Canada, there is a distinction between the institutions that compose the higher education landscape. The college system in Ontario was chosen as the unit of study because the colleges work as a system and a cross-case analysis is a starting point for further study. Therefore, the purpose of this multiple case study (Stake, 2005) was to explore academic advising practices at four Ontario higher education institutions in terms of types of advising, institutional advising model, and

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roles and responsibilities of advisors. This study is guided by three research questions:

RQ1: What types of advising are practiced?

RQ2: What advising models exist and how do they frame the practice of academic advising?

RQ3: What are the roles and responsibilities of the advisors and how are they framed within the existing advising models?

Literature Review

Institutional Advising Models

Institutional advising models are influenced by the context of the institution, the student population, faculty interest and involvement in advising, and the complexity and mix of academic programming (King, 1993). Despite this, each institutional advising models fits into one of seven categories (Habley, 1993). that classify the advising model by type (i.e., the extent to which each model is centralized, decentralized, or shared); by how the administrative unit is structured; and by the role of the coordinator. Pardee (2000) expanded on this by including both the reporting structure (who coordinates the service) and the physical location of the service.

One reason advising has not yet reached "a unified direction for the field" (McGill, 2019, p. 89) is a result of institutional decisions to house advising in either academic or student services. A decentralized model operates under the assumption that advising is provided by faculty members or personnel directly hired by an academic unit and includes the faculty-only and satellite models. A centralized model, on the other hand, acts as a self-contained unit with a centralized space and reporting structure. More commonly, academic advising is a shared function between academic and student services units (Pardee, 2000). In a shared model, academic advising is offered within an academic department and a centralized unit. The shared models of academic advising include supplemental, split, dual, and total intake models. Each model is distinguished by the degree to which information and resources are shared between the academic department and central unit.

The location of the advising service determines the reporting lines (Cate & Miller, 2015), which are critical because they dictate the functional purpose of academic advising (Kuhn & Padak, 2008). If academic advisors report to an academic area, the purpose of advising may be retention-focused or learning-focused; if academic advisors report to a student services unit, the purpose may be to enhance student satisfaction and the student college experience (Kuhn & Padak, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of academic advising might look different depending on its location and reporting lines.

Roles and Responsibilities of Advisors

One factor required for academic advising to move forward as a profession is a clear description of advisor roles and responsibilities (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). In 2011, a nationwide U.S. survey sponsored by NACADA aimed to determine common responsibilities of academic advisors. The results demonstrated that in both 2-year and 4-year institutions in the United States, the top 5 job activities for academic advisors were course scheduling, course registration, program mapping, new student orientation, and sitting on committees (Huber & Miller, 2013). Similarly, Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) found inconsistency among academic advisor roles and responsibilities. When participants described their day-to-day responsibilities, they mentioned meeting with students and completing administrative tasks, which included completing checklists with students regarding transfer credits, degree completion, and graduation planning. These administrative tasks that were tacked onto the academic advisor roles led to inconsistency in academic advising and confusion among faculty members and advising personnel. Some of these activities are associated with prescriptive advising, wherein the advisor is the disseminator of information (Drake, 2015), rather than a more developmental approach of working with a student to identify their needs and goals (Creamer & Scott, 2000). Significantly, although academic advising leaders supported a developmental approach to advising, most advisors at the time were tasked with prescriptive functions (Huber & Miller, 2013).

Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) also found that job titles lacked uniformity within and across institutions; education and past work experience varied among academic advisors; and each academic advisor approached working with

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Table 1. Participating Institutions

Participating Institutions	Demographics	Student Population	Documentary Evidence	Interviews
Institution A	Large, urban college	<20,000	Yes	3
Institution B	Large, urban college	<26,000	Yes	3
Institution C	Large, urban college	<23,000	No	3
Institution D	Medium, urban college	<13,000	Yes	2

students differently. The variety of educational preparations and past work experiences is significant because it exacerbates the differences in the understanding, training, and skills among academic advisors. Most concerningly, staff advisors believed faculty did not value staff advisors, in part due to the discrepancy of educational backgrounds between staff and faculty. Bridgen (2017) focused on understanding how administrators, faculty, and staff advisors perceived the purpose and function of academic advising on one campus. Findings indicated administrators viewed academic advising as a retention tool, staff advisors saw advising as a tool for keeping students on track academically, and faculty advisors understood advising as discussing subject matter content and professional issues with students. However, faculty also admitted to spending most of their time on the "mechanical aspects of advising" (Bridgen, 2017, p. 15).

In 2017, NACADA's professional development committee established the Core Competencies of Academic Advising to better define a shared, but flexible, role of academic advisors (Farr & Cunningham, 2017). The standards provide a framework for advisors to begin understanding and shaping their practice, while providing supervisors with guidelines to inform institutional policy, roles, and professional development activities for advisors. The core competencies include *informational* knowledge areas academic advisors must master (e.g., institutional knowledge, campus resources, and legal guidelines), *conceptual* areas advisors must understand (e.g., advising theories, outcomes of academic advising, and NACADA's Core Values), and *relational* competencies (e.g., rapport-building, problem-solving, and respectful communication).

Methods

In this study, we utilized multiple case study to explore academic advising practices at four Ontario colleges to review types of advising, institutional advising model, and roles and responsibilities of advisors. Case study is useful when researchers seek to better understand an issue within a bounded case context (Yin, 2018). Additionally, case studies "can cover multiple cases and then draw a single set of 'cross-case' conclusions" (Yin, 2018, p. 17). Ontario colleges were chosen because they function as a system, separate from the universities. The Ontario colleges traditionally confer diplomas, post-graduate certificates, and 3-year degrees. In general, colleges and universities in Canada are considered separate, distinct entities where colleges are somewhat synonymous with what is commonly known as community colleges or technical and trade schools in the United States and parts of Europe.

Authors' Positionalities

The first author is an academic advising scholar-practitioner in Ontario. Her role as a director of student services puts her within proximity to academic advisors within the college system. The second author, a former primary-role advisor, is currently a faculty advisor at a research-intensive institution in the United States Midwest.

Site Selection

In constructing a multiple case study, the researcher studies "cases in terms of their own situational issues, interprets patterns within each case, and then analyzes cross-case findings to make assertions about the binding" (Stake, 2005, p. 10). In studying multiple cases, the researchers "carefully examine its functioning and activities. . .generate[s] a picture of the case[s] and then produce[s] a portrayal of the case[s] for others to see" (Stake, 2005, pp. 2–3). For this study, we included four colleges in Ontario, all of which self-selected into the study. Table 1 provides the size and location of the four participating institutions (labelled A, B, C, and D for privacy). A small college typically serves less than 10,000 students, while a large college typically serves more than 20,000 students.

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Data Collection

Data collection included two processes: collecting institutional documentation and semi-structured interviews. Each participating institution was asked to provide documents related to the roles and responsibilities of academic advisor's job expectations and descriptions. These documents allowed us to understand the relationship between what was expected of academic advisors and the language used to describe the types of advising with which they engaged. Two academic advisors and the advising manager were invited to participate in the semistructured interviews for an intended total of 12 interviews. Studies have shown that data saturation within interview transcripts begins within about 12 interviews, meaning that any themes or meta-themes begin to present themselves within the first 6 to 12 interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Purposeful voluntary sampling was chosen for the selection of interview participants. Inclusion criteria were: full-time employee and advisors who spend most of their time at work advising students. Exclusion criteria were: part-time advisors and advisors who had not participated in training and professional development as part of their advising role. No minimum number of years of practice was established. Eleven individuals with varied educational and work experiences participated; one of the institutions did not have an acting manager at the time of the interviews.

When planning interviews, consideration must be given to the number, length, timing, and location of the interviews (Cohen et al., 2011). The interview protocol consisted of seven main questions (see Appendix A). The same protocol was used for both advising managers and the academic advisors; it was sent to participants before the interview. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes each, long enough to capture data related to the study. Interviews were recorded on-site using a software program that allowed for both recording and follow-up transcription. The recordings were supplemented by handwritten notes. However, one of the three managers was not recorded due to technical issues and handwritten notes were used in place of a transcript.

Data Analysis

Both the documentary evidence and semi-structured interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis, a common method for making inferences within a data set by "systematically and objectively identifying" categories within the data (Gray, 2014, p. 607). Content analysis is generally considered a deductive approach because categories are often established before approaching the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The documentary evidence was analyzed using conventional content analysis in which we attempted to note and analyze categories from the documentary evidence. Following this, the interview data was analyzed using directed content analysis with categories derived from data drawn from the documentary evidence.

There are three types of categories (Gray, 2014). *Common categories* include easily identifiable characteristics such as age and employment status. *Special categories* include those that the community being studied would use to distinguish themselves from other communities. *Theoretical categories* include those that emerge from the data that identify key patterns. For our study, we identified *special* categories from the documentary evidence because of our familiarity with academic advising and the Ontario college system.

Document Analysis

The first step in conventional content analysis entails full immersion in the data set by reading and re-reading the documents. This is followed by highlighting initial thoughts. The third step in conventional content analysis requires turning the initial ideas into initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Once the data has been coded, the list of codes are arranged into potential categories and then tested against the entire data set. The final step includes finalizing the name and definition of each category (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

After reading each document, they were labeled and typed into a chart in Excel. A brief description of the content of each document was added into the chart with a matrix, which is "the 'intersection' of two lists, set up as rows and columns" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 105). This added credibility and trustworthiness to the analysis because it allows the reader to reference the decisions made by the researcher. The description of each document became the basis for preliminary ideas around codes and possible categories. We studied the spreadsheet to understand which initial codes were similar and could be grouped into fewer categories; the initial list of codes were types of advising and roles and responsibilities of academic advisors.

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Once we were satisfied with the two categories, we reviewed each document in full to ensure we had captured all ideas related to the initial categories. To simplify the matrix, we replaced the coded text with the label of each document. This illustrated the preponderance of each category across all four institutions. After reviewing the categories, no further changes were made. A definition of each was written to identify what concepts and ideas were contained within each category. The following definitions were used:

- Types of advising: content that references established models of advising such as transactional advising, informational advising, and development advising.
- Roles & responsibilities: content that references staff roles or titles associated with advising such as faculty advisors or staff advisors.

Interview Analysis

Directive content analysis can "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281), meaning the analysis of the interview transcripts should support the initial coding from the documentary evidence. The concepts used to code the transcripts were discovered through the analysis of the documentary evidence. These codes included types of advising and roles and responsibilities of academic advisors. The working definitions of each code remained the same as in the documentary evidence phase of analysis.

We began by reading through the interview transcripts to familiarize ourselves with the data. Before applying the codes established through the documentary evidence, we read the interview transcripts to identify new concepts as potential new codes. We noted one new category: *Institutional Advising Model*, which is the structural location and reporting lines of advising services within an institution including whether an advising service is centralized or decentralized. Following this, we created a new matrix in Excel to include the new category whereby the rows reflected the interview questions and the columns represented each of the 11 interviews. In each cell, we recorded the coded text from the transcripts to highlight the exemplars of the chosen categories.

Findings

We examined three categories across four institutions: type(s) of advising (Kuhn et al., 2006), the institutional advising model (Pardee, 2000), and advising roles and responsibilities as they appeared throughout the data for each institution.

Types of Advising

Throughout the interviews, advisors and training managers consistently mentioned the disconnect between the type of advising expected of them and the type of advising they wanted to do. Specifically, advisors believed they were spending too much time on transactional advising, described at times as customer service and explaining policies. Advisors expressed interest in participating in developmental advising, helping students map out their academic journey. Most academic advisors believed they were asked to do transactional advising due to a misperception of academic units about the role and purpose of academic advising supporting previous scholarship (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015). Figure 1 provides a comparison of the types of advising models referenced across both the document and transcript evidence.

For Institution A, the type of advising referenced in the documents focused on moving from transactional advising to developmental advising (Kuhn et al., 2006). In addition to the documentary evidence, the interviews revealed a desire from practitioners to move toward developmental advising. For example, the manager stated:

> The current state of the college was very prescriptive and transactional, and knowing that the goal was to elevate advising more to be not counselling, but more around coaching and developing goals and helping students identify values and interests and connect them. (Interviewee A1)

Institution B also delineates types of academic advising by staff role but distinguishes between *nondevelopmental advisors* (i.e., nonprimary role) who coach or guide students and *core function advisors* (i.e., primary-role) who spend the majority of their time advising students. Like Institution A, several staff roles fall within this dichotomy: student success advisors, career advisors, employment advisors, and faculty

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Figure 1. Types of Advising

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C	Institution D
Transactional vs. developmental	Focus is on transactional advising (two responses) Wants to elevate advising from transactional to developmental	Some people think they advise because they "explain policies" Do not see importance in developmental advising	Can be very transactional Relational component is less emphasized What is happening now is informational	n/a
Advising appointment models	Tension between walk-ins vs. appointments Academic schools concerned with "customer service," "front line service," and "clearing the line"	No walk-ins; only appointment	Walk-ins force very quick informational advising Walk-in model problematic because students don't get developmental advising	Volume is an issue; 15-minute appointments can be draining

advisors. Like Institution A, rather than acknowledging academic advising as a separate and distinct role, both institutions attempt to include all practitioners who engage in some type of advising as part of the institutional advising community.

The interviews at Institution C revealed disparities regarding the type of advising vis-à-vis the role and function of the academic advisor. Whereas the manager noted advisors in the central advising unit were doing "informational" advising, one of the advisors described it as transactional. The advisor described the institutional drop-in advising model in the center as the driver behind the short transactional appointments because there is no expectation of following up with the student. From the advisor's perspective, there seemed to be a disconnect between what they believed to be an important skill, the ability to build rapport with students, and what was expected of them as an employee: "We need to build that relationship and that goal with students, and yet it's not necessarily encouraged or the norm here and I'm finding that interestingly challenging" (Interviewee C1). The advisor is embedded in the academic unit however, described a more relational approach than a prescriptive approach to advising.

Institution D's documents had no direct mention of specific types of advising. Interestingly, the advisors shared that the advising service evolved from a learning support team originally housed in library services. As a result, the advice they provided students included learning strategies. They also indicated that they spent most of their time with new students. Additionally, as a centralized service, the advisors reported they spent time trying to distinguish their role from the faculty and counsellor roles. However, due to centralization and reporting to a student services unit, they seemed to have more flexibility in defining the types of advising if they refrained from taking on more traditional academic advising tasks as they were within the purview of the faculty.

From a cross-institutional comparison, some managers and academic advisors mentioned walk-in advising appointments. Managers and

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Table 2. Institutional Advising Models

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C	Institution D
Advising Model	Shared (supplementary / dual model)	Shared (supplementary)	Shared (supplementary / dual model)	Central (self-contained model)
Location	Central Embedded	Central Embedded	Central Embedded	Central
Reporting Lines	Central – student services Embedded – student services	Central – student services	Central – student services	Central – student services unit
		Embedded – mix of student services and academic units	Embedded – Academic Units	No Embedded

academic advisors expressed their frustration with this model because it forces a transactional experience due to the lack of time and preparation required on the part of the student and advisor.

Institutional Advising Models

Institutional advising models include content that references the structural locations or reporting lines of academic advising within an institution. Three of the four institutions had advisors located within a central service unit plus advisors embedded within the academic schools. However, the advisors embedded within the academic unit either reported directly to the academic unit or they reported to a student services unit. Regardless of reporting structures, three of the four institutions offered a central professional development program for advisors coordinated by a student service unit. Table 2 illustrates the comparison between the institutional advising models.

Documents provided by Institution A suggested a shared advising model because a central advising service exists for general inquiries in addition to advisors embedded within the academic schools. The interviews revealed advisors in the central advising service reported to a central student's services unit and the embedded advisors reported to administrators within their academic units, a dual model (Pardee, 2000). However, because training is offered centrally, this can also be considered a supplemental model.

Institution B also had a central advising service for general inquiries, but unlike Institution A, the academic advisors also spent some of their time inside the academic unit. Thus, this could be categorized as a shared/supplemental model (Pardee, 2000). To complicate matters, some academic units had their own academic advisors who reported to the academic unit. This, at times, created tension and confusion between the central service advisor and the advisors hired by the academic units. For example, Interviewee B1 stated:

> Some other schools … have student intervention coordinators in the schools, then they have student advisors in the schools, in addition to [our] role so it's a little hard to navigate and to filter how the students come to because you are the new face and you have to prove yourself and the expectations are different and to be honest, I don't really even think, still at this time, anybody knows the expectations from us.

Institution C utilizes a shared model. There is a central advising unit for student drop-in advising appointments. Only some academic units have embedded advisors, making the model inconsistent across the campuses. It was also unclear whether the advisors from the central unit had to directly support the academic areas without embedded academic advisors. The advisors in the central advising unit reported centrally to students' services, while the embedded advisors reported to their respective academic units.

The existing advising model at Institution D was centralized; it developed first as a pilot project, then transitioned from a learning support

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model to an advising model. However, the advisors indicated the institution was in the process of decentralizing academic advising and embedding individual advisors into the academic units. Institution D had a central or a self-contained model (Pardee, 2000) that offered academic and learning support advising.

Roles and Responsibilities

The role and responsibilities of advisors include references to the role of the advisor as it is described compared to other roles on campus. The responsibilities include duties and tasks that were described in the documents or described by the advisors through the interviews.

For Institution A, the role and responsibilities of the central service advisors and the school advisors differed in terms of scope and function. According to the documents, school advisors are responsible for "orientation to school, program-specific, academic requirements," (Document A1, p. 1). The central service advisors are responsible for "pathway advising, PLAR [Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition], transfer credit, WSIB [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board], and career" (Document A1, p. 1). Central service advisors are responsible for advising students engaging in alternative pathways to completing their academic credential. PLAR is a process allowing students to obtain credit for previously completed courses or work experience toward a new certificate, degree, or diploma. WSIB provides funding for injured workers in Canada to take courses or to complete a certificate, diploma, or degree. Advisors described the inconsistencies in the understanding of their roles depending on their reporting structures. For example, Interviewee A3, who reported to an academic unit, said, "I had to get approval from my former manager [to complete an academic program related to advising] . . . but I kind of had to make a plea as to why this is really good for me."

Advisors at Institution B shared examples of role misperception. Interviewee B3 said, "I think [other] advisors know what we do, but I don't think that others in the post-secondary field know what we do in the same way." Some interviewees mentioned that the academic advising role is sometimes confused with faculty advising and counselling roles. For example, Interviewee B2 stated "where academics faculty are doing advising, they may not be doing it well, but they technically are advisors," meaning that although some faculty have been tasked with advising, they are not necessarily engaging in developmental conversations with students. From the manager's perspective, they also struggled with who was and was not an advisor. The manager from Institution B admitted a lot of people think "they do advising" because they have contact with students. In attempting to include various roles on campus as part of the advising community, the manager felt this uncovered several roles where practitioners perceived they were advising students or were engaging in advising outside of the scope of their role.

The roles and responsibilities of the advisors at Institution C are somewhat organized based on the location of the advisors. Those in the central services areas are responsible for sharing general knowledge of the institution and making referrals to other service areas. Some of the academic units have embedded advisors who are responsible for academic advising along with the program coordinators. There seems to be less confusion about the various roles and responsibilities at the institution, but more frustration in the percentage of time spent on advising, including time for developmental advising. The advising model in the centralized service area was built on a drop-in, 30-minute appointment with no follow-up.

The two advisors interviewed at Institution D also described the relational aspects of their advising roles on campus and the importance of building rapport with students. However, interviewee D1 noted that appointments were 15 minutes and volume was an issue. Both advisors emphasized the importance of building relationships with faculty. This was particularly important because the advisors perceived that a good relationship with a faculty member meant that the faculty member would tell students about the central advising service, therefore providing a clientele.

Discussion

Findings from this multiple case study will add to the literature on academic advising in the Canadian context and provide further insight into the larger issue of the professionalization of academic advising. How do administrators and advisors understand their role and responsibility within the current models and structures? Do administrators examine the value and purpose of advising within the existing models and structures? Are advisors actively applying the types of advising that are required in each interaction with

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students? Do administrators align the value and purpose of advising with the roles and responsibilities given to advisors?

These findings suggest the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors within the Ontario college system remain unclear and that even within an institution, administrators, faculty, and staff advisors can hold different views on the purpose and function of academic advising. Despite the attempt to define the institutional advising model and the roles and responsibilities of the advisors within the institutional documents, the interviews revealed role ambiguity and a disconnection from the type of advising that was desired by the academic advisors and the type of advising that occurred on a regular basis. Without a clear definition of academic advising, or a definition of what academic advisors do, it is unsurprising that none of the institutions include the role academic advisor within their model or that managers and advisors in these systems describe conflict between their role and faculty roles. It is no wonder, then, that the role of the advisor remains misunderstood across campuses.

The findings support the research on academic advising that the roles and responsibilities of the academic advisor remain unclear (Huber & Miller, 2013), in part due to the lack of a clear definition of academic advising (Larson et al., 2018) and inconsistent institutional advising models across, and within, institutions (McGill, 2019). Reporting structures and location of academic advising remain varied across, and at times within, institutions (McGill, 2019). Because reporting structures and locations have implications for the advising model applied, this adds to the lack of clarity of what academic advising is and what the intended focus and outcomes of academic advising are (Kuhn & Padak, 2008). The institutional advising model also influenced the type of advising that occurred. For example, all three managers spoke about how the advising model on their campus was influenced by the institutional politics and union rules and they often had to tread very carefully in terms of what was considered a staff role and what was considered a faculty role. Without a common definition for academic advising, administrators continue to "create any rubric to hire, supervise, or assign advisors" (Larson et al., 2018, p. 82) and "others can make claims about advising or advising practitioners that may or may not represent the responsibilities of academic advising" (p. 83).

Implications

We offer the following recommendations for future planning based on the three research questions posed. We acknowledge the recommendations require structural, technological, and behavioral changes, which lead to implications in funding, staffing, and space consideration (Lumadi & Mampuru, 2010).

These findings suggest that academic advisors engage in transactional and developmental advising with a preference for the latter. We recommend that academic advisors are well-versed in a variety of advising approaches and understand when to apply each approach. Prescriptive advising can be helpful early in the advising relationship to establish rapport with students (McGill et al., 2021). Developmental advising is useful in helping students understand the connections between their academic program and career aspirations. Advisors model behaviors and attitudes for students. Given such responsibility, advisors and administrators need to think more deeply about their role in student success. Advising administrators must communicate the value of academic advising to advisors (McFarlane & Thomas, 2016; Menke et al., 2020).

Our comparative analysis revealed that most of the institutions have established a shared advising model, although it is not applied consistently across campus. Given these findings, we recommend that institutions consistently apply the institutional advising model across academic and student services divisions. When institutional advising models remain inconsistent, there is a conflict between what academic units and student service units believe academic advising should encompass. Consistently applying the institutional advising model could help mitigate any role confusion and would communicate to institutional stakeholders the purpose and value of academic advising services.

Additionally, a consistent advising model would allow for the development of an assessment process, which, in turn, would feed into an iterative loop of advising service development and professional development (PD) activities. For instance, many documents provided by Institution B were aspirational in nature and consisted of a future advising model, roles, and a supportive PD plan. The PD plan references NACADA's (2017) core competency framework as the foundation for building their academic advisor practices.

Finally, institutions should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of staff and faculty

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advisors. Clearly defining the roles of the advisor and aligning those roles with the type of advising that complements the intended outcomes would provide advisors with a better understanding of what the expectations are for them and the work they do with students. It is possible that not clearly defining the advisor role offers flexibility for institutions to continue to design and develop advising services that reflect the changing needs of the students and fit within the constructs of individual departments. However, clearly defining the role of advisors and aligning the type of advising with that role should allow for a more seamless and equitable experience for students within an institution. Also, it would make the work of frontline workers—those who serve as students' first point of contact with the institution—more efficient because it would be clear to whom they should refer a student inquiry.

Limitations

There are three primary limitations to this study. First, it would have been beneficial to pilot the interview questions in advance to get a sense of how the interviewees would perceive the questions and to measure the length of time the interviews would take. After the first interview, one with a manager, we saw that the interview questions had been designed specifically for academic advisors and might have required adjustment for the managers.

The second limitation deals with documents. The analysis was conducted in the awareness that because the documents were provided to the authors, rather than collected by them, they could reflect institutional bias. Further, the qualitative data collection process was impeded because one of the institutions could not provide documents because any recorded activity existed with individual academic advisors and not in a central repository. In addition to missing documents, one of the three manager interviews was not recorded, and handwritten notes were used for the purpose of analysis. Therefore, the qualitative data analysis consisted of documents from three of the four institutions and full transcripts from two of the three managers.

The final limitation is that while the study focused on the college system in Ontario, the participant institutions were not fully representative of the entire system. There are 24 colleges in Ontario. Three of the four institutions were large, and one was medium; all four were urban. Therefore, we do not have perspective from the smaller and typically more rural colleges in Ontario. Looking outside of the college system in Ontario, we also lack the perspective of the universities that traditionally offer 4-year degrees with some provincial exceptions.

Conclusion

Advancing the profession involves not only examining current views and practices of advising, but also thinking more intentionally about clarifying the role, purpose, and function of academic advising. As advising has been positioned as counseling, learning, mentoring, encouraging, advocating, educating, and even friendship (Hemwall & Trachte, 2005; Lowenstein, 2005; Melander, 2005; Rawlins & Rawlins, 2005), there have been divisive discussions about what advising is. However, comparing advising to other fields of practice, such as teaching, only complicates positioning academic advising as a distinct practice (Kuhn et al., 2006) within higher education and contributes to the confusion of defining what advising is and what it is not (Larson et al., 2018; McGill, 2021; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). These are critical conversations for administrators, practitioners, and scholars in the field to continue to engage in to advance the profession.

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Appendix. Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your journey to becoming an advisor.
   a. What was your educational pathway?
   b. What has been your experience?
2. How do you approach learning about your role?
3. What types of training have you participated in since taking on your role as an advisor?
   a. How long did each training take place?
   b. How often do you participate in training?
   c. What topics were covered?
   d. Did you seek opportunities outside of the college? Was it supported by the institution?
4. In reflecting on the NACADA framework what would you say are:
   a. Important content for your practice?
   b. Important experience to gain for your practice?
   c. What important skills were developed for your practice?
5. How do you integrate what you have learned into your practice?
   a. How do you know it is affective?
6. What have you learned from other advisors at your institution?
   a. From other colleagues from colleges across the system?
7. Do you consider yourself a professional? If yes, why?

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