



RESEARCH BRIEFS

Mapping High-Impact Practices to Advising

Advising as a Pathway to High-Impact Practices

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Background and Research Question

The purpose of this series of research briefs is to explore the relationships between advising and high-impact practices (HIPs). As noted in the first installment of this series, HIPs “are educational experiences that research has shown deepen learning and increase rates of student retention, student engagement, and persistence to graduation for all students across diverse backgrounds (Kuh, 2008)” (Kinzie et al., 2024, p. 1).

That same research brief expanded upon a line of exploration that had been previously considered: reframing and elevating advising as a high-impact practice. The second research brief examined a concept not as fully developed but which had been a line of subtext in most research and best-practice work on HIPs: the role of advising in high-impact practices. For this third brief, we will investigate a relationship between advising and HIPs that has not been directly addressed in the literature: the role of advising as a pathway to HIPs.

All these relationships are critical to elevating advising, engagement in HIPs, and student success. However, the consideration of advising as a pathway to HIPs is probably most connected to the equity potential of such high-impact practices. Considering the nature of HIPs, most of these practices either are not required of undergraduates or are required of only a certain subset of them. As such, their impact is contingent on students electing to engage in these practices as with first-year experiences/seminars, capstone experiences, learning communities, e-portfolios, internships,

undergraduate research, and writing-intensive courses. Several other HIPs are more representative of pedagogical practices than curricular initiatives, including diversity/global learning, collaborative assignments and projects, and common intellectual experiences. These practices might be more present and prevalent in certain curricular and co-curricular experiences in which advisors could guide students’ engagement.

Finally, all of these practices require a substantial investment of time, energy, and intentionality, as well as reflection and processing to yield their full impact on students’ experiences and outcomes. As gatekeepers to students’ access to HIPs, advisors play a key role. They can introduce students to HIPs, encourage and facilitate their involvement in these practices, and importantly, create equitable opportunities for HIP engagement regardless of a student’s circumstances or identity. Further, advisors are well positioned to support students as they process and understand their involvement in the high-impact practice and build upon those meaningful experiences toward achieving their goals and objectives.

Consequently, this research brief will examine the research, literature, and theory on HIPs and advising to clarify the relationship between advising and participation in high-impact practices. Further, we will interrogate and amplify the equity potential embedded in this relationship. More specifically, this third installment in the research brief series will address the question: **How does advising create pathways for meaningful and equitable engagement in high-impact practices?**

Methods

As with the previous two research briefs, this one draws upon a data-sharing collaboration between the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at the Center for Postsecondary Research (at Indiana University) and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (at the University of South Carolina). Thus, this brief draws upon student-level data collected from more than 72,000 first-year students and 87,000 seniors who responded to the NSSE, administered in 2020 and 2022, and to NSSE's Academic Advising Topical Module at 320 four-year colleges and universities. Together, these data provide evidence of students' exposure to high-impact practices and the eight elements of HIP quality within the context of academic advising.

It is important to address a few qualifications of these data. First, given widespread disruption in the college experience, including advising practice, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we excluded NSSE data collected in 2021 from this research brief. Second, the colleges and universities that administer NSSE and the Academic Advising Topical Module are not chosen at random. Rather, these institutions are interested in assessing advising practice and could be qualitatively different from other institutions. However, the range and type of the 320 institutions in the NSSE sample used for this research brief is mostly representative of higher education types. More specifically, about half are public, and the proportion of doctoral, master's and bachelor's-granting are approximate to the percentages in the portrait of U.S. Carnegie Classification institutions, with bachelor's institutions overrepresented slightly. The diversity of U.S. institutions is further represented in the sample's inclusion of about 20 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and 56 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).

These student-level data are complemented by program-level surveys of institutional initiatives from hundreds of U.S. colleges and universities collected by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Recent administrations of the National Survey of First-Year Experiences generated responses from 537 campuses nationwide in 2017 and data from 334 institutions in 2023 to evaluate and understand the elements and outcomes of first-year experiences and seminars as a HIP. While not nationally representative, these data sets included two- and four-year colleges and universities, public and private campuses, and a wide range of institutional sizes, allowing for a comprehensive portrait of the prevalence, purpose, structural and instructional characteristics, and assessment of advising and HIPs.

For this series of research briefs, data from NSSE and the National Resource Center were examined with the intent to evaluate and extract specific findings related to the role of advising as a pathway to equitable participation in HIPs. No new analyses were conducted; rather, existing results from the data were interrogated and categorized to highlight and synthesize findings across these existing data sources to answer the current research question. Finally, in the

absence of specific national data dedicated to the connection between advising and participation in HIPs, this research brief draws heavily from other scholarship and theory in the field to complement the data available from the surveys conducted by NSSE and the National Resource Center. As such, it represents more of a thought piece punctuated by appropriate data points and intends to serve as a foundation for future empirical work

Findings

As the first two research briefs in this series noted, the literature on high-impact practices documents the association between participation in HIPs and an array of positive educational, engagement, developmental, and student success outcomes. By definition, identification as a HIP is contingent on positive outcomes such as "increase[d] rates of student retention and student engagement" (Kuh, 2008, p. 9). In addition, with fidelity to the eight tenets that are fundamental to ensure their impact, HIPs can substantially affect student learning and success. This impact can involve creating meaningful experiential learning opportunities, facilitating an orientation toward lifelong learning, generating meaningful student-faculty interaction, enhancing moral reasoning, developing critical thinking, and fostering career skill development (e.g., Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kilgo et al., 2015; King & Mayhew, 2002; Kuh, 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013; NSSE, 2021; Tobolowsky et al., 2015). Further, these impacts are often amplified when students are engaged in more than one HIP and when these practices are effectively integrated into a meaningful educational experience.

Yet another important and consistent finding across the literature on HIPs is their even greater impact on historically underserved students, a discovery that has massive equity implications for effective, integrated, and accessible high-impact practices. When they were first introduced, Kuh (2008) noted that these "teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for *college students from many backgrounds*" (p. 9; emphasis added). Subsequent qualitative and quantitative studies yielded more specific findings—that HIPs deliver a greater benefit for students of first-generation status; transfer students; those who identified as African American, Asian American, or Hispanic/Latino; or those who were from low-income families or affected by poverty (Finley & McNair, 2013; Harper, 2009). The early founders and leaders of the HIP movement captured the importance of these findings:

The most valuable findings [are] the "equity effects" that appear in students' reports of their learning as their success is boosted by HIPs; the equity-minded perspective that educators can nurture; the principles of inclusive excellence that can guide colleges and universities in providing a liberal education that offers not only equitable access to HIPs, but also equitable achievement of outcomes. (Schneider and Albertine in Finley & McNair, 2013, p. v)

While HIPs are beneficial to student learning and success, they are not universally available at colleges and universities, are rarely required to graduate, and are sometimes viewed as a luxury. For a variety of reasons many students simply cannot participate in them. NSSE's annual data summaries of senior student participation in six HIPs show that about 1 in 6 students do not participate in a HIP during their college career. A major challenge of actualizing the benefits of HIPs and, in particular, their equity potential is that the very students within the populations most likely to benefit from HIPs are also much less likely to engage in them and/or less likely to do so in a way that is integrated, reflective, and impactful (Finley & McNair, 2013; Harper, 2009; Zilvinskis et al., 2022).

NSSE's annual HIP participation summaries show variation by race-ethnicity and first-generation status. For example, while senior students' average participation rate in internships and field experiences is about 50%, the rate drops to 45% for students who are first-generation, and 43% among Black or African American students. The differential levels of participation and engagement among students from historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds actually run the risk of making HIPs a tool to reify higher education disparities by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, family background, and pathways through higher education.

Yet, until HIPs are required to graduate, or are designed into undergraduate programs to make them nearly inescapable, we must either rely on students finding their way to these practices or on faculty and advisors to guide students to and advise them within HIPs. Support for students' participation in HIPs might also require funding, applications or letters of recommendation, and encouragement and guidance to ensure students thrive and make the most of their experiences. Given that advising is the most frequently reported initiative to support first-year students, the second-most common tool to create a positive sophomore-year experience, and embedded in numerous other HIPs, advisors are important partners in forging an equitable pathway to and through HIPs for all students (Hartman & Young, 2021; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2020; Young, 2019; Young et al., 2017).

Advising as Advocacy for HIPs

Over the past several decades, "advising has evolved and changed in its activity and impact," with a distinct shift from consideration as a student service activity to its current stature as a high-impact practice of holistic student support (Keup, 2022, p. 7). Advisors still engage in transactional activities such as course selection, academic planning and progression, major selection, and communication of institutional policies and compliance. However, they now also embrace a range of other responsibilities and opportunities with students that speak to more holistic developmental needs; address financial issues, career considerations, health and well-being, skills development, and personal exploration; and serve as true advocates for students and their success (CAS, 2023; Karp et al., 2021; Keup et al., 2024; Troxel et al.,

2022). Further, and as noted in the second research brief in this series, the role of advisors and advising changes over the course of students' tenure in college as their developmental, personal, and academic needs change (Keup et al., 2024).

Guidelines for practice, including the most recent standards for academic advising by the Council for the Advancement of Standards, highlight the need for advising practices and structures to "serve the distinctive needs of a range of student identities and populations, and contribute to our understanding of the impact of academic advising on success for all students, with particular lenses on critical issues of equity and cultural contexts" (CAS, 2023, p. 2). Empirical studies highlight the importance of advisors acting as or being perceived as accessible and proactive advocates for students, an attribute especially impactful for students of color and students from other historically underrepresented populations (Harper, 2009; Lee, 2018; Museus, 2021; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Sheppard & Bryson, 2022). In fact, systematic efforts toward student-centered, advocacy-focused, and asset-minded advising practice have been codified as methods, such as proactive advising (Museus & Ravello, 2010; Museus, 2021; PASS, n.d.), developmental advising (Crookston, 2009; Lee, 2018), and appreciative advising (Bloom, 2007; Bloom et al., 2013; Habley et al., 2012).

More specifically, appreciative advising "is a powerful tool for building rapport with students, discovering their strengths, unleashing their hopes and dreams, and devising plans to make those hopes and dreams come true" in a manner that draws explicitly upon students' identities and interests (Bloom, 2007, p. 4). Developmental advising is also more personalized to students' identities and experiences and "is practiced to lead students to self-authorship and the fulfillment of their own personal desires" (Lee, 2018, p. 78). Museus and others also found that "academic advisors who were noted for their impact on racial and ethnic minority student success make intentional efforts to proactively connect students with resources" (Museus et al., 2010, p. 21), such as helping students to engage with high-impact practices.

Advising plays an important role in supporting participation in HIPs, in particular encouraging students to take part (Goldman, 2021). With regard to introducing students to opportunities such as HIPs, advising practice seems to be achieving some effectiveness. Results from NSSE's Academic Advising Topical Module reveal that only about 1 in 6 first-year students and seniors "never" had discussions about "special opportunities" (e.g., study abroad, internships, service-learning, undergraduate research) with someone at their institution. These results were generally the same by race-ethnicity and first-generation status, positively showing that HIPs are discussed in the context of advising.

To illustrate what this looks like in advising practice, Goldman (2021) described how advisors at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) collaborated with units responsible for specific HIPs, including education abroad, undergraduate research, and internships, to create advising pages describing these high-impact practices in specific majors.

The major-based advising pages were further supported by departments that enhanced opportunities for students to learn about HIPs. For example, the forensic science department emphasized study abroad and undergraduate research experiences as important to the major, and the department assigned a faculty mentor to discuss research opportunities with students, conducted departmental programs for students to learn about doing research for credit, and made the forms needed to do research more accessible to promote these experiences. Collaboration among advisors, academic departments, and units responsible for HIPs illustrates the role of advising as a pathway to these practices.

One of the main routes to HIPs is via major; Kuh (2008) recommended deploying at least one high-impact practice in the first year and one later in the major. For advisors, helping students see opportunities for HIPs in their major is an important quality. Academic maps, or major maps, are tools designed by faculty and academic advisors that lay out required courses in a given program of study to provide students clarity and direction as they pursue their desired major. These maps alert students to curricular and co-curricular programming, ensuring they are aware of needed courses as well as sequencing and experiential enrichment opportunities, including HIPs. For example, VCU's major maps include specific HIPs for the major; advisors use the maps when meeting with students to discuss their plans for each academic year (Goldman, 2021). Service-learning, study abroad, internships, research opportunities, and living-learning communities are routinely discussed during advising appointments using the major map.

Insights into what students perceive as barriers to their participation in HIPs give further understanding of institutional action and implications for advising. NSSE results from a study on potential barriers to participation in high-impact practices show that 60% of first-year students who planned to participate indicated the top obstacle as not knowing enough about HIPs (NSSE, 2022). Additional obstacles included students not being able to fit HIPs into their schedule, cost barriers, or feeling unprepared, each cited by about 30% of students. Least among first-year students' concerns: feeling discouraged by people in their life, feeling that people like them were unlikely to participate, or studying remotely. These findings suggest HIP recruitment and promotions might be reaching students generally and across social identities.

Barriers to participation showed some variation among HIPs; for example, affordability was the highest concern for students studying abroad (56%). On the other hand, relative to other HIPs, a far greater share of students interested in learning communities or senior capstones did not know enough about the experience (78% and 75%, respectively). These findings are encouraging for advising in that for the many first-year students who intend to participate in HIPs, the greatest perceived barrier can be mitigated through better promotion, information and guidance, and curricular integration.

Advising as a Component of Student Success Ecosystems

More recently, higher education researchers have gone a step further in theory-to-practice models. Their efforts have highlighted advising as both (a) a critical component of ecosystems of support for all undergraduates, and (b) a practice with an inclusive lens to foster the success of students from historically marginalized populations. For instance, Young and Bunting (2024) used various theoretical constructs to reframe student transitions in higher education, highlighting the principles of belonging vs. marginality and equitable community engagement. In their model, sense of community, equitable participation, and "becoming" serve as pillars of student success through the various transitions into and through higher education (e.g., entering from high school, transfer, the sophomore year experience, senior capstones, transitioning out of college). Further, Young and Bunting (2024) identify advisors as critical agents of the institution and advocates for students toward creating pathways for inclusive and meaningful engagement, often through participation in HIPs, in the community of practice represented by the undergraduate experience.

Similarly, Hallet et al. (2024) include proactive advising, academic support, counseling, and non-deficit approaches to academic recovery as components of their ecology of validation model for student success. This model has been shown as highly effective for supporting student success on an individual level, and particularly for "low-income, primarily first-generation students, as well as racially minoritized students," whom the researchers refer to as "at-promise students" (PASS, n.d.). These same scholars found that proactive advising approaches and programs under the umbrella of an ecology of validation facilitated engagement in high-impact activities inside and outside the classroom. Such approaches also improved a wide range of psychosocial outcomes (e.g., mattering; sense of belonging; academic, social, career, and major self-efficacy) as well as more traditional metrics of student success such as persistence and academic performance (Hallet et al., 2024; PASS, n.d.).

Institutional studies have documented positive effects from this shift toward advising as a part of a systemic and cultural approach to student success overall and for historically underserved and marginalized students. These studies include Georgia State University, with the Monitoring Advising Analytics to Promote Student Success (MAAPS) project (Rossman et al., 2021), and the three campuses of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Omaha, and Kearney through their Thompson Scholars Learning Community (TSLC) programs (Hallett et al., 2024). These demonstrations of positive effects are vital to enhancing our understanding of practice. Yet because they represent comprehensive, large-scale and intensive investments in studying and changing advising and student success, they are not immediately reproducible at most colleges and universities.

Despite theoretical support for forging a meaningful connection between advising and high-impact practices, large-scale assessments of advising's integration within a constellation of HIPs at 537 institutions nationwide show the limited relationship between advising and HIPs in the first college year. More specifically, using data collected via the National Survey of First-Year Experiences, researchers at the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition conducted an empirical examination of the relationships between advising, HIPs, and other student support initiatives in the first year of college using bivariate categorical correlations (Keup, 2019). Findings from this study showed that although academic advising was the most commonly reported first-year program, it did not have statistically significant intercorrelations with any HIPs or programs, initiatives, or courses intended to support first-year students (Keup, 2019).

The same was true for early alert programs, which are often associated with advising in the first-year experience. As such, advising and early alert programs represent "the least integrated 'stars' in the constellation" of first-year support that includes numerous HIPs such as first-year seminars, undergraduate research, writing-intensive coursework, common intellectual experiences (e.g., general education, common reading programs), learning communities, service-learning, and undergraduate research (Keup, 2019, p. 29).

Examinations of the influence of institutional type on advising into HIPs also showed little variation. Correlational analysis by institutional type (four-year/two-year), control (public/private), and institutional size also showed very little connection between academic advising and HIPs in the first year of college (Keup, 2018). Advising yielded no connections with any HIPs or first-year support structures for private institutions, four-year campuses, and smaller colleges and universities. Further, the only significant connection between advising and HIPs in the constellation of first-year programs and initiatives at large campuses, public institutions, and two-year campuses was with general education.

These results with national data indicate that, generally, advising is not intentionally and meaningfully integrated with HIPs, at least within the first year. Thus, advising is not fully leveraging its best-practice potential to set a precedent for collegiate engagement in HIPs for all students and to create pathways to those practices for "at-promise" students.

Conclusions and Implications

This brief identifies and integrates the current scholarship, theory, and practical approaches linking advising to participation in HIPs. However, it also illustrates the gaps in this body of work and is a clarion call for researchers, advisors, and campus leaders to pay greater attention to

advising as a gateway to HIPs and to advisors as critical advocates for equitable participation among all students. This is particularly true for those students who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in higher education.

With respect to campus practices, an obvious answer to the problem of inequitable access to HIPs is to work with key campus constituencies with the power and potential to make participation in high-impact practices more widespread and available to all students. Advising is a vital pathway to more equitable student participation in HIPs. Through advising, students must be encouraged to participate in HIPs and see how their participation is relevant to their major, career goals and purpose, and to their overall development and success. Intentional efforts must be made to overcome the primary barriers to engagement in HIPs outlined in this research brief and to proactively consider what new challenges could arise for incoming cohorts and generations of students. These efforts require systemic change on several fronts.

First, students must be ushered toward HIPs with greater intention, whether through curricular requirements in general education or the major, incentives for engagement, or a perceived institutional expectation and full support of their participation in these activities. Second, we need to reconceptualize advising as a form of student advocacy, which includes advisors' support of an equitable pipeline to participation in HIPs. This shift very likely will require a reexamination of job descriptions, training methods, standards for performance, and reward and promotion for advisors on institutional and profession-wide levels. Third, colleges and universities need to consider the role of advising within an ecosystem of student support. While there is ample theoretical support for this approach, campus practices often fall short of true integration of advising into other student support and experiential learning.

This work also has implications for future research. For instance, more scholarship is needed to test the theoretical connections between advising and equitable participation in HIPs, especially with national data sets. Additionally, a more robust empirical foundation is needed to further document the differential pathways and impact on students from a wide range of identity areas to and through HIPs, and the role of advisors in that process. Qualitative data collection methods could best capture students' perspectives about aspects of advising that helped them get into HIPs. Finally, a diversity of methods is needed to fully capture the experiences of students from historically underserved and underrepresented communities in their advising experiences and in HIPs. Qualitative and quantitative data and methods will allow a fuller, more informative picture of the relationship between advising and HIPs and indicate how to leverage that connection for more equitable involvement and impact for students in those experiences.

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