Administrator Perceptions of Academic Advisor Tasks

Donna J. Menke, Mid-Plains Community College
Mark Duslak, Lake-Sumter State College
Craig M. McGill, Kansas State University

As higher education leaders, chief academic officers are capable of affecting the ways advising is structured and performed on college campuses, but little is known about how they regard advising. This study investigated the perceptions of 181 chief academic officers at two- and four-year public and private institutions in the U.S. regarding advising tasks. Using a Likert-scale instrument built using the NACADA core competencies, we explored how chief academic officers' perceptions of advisor tasks represent the informational, relational, and conceptual areas of the core competencies. Results revealed small significant differences between institutional type in perceptions of advising roles and functions. This study lays the foundation for future inquiry into perceptions of chief academic officers and other key stakeholders of advising.

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Academic advising has evolved over the last half century (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). In its infancy, academic advising had "low institutional status" and was not clearly defined (McLaughlin & Starr, 1982, p. 15). The advising role was assumed by faculty members using a mostly prescriptive approach to help students select courses and make choices that adhered to campus policies and procedures and which led to the students completing their degrees. Advising excellence was not rewarded, and professional development was not provided to those charged with advising. Since that time, many approaches to academic advising have emerged (e.g., developmental, learning-based) that expand the work of advisors to a holistic consideration of the students' entire college experience.

Indeed, academic advisors can enhance the general education experience of college students due to their unique position in students' lives (Egan, 2015). Academic advisors assist with goal setting, degree planning, and major and career exploration (Flatley et al., 2013). Academic advisors know students, the issues students face, and students' reasons for departure (Steele & White, 2019). They can identify students who are struggling, leading to interventions that allow students to continue toward their educational goals. Therefore, considering how involved academic advisors are in students' lives on campus, advisors can have a positive impact on increased student persistence (Drake, 2011). Those intimately familiar with the important work of academic advising know their impact, not just regarding student graduation rates, but how their work contributes to the core teaching and learning missions of academic institutions.

Yet, academic advising is often misunderstood by higher education leaders who, despite concerns with student persistence, underestimate the work academic advisors do (McGill, 2018). The field of academic advising currently strives for professionalization, a "process by which a nonprofessional occupation is transformed into a vocation with the attributes of a profession" (Shaffer et al., 2010, p. 68). In a review of the literature from 1980 to 2016, McGill (2019) identified five obstacles to professionalizing advising: the need to further define the field; the role of the professional association; the professional development and required education needed to perform the advising role; personal and occupational autonomy from other professional entities; and the lack of a consistent home for advising. Professionalizing occupations matters because doing so is the primary way members of a given field can increase the understanding and value of their work to important stakeholders and the public at large.

In 2011, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising conducted a survey of their membership, which primarily consists of academic advisors and academic advising administrators (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). One section of the survey asked respondents their beliefs about how upper-level administrators (defined in the survey as any level above dean) perceived academic advising. The results indicated NACADA members

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believed their campus administrators viewed academic advising as assisting with course enrollment. This was the most commonly selected option, over "facilitating student development" and "teaching and facilitating student learning" (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). At public four-year institutions, many survey respondents indicated they did not know administrators' views of academic advising. While the survey and the results presented did not include campus administrators' perceptions of academic advising as reported by administrators themselves, they did shed light on how little we know about the perceptions of academic advising by those who are in positions to make significant decisions about how the work is performed and structured on campuses.

The 2011 survey provided a basis for examining the relationship between academic advisors and administrators but also raised important questions about how administrators see the role of academic advising on their campuses. There is still little known about the perspectives of high-level administrators regarding academic advising. Surprisingly, no empirical study has reported administrators' perceptions directly. As leaders of higher education institutions, chief academic officers (CAOs) are in a position to affect the way advising is structured and performed on college campuses.

NACADA President Josh Smith (2013) called for researchers to investigate the significance administrators place on academic advising and their understanding of the role academic advising plays in the teaching and learning mission of institutions. We respond to this call. The purpose of this study is to investigate how advisor tasks relating to the core competencies of academic advising are perceived by chief academic officers at two- and four-year public and private institutions in the United States. This study was guided by three research questions:

RQ1. From the perspective of chief academic officers (CAOs), how *important* are the tasks representing the areas of the core competencies (informational, relational, and conceptual) in the advising practices on their campuses?

RQ2. From the perspective of CAOs, how *present* are the tasks representing the areas of the core competencies in the advising practices on their campuses?

RQ3. How does a CAO's institution type relate to their perception of both the *importance* and *presence* of these advising tasks?

Literature Review

Empirical work regarding the prerequisite knowledge and skills advisors must possess has been limited. As no specific degree is required to practice academic advising, individuals come to the field with a host of different academic backgrounds (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015). A recent Delphi study (Menke et al., 2018) sought to determine essential competencies for professionals entering academic advising. Menke, Stuck, and Ackerson (2018) found communication skills were essential competencies for entry-level academic advisors. Competencies such as knowledge of the curriculum, technology, teamwork/collaboration, critical thinking, and having patience or multicultural competence were viewed by participants as less important. The authors noted that the numerous environments in which advising occurs may explain the variation in essential skills deemed necessary to practice advising. This variation also has interesting implications for the ways academic advising is structured on college campuses, as what works well in one environment may not work well in another.

McGill, Heikkila, and Lazarowicz (2020) conducted a two-phase sequential explanatory mixed-methods study of a professional development program for academic advisors. In phase one, they found relational learning opportunities were lowest among the informational, relational, and conceptual areas of academic advising and did not significantly impact advisor evaluation scores. Themes uncovered in phase two regarding perceptions of the relational component and factors impacting advisor performance suggested more emphasis on relational training and advisor assessment of relational competencies is critical to professionalizing the work of academic advisors.

Another study (McGill et al., 2020) of NACADA leaders explored the skills, dispositions, and required academic preparation for advisors. Participants valued academic advisors who exhibited interpersonal skills, multicultural competence, and an appreciation for college students. Additionally, collaboration within the department and ability to prioritize tasks were valued, and personal traits were deemed more important than educational background and experience. The findings

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suggest a significant level of variance continues to exist in defining the ideal skills, dispositions, and preparations for advisors, leaving stakeholders to their own perceptions regarding academic advising, including the misperception that anyone can simply step into the role and perform the work.

For many years, the primary guiding framework describing academic advising activities was the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's (CAS's) *CAS Standards and Guidelines* (CAS, 2014). These standards were broad, primarily addressed the goals of the advising program, and allowed for a great deal of variability in advising practices across institutions. They also did not specifically address duties academic advisors should and should not perform. Recently, NACADA's professional development committee developed the *Academic Advising Core Competencies Guide* (Farr & Cunningham, 2017), which defined more nuanced work roles for academic advisors. These roles were divided into *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, facilitating problem solving, and communicating in a respectful manner). Although these standards are a helpful framework to guide advising practice, institutional and governmental policies and their interpretation by supervisors ultimately shapes the work activities of academic advisors.

Methods

To understand chief academic officers' (CAOs') perceptions of academic advising roles, functions, and purposes, we created a five-point Likert-scale survey instrument built from the *NACADA Academic Core Competencies Model* (NACADA, 2017). In this section, we describe instrument development and pilot, data collection and sample, and analytical procedures.

Instrument Development and Pilot

For this study, the Qualtrics software platform was used to create and distribute a survey to CAOs at college and university campuses across the United States. The survey was developed by the researchers and drew content heavily from the *NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model* (NACADA, 2017). The development of the NACADA core competencies was a multi-year project spearheaded by NACADA's professional development committee from 2015 to 2017. The committee developed the competencies by supporting each competency with published research, proposing draft competencies at regional and national conferences in the U.S., and through discussion within the committee. The result of this endeavor was the creation of 20 competencies grouped into three areas (conceptual, informational, and relational). Because the core competencies have been developed through a rigorous process by a broad coalition of leaders and professionals in the field of academic advising, they offer a starting point to develop a survey instrument with ample content validity. The content validity pertains to accurately representing the recommended job activities, skills, and content knowledge academic advisors should possess to be effective.

Prior to distribution to CAOs, the survey draft was piloted among a convenience sample of academic advising administrators. These individuals were selected based on their understanding of leadership of academic advisors and survey development, experience with research design, and status as a leader in NACADA and/or of academic advising. The pilot survey included open-ended questions at its conclusion that encouraged participants to share feedback on the questions, structure, time spent, and congruence of the goals of the study to the survey design. The feedback we received indicated portions of the survey (relating to levels of supervision and the core competencies) were challenging to understand, and the recommendation was to explain the levels of supervision more clearly and truncate the direct verbiage of the core competencies. To this last recommendation, three core competency questions that we believed CAOs would deem "not important" or "not evident" were removed. These questions addressed NACADA's core values of academic advising, curriculum degree programs, and other academic requirements, options, and information technologies applicable to relevant advising roles. We determined they did not add value and would therefore unnecessarily extend the survey. Thus, we had 17 items instead of 20 representing the core competencies of academic advising.

With the questions/items, we were seeking CAOs' perceptions about 1) the *importance* of the items to the role of academic advisors and the function of academic advising; and 2) CAOs'

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perceptions of the *presence* of these items on their campuses. Regarding this second point, we sought to learn whether CAOs *perceived* advisors on their campuses as performing these tasks, as determining if these tasks were actually performed on the campuses would require significantly different data from a variety of other individuals on campuses. Tables 2 and 3 contain the items participants were asked to rank.

Additionally, the final survey instrument contained demographic questions pertaining to whether academic advising was within the organizational reporting line to the respondent. The survey also contained a question about the respondent's level of organizational separation from directly supervising academic advisors. Next, the survey asked participants to rate the importance of 17 specific advising tasks relating to the *NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model* on a five-point scale ranging from "not important" to "very important" (NACADA, 2017; see Table 2 and Table 3). Because the participant contact list was paired with embedded data relating to the Carnegie classifications of their respective institutions, this data was available for each participant as well.

Table 1. Institutional characteristics of the sample

Levels of Separation	**Percentage**	***n***
None	15%	27
1	41%	74
2	28%	50
3	12%	21
4	5%	9
5 or more	0%	0
Institution Size	**Percentage**	***n***
Very small	17%	30
Small	43%	80
Medium	25%	45
Large	14%	25
Very large	1%	1
Public vs. Private	**Percentage**	***n***
Public	72%	130
Private not-for-profit	24%	44
Private for-profit	4%	7
Degree Program	**Percentage**	***n***
Predominately 2-year	59%	107
Predominately 4-year	41%	74

Data Collection and Sample

The sample population for this study consisted of CAOs at two- and four-year colleges and universities. We chose to exclude doctoral schools, special focus schools, and tribal schools from our study based on our interest in examining undergraduate academic advising in the two most traditional modalities. This produced a population of CAOs from 1,836 institutions. To obtain contact information for our target population, we purchased a contact list from Higher Ed Direct. The company provided a final list of 1,456 contacts. An email was sent to these contacts requesting participation in our Qualtrics survey, which was linked to the email. Follow-up emails were sent weekly for a month. This process yielded 244 responses and 181 completed surveys, which equates to a 10% completion rate for the population. Table 1 provides the institutional characteristics of the sample.

Participant privacy was maintained by using Qualtrics, a password-protected survey software that has the capability of removing participant identifiers for the purpose of data analysis. While the researchers were able to link responses back to the original email address, any reporting of results remained confidential. Names, email addresses, institutions, and job titles were not revealed outside of the password-protected Qualtrics software.

Analytical Procedures

The dependent variables in our study were the computed average of overall agreement with the 17 statements relating to the *NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model* (NACADA, 2017), the computed average of agreement with each competency area (conceptual, informational, and relational), and the raw agreement score for each of the 17 items. The independent variables in our study were the levels of supervision between the respondent and an academic advisor, the institution size, whether the institution was public or private, and whether the institution served predominantly 2- or 4-year-degree-seeking students.

A descriptive analysis of the 17 survey items pertaining to the importance (RQ1) and presence (RQ2) of statements related to the core competencies of academic advising was conducted. The mean area scores were calculated, and a paired samples T-test was conducted to determine whether there were mean differences between the mean importance ratings for each area of the *NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model* (NACADA, 2017). For RQ3, a one-way

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analysis of variance (ANOVA) between the dependent and independent variables was conducted.

Results

The results of this study reflect the analysis of data derived from a survey of 181 CAOs. Additionally, data relating to institutional characteristics derived from the Carnegie classifications of higher education were incorporated into this analysis by matching the respondents with the characteristics of their institutions.

RQ1 Results

Respondents rated the importance of 17 statements corresponding to the core competencies on a 5-point Likert Scale. The anchor points for importance ranged from "not important" (1) to "very important" (5). In general, the mean importance ratings of all statements indicated that participants perceived the importance of academic advising tasks in ways that mapped closely onto the core competencies ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .45$).

Mean importance ratings for the three areas of the core competencies (conceptual, informational, and relational), although negatively skewed, differed significantly across certain comparisons. On average, respondents rated the informational area of the core competencies highest ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .46$), followed by relational ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .46$) and conceptual ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .77$). A paired-samples T-test indicated a significant difference in mean importance scores between the conceptual and relational areas [$t(181) = -16.11$, $p < 0.000$]. Additionally, there were significant differences between the importance ratings for the conceptual and informational areas [$t(181) = -14.61$, $p < 0.000$]. Lastly, there were no significant differences between the importance ratings of the relational and informational areas of the core competencies.

The Chronbach's alpha of each set of indices for the core competencies' importance ratings indicates that the conceptual ($\alpha = .78$) and relational ($\alpha = .78$) questions had acceptable levels of internal consistency. The informational area questions fell below the typical alpha threshold of .70 ($\alpha = .65$). This indicates that ratings within the informational items were less consistent than ratings in the other two categories. Exploring the informational questions individually, the highest rated statement was "knowledge of campus and community resources that support student success" ($M = 4.78$, $SD = .44$), whereas the lowest rated statement was "develop an appreciation for worldviews that are markedly different than their own" ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .97$). Table 2 represents the mean importance scores for all items based upon the *NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model* (NACADA, 2017).

RQ2 Results

Respondents were asked to report the degree of presence of each of the 17 statements corresponding to the core competencies. The anchor points ranged from "never" to "almost always." The mean presence ratings for all statements indicated that respondents perceived the presence of academic advising tasks was moderate ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .58$). Table 3 represents the mean presence scores for all items based upon the core competencies of academic advising.

Mean presence ratings for the three areas of the core competencies differed significantly. The conceptual area ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .78$) presence significantly differed from the informational area presence ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .62$) [$t(181) = -15.418$, $p < 0.000$]. The informational area presence differed significantly from the relational area presence ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .65$) [$t(181) = 5.82$, $p < 0.000$]. Finally, the relational area presence differed significantly from the conceptual area presence [$t(181) = 12.75$, $p < 0.000$]. This suggests CAOs perceived the conceptual competencies as being most present, followed by the informational and relational competencies.

Item presence ratings indicated "knowledge of the history and role of academic advising in higher education" was the least present ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.06$), whereas "knowledge of campus and community resources that support student success" was most present ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .76$).

RQ3 Results

Levels of supervision. Levels of supervision indicated the number of positions between the CAO and the academic advisor. For example, participants indicating "1" level of supervising meant that they were directly supervising academic advisors. Across the sample there was a mean of 2.5 levels of separation with a standard deviation of 1.07.

An ANOVA indicated no significant differences between overall mean importance ratings and the levels of supervision. This also held true

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Table 2. Mean importance rating for items related to the core competencies

Survey Item	Competency Area	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge of the history and role of academic advising in higher education	Conceptual	2.91	1.245
Knowledge of theory relevant to academic advising	Conceptual	3.62	1.022
Knowledge of empirically validated academic advising approaches and strategies	Conceptual	3.94	0.941
Knowledge of expected outcomes of academic advising	Conceptual	4.51	0.620
Understanding of how physical space of the advising office impacts the success of an advising interaction	Conceptual	3.21	1.275
Know the history, mission, vision, values, and culture of the institution	Informational	4.29	0.785
Knowledge of institutional policies, procedures, rules, and regulations	Informational	4.64	0.547
Knowledge of legal guidelines of advising practice, including privacy regulations and confidentiality	Informational	4.54	0.702
Develop an appreciation for worldviews that are markedly different than their own	Informational	3.96	0.968
Knowledge of campus and community resources that support student success	Informational	4.78	0.441
Create rapport and build relationships with students in the area/major(s) they advise	Relational	4.71	0.542
Facilitate problem-solving and decision-making with students	Relational	4.42	0.737
Facilitate planning and goal-setting with students	Relational	4.62	0.590
Engage in ongoing self-reflection	Relational	3.79	0.960
Advisors help students make meaning of their college and life experiences	Relational	4.30	0.736
Advisors facilitate student growth and development	Relational	4.36	0.720
Advisors connect students to campus resources and lead them to opportunities for engagement	Relational	4.58	0.568

for the mean importance ratings for the informational, conceptual, and relational importance ratings. This indicates that, generally, the levels of supervision did not appear to relate to the CAOs' ratings of the importance of the core competency items. The same held true for the presence scores for this variable.

Institution size. There were no significant differences regarding CAOs' mean importance ratings of the core competency items across institution sizes. This also held true for the mean importance scores for each core competency area. The same held true for the presence scores for this variable.

Public vs. private. The only significant difference regarding mean importance scores across the core competency areas for institution type was the importance ratings for conceptual items between public ($M = 3.72$) and private not-for-profit ($M = 3.39$) institutions. A Tukey's HSD post-hoc analysis indicated a significant difference ($p < .001$) between these two groups only for the item relating to how the physical space of the advising office impacts the success of an advising interaction, indicating the differences were likely inconsequential. The same held true for the presence scores for this variable.

2-year vs. 4-year. There were no significant differences regarding CAOs' mean importance ratings of the core competency items across institutional sizes. This also held true for the mean importance scores for each core competency area. However, a one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference for the informational area's presence ratings between CAOs at predominantly 2-year institutions ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .63$) and 4-year institutions ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .55$. [$F(2, 179) = 4.77$, $p > .05$].

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Table 3. Mean presence rating for items related to the core competencies

Survey Item	Competency Area	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge of the history and role of academic advising in higher education	Conceptual	2.63	1.063
Knowledge of theory relevant to academic advising	Conceptual	3.11	0.986
Knowledge of empirically validated academic advising approaches and strategies	Conceptual	3.13	0.969
Knowledge of expected outcomes of academic advising	Conceptual	3.86	0.887
Understanding of how physical space of the advising office impacts the success of an advising interaction	Conceptual	3.00	1.208
Know the history, mission, vision, values, and culture of the institution	Informational	4.04	0.866
Knowledge of institutional policies, procedures, rules, and regulations	Informational	4.17	0.771
Knowledge of legal guidelines of advising practice, including privacy regulations and confidentiality	Informational	4.02	0.898
Develop an appreciation for worldviews that are markedly different than their own	Informational	3.38	0.937
Knowledge of campus and community resources that support student success	Informational	4.23	0.759
Create rapport and build relationships with students in the area/major(s) they advise	Relational	4.14	0.815
Facilitate problem-solving and decision-making with students	Relational	3.75	0.873
Facilitate planning and goal-setting with students	Relational	3.88	0.832
Engage in ongoing self-reflection	Relational	3.12	0.926
Advisors help students make meaning of their college and life experiences	Relational	3.68	0.839
Advisors facilitate student growth and development	Relational	3.71	0.859
Advisors connect students to campus resources and lead them to opportunities for engagement	Relational	3.96	0.799

Discussion

Chief academic officers are significant stakeholders for academic advising. The policies and practices they implement have repercussions for how academic advising is carried out at their institutions. For instance, they must decide whether faculty members, primary-role advisors, or a combination of both will advise students. But little is known about chief academic officers' experience with and understanding of academic advising. Almost a decade ago, some advisors "reported that they did not know the beliefs of their administrators. This could be a function of proximity. Some advisors have little contact with upper-level administrators and would not have enough information to make a determination" (Smith, 2013, para. 2). Because academic advising may be but one of many functions reporting to CAOs, there may be minimal understanding of the roles, tasks, and depth of academic advising in some cases. Our study sought to test and add nuance to these prior findings by exploring administrator beliefs about the established normative core competencies of academic advising.

Overall, our findings suggest CAOs value items of advising that are congruent with the core competencies of academic advising. On average, CAOs rated all 17 statements of the core competencies to be important. Each area (e.g., conceptual, informational, relational) was internally consistent and the individual means for each area were positive. This indicates CAOs collectively believed the competencies in each of the three areas to be important. Notably, there were mean differences across the areas, with conceptual competencies being the lowest rated and informational competencies considered most important. Conceptual competencies contain statements

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relating to knowledge of theories of academic advising and research relating to academic advising. Of these, knowledge of the history and role of academic advising in higher education was the lowest rated core competency overall ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.24$).

Conceptual knowledge, what Houle (1980) called *theoretical knowledge*, is vital to performing the duties of a profession. One aspect of the process of professionalization is the development of this body of knowledge and practitioners' ability to apply that body of knowledge within the context of the profession (Houle, 1980). Whereas theoretical knowledge is developed in pursuit of disciplinary truths, practical knowledge evolves from the application of theoretical knowledge within the discipline. The two types of knowledge cannot be fully separated, and a professional must be able to use and contribute to both. In other words, a professional learns the knowledge needed to perform the job at hand and broadens his or her own knowledge to apply it—in collaboration with others—to solve occupational problems. Given the absence of literature regarding administrator perceptions of advising, it is difficult to conjecture as to the reasons conceptual items would be rated less important than informational or relational items. However, when considering previous studies that indicated a prevailing overemphasis on advisors as information providers (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; McGill et al., 2020), this finding reinforces the hypothesis that a misunderstanding of the tasks of academic advisors persists despite increased efforts to convey the variety of the complex tasks academic advisors complete.

There may still be a misconception of advisors as simply transmitters of information to students and gatekeepers to ensure timely graduation. This finding supports previous work suggesting that advisors believe CAOs are not fully aware of academic advisors' "roles, responsibilities and daily work life" (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015, p. 66). For instance, CAOs may not be aware of the growing body of knowledge on academic advising or that there have been numerous advancements in this area over the last few decades. The most significant examples of these advancements include at least four peer-reviewed journals dedicated to the practice and scholarship of academic advising, the establishment of the NACADA Center for Research at Kansas State University (KSU), and a PhD program in Academic Advising Leadership at KSU. By rating the conceptual competency low in importance to the work of advising, CAOs may reflect the belief that academic advising is not a profession with a history, methods of practice, or a body of knowledge that should inform professional practice. Interestingly, the *presence* of the conceptual items was the highest rated aggregate category. This indicates that CAOs believe their advisors possess these tasks but do not consider them as important as the other tasks.

The perceptions CAOs hold about academic advising roles and tasks may well depend on their own professional experience as well as their institutional contexts. Smith (2013) noted that "consistency in perceived beliefs suggests that the various contexts of administrators' experiences did not characterize their views on advising" (para. 3). While we found differences in ratings between public and private not-for-profit institutions, there were no significant differences for other institutional variables. However, these data should be interpreted with caution, as the group size for private not-for-profit institutions was small ($n = 10$) and the finding was only connected to one item relating to the conceptual area of core competencies. While our findings suggest CAOs hold similar views about the core competencies of academic advising, this does not necessarily mean they act similarly. There are many variables on individual campuses (e.g., budgets, campus politics) that influence campus decisions regarding academic advising. The rejection of academic advising as a profession by CAOs will undoubtedly slow the progress towards the professionalization of the field. When CAOs make decisions about how advising is carried out on their campuses, it is necessary they have a clear understanding of the day-to-day roles and responsibilities of advisors. Changing this perspective of advising should be a high priority if professionalization is the ultimate goal. Simply decreeing that advising is a profession will not permit advising to withstand the programmatic consequences that arise when a top administrator believes otherwise.

There is widespread agreement in the advising community that, regardless of advisor *type* (e.g., faculty advisor or primary-role advisor) or *setting* (e.g., advising centers, individual offices within different academic units), the academic advising process encompasses conceptual, informational, and relational components. But what happens when one of those components (in this case, the conceptual component) is regarded as less important than the other two? What does academic

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advising look like if its conceptual underpinnings are removed? Unfortunately, academic advising is frequently viewed by higher education leaders as a service (Steele & White, 2019). In a service model, the informational and relational aspects of academic advising are paramount, while the conceptual aspects of academic advising are less important. In such a model, advising is tantamount to customer service (e.g., emphasis on delivering correct information as opposed to the complex issues in which students are not necessary left "satisfied," but challenged/nourished). Regardless of how academic advising is configured on a particular campus (e.g., de-centralized, satellite), a model of advising that is undergirded by in-depth conceptual complexity is a key component of elevating advising as a profession.

The financial state of higher education has led to an increase in an outcomes-based funding model in which state funds are dependent on graduation rates or other student success metrics. This demand for careful monitoring of student progress towards a degree has implications for academic advising (Thompson & Prieto, 2013). In such a funding model, academic advisors must focus on monitoring students' progress towards their degree completion. While participants did not demonstrate philosophical viewpoints that cause any observed differences in how academic advising is practiced, it is not clear if these CAOs act accordingly. Although student degree completion is not an unimportant goal for an institution to have for students, it is a byproduct of the educational experience and should not be the primary goal of academic advisors. Students engaging with learning support systems, first-year programs, and academic advisors can improve student persistence (Drake, 2011). If advisors are, in fact, a link in the retention-to-graduation chain and to student learning, clearly defined roles and responsibilities could enhance the academic advising experience for students and advisors, potentially leading to an increase in important metrics. When making decisions regarding academic advising on their campuses, CAOs must account for budgetary and political concerns. Possessing the belief that advising is a profession adds weight to these considerations and may help prevent departmental cuts, mission changes, and other forms of misalignment to the rich set of possibilities professional academic advising offers college and university campuses.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The results of this study yielded small significant differences in how CAOs perceive academic advising. Overall, CAOs believed that the relational and informational tasks and functions of academic advising were important and present on their campus but were less concerned with the conceptual components of academic advising. One significant aspect of this study is that it creates a baseline for understanding the perceptions of academic advising among campus CAOs in positions to make decisions regarding academic advising on their campuses. We call for further research to gain a better understanding of the place academic advising holds on college campuses and to further the field of academic advising. We suggest that scholars and academic advisors communicate the value and purpose of advising beyond retention efforts. Academic advising is significant to the college student experience. For the field's ongoing quest of professionalization, we must do better in communicating our value to the entire higher education community.

One potential limitation of the study is the sample. After screening out institutions that served exclusively graduate students, had a special focus, or were tribal schools, our entire population of institutions was 1,845 institutions. Of those, we were able to obtain contact information for the chief academic officer for 1,457 institutions (79% of the population). This initial attrition was nonrandom and therefore potentially influenced these findings. Additionally, our response rate was 10%, which meets the threshold for a randomized sample size with a 90% confidence rate and 6% margin of error and is generally acceptable. A power analysis determined that our sample size met the threshold for demonstrating adequate power to detect a medium size effect. This is especially important given that a majority of our findings supported the null hypothesis that there were not significant differences between our independent variables (thereby reducing the chances of a type I error).

However, in terms of the limitations of our sample, we acknowledge that the respondents represent a nonrandomized sample of those willing to participate in an online survey. Because the design was limited to a nonrandomized sample, caution regarding the generalizability of the findings is necessary. Inherent to nonrandomized sampling is response bias. There may have been an unstudied mediating or moderating variable that

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influenced CAOs' willingness to respond to the survey. That being said, when the response sample variable characteristics were compared with the population's characteristics, there were only slight to moderate differences (see Table 1). Because the sample was limited to certain institutional types, generalizations of the findings to other institutional settings should be made with caution and qualification. Additionally, while the pilot study did not raise any concerns about our adaptation of the core competency items, it still differs from an exact representation of these competencies.

These findings indicate CAOs may not be fully aware of the day-to-day roles and responsibilities of academic advisors or that a body of knowledge on academic advising exists. Findings suggest CAOs continue to view advising's main role to be providing information to students. There was a negative skew to the CAOs' responses regarding the importance of the core competency items for academic advisors at their institution. This raises questions for future studies. For instance, we did not explicitly ask CAOs if they perceived academic advising as a profession. To some extent, doing so would require unpacking what we mean by a profession (this matter itself has caused a debate in the field). The findings from this line of inquiry, however, are quite valuable, and the question might have suggested additional (or different) interpretations of the findings. Future researchers should consider a wide variety of methods to explore this question.

Secondly, little is known about CAOs' views regarding what academic advising is or how it might best meet institutional goals. A search through higher education administration journals reveals few articles focused on academic advising. Between 1975 and 2020, eight articles on academic advising were published in *Research in Higher Education*, two in *Review of Higher Education*, and none in *Studies in Higher Education*. Recognition of this body of knowledge could be important to the future of academic advising. In addition to the bourgeoning literature base within the field (with four peer-reviewed journals focused on academic advising), it seems important for academic advising researchers to continue publishing and highlighting the importance of academic advising research and scholar-practitioner approaches *outside* of academic advising journals. Advising researchers have a better chance of demonstrating the value of academic advising to CAOs when the research is published in journals that are more likely to be read by CAOs (e.g., broader base higher education outlets like *Research in Higher Education* or *Review of Higher Education*).

For example, future research could explore the reasons conceptual items would be rated less important than informational or relational items. Qualitative inquiries might consider how CAOs' understandings of the role and purpose of academic advising are formed throughout their careers. What experiences have shaped their beliefs about the purpose and function of academic advising? Do these perspectives vary if a CAO comes up through the ranks of faculty or through student affairs and student services? Future research that includes or specifically examines demographic data such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and/or religious affiliation may provide nuanced and more individual perspectives of CAOs. Such inquiry would allow for a much deeper understanding of CAOs' perceptions of the purpose of academic advising and help determine if they see its goals as reaching beyond increasing graduation rates.

Conclusion

Academic advising, once viewed as prescriptive and solely useful for providing curricular information, has grown into a developmental process designed by those who perform advising to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills. Despite these efforts, the field is not clearly defined or practiced consistently in a variety of contexts (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; McGill, 2018). The lack of clear boundaries and practices leave the day-to-day roles and responsibilities of academic advisors somewhat open to interpretation. Better understanding of the perceptions of the leaders on our campuses will help the field of academic advising take stock of how advising is perceived, understood, and practiced in different institutional contexts. Although extreme standardization of practices from one setting to another is undesirable due to the importance of advising working for its particular institutional setting, clarifying the complexity of the advising process and raising the bar for how academic advising is performed is critical to our ongoing professionalization (McGill, 2019). With this information, the field can better advocate its worth and value for student success.

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Authors' Notes

Donna J. Menke is the area director of advising at Mid-Plains Community College. She earned

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her PhD from Kansas State University in Counseling and Student Development. Her research focuses on the college student-athlete experience and academic advising. Donna can be reached at menked@mpcc.edu.

Mark Duslak is the associate dean of students at Lake-Sumter State College. Prior to this position, Mark worked as a director of student development, a career advisor, an academic advisor, an adjunct faculty member, and as a school counselor. He holds master's degrees in School Counseling and Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Loyola University, Chicago and the University of South Florida, respectively. Mark is currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Florida State University. He serves on the editorial board for NACADA Review: Academic Advising Praxis and Practices. *Mark's research interests include counselor-administrator communication, academic advising training and development, administrator perspectives of academic advising, and advisor socialization and identity development. Mark may be reached at Duslakm@lssc.edu.*

Dr. Craig M. McGill is an assistant professor for the Department of Special Education, Counseling and Student Affairs at Kansas State University. Prior to completing a two-year post-doctoral research fellowship at the University of South Dakota, he was an academic advisor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Florida International University. He holds master's degrees in Music Theory from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Academic Advising from Kansas State University, as well as a doctorate from Florida International University in Adult Education and Human Resource Development. He serves on the editorial board for NACADA Journal, *the* Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, *and NASPA's* Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education. *Dr. McGill is a qualitative researcher with an emphasis on identity (personal, professional, and organizational). His research agenda is focused on social justice and the professionalization of academic advising, and he has also published articles in musical theatre and queer studies. His publication record consists of two co-edited books and over 20 peer-reviewed articles. Dr. McGill can be reached at cmcgill@ksu.edu.*

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