



RESEARCH BRIEFS

Mapping High-Impact Practices to Advising

Advancing the Study of Advising and HIPs: Next Steps

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While academic advising has gained widespread prominence in higher education, it has yet to fully realize its potential as a promising practice for student learning, development, equity, and success. In part, this limitation is a result of outdated yet persistent models for and beliefs about advising as a transactional practice, rather than as a holistic approach that

- is a "'bright star' in the integrated constellation of student supports at an institution;"
- is inclusive of "academic, career, and personal goals," and;
- attends to issues of financial, emotional, and interpersonal well-being as well as academic success (Advising Success Network, n.d., ASN definitions section; Karp et al., 2021).

Further, in an era of socio-political tensions, racial violence, and attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion, advising often provides a safe space where students' lived experiences and "stories" are told and heard. This is especially true for students who historically have been marginalized in higher education, such as low-income, Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and first-generation students (Harper, 2009; PASS, n.d.; Young & Bunting, 2024). Scholarly and practical literature on high-impact practices (HIPs) offers a valuable framework to elevate advising as a tool for student learning, equity, and success.

As the basis for this research brief series, HIPs are defined as "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). More specifically, in its seminal work on this topic, AAC&U designated 11 experiential learning activities as HIPs:

- A. first-year seminars and experiences
- B. common intellectual experiences
- C. learning communities
- D. writing-intensive courses
- E. collaborative assignments and projects
- F. ePortfolios
- G. service-learning/community-based learning
- H. diversity and global learning
- I. undergraduate research
- J. internships
- K. capstone experiences and projects (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008).

HIPs have provided a widespread conceptual framework to help organize institutional interventions for student success; understand student learning; measure the quality of an undergraduate experience; engage historically underserved student populations; and ground research on student learning, development, transition, success, and equity.

Clarification by scholars and practitioners of the key components that make HIPs so effective has helped significantly advance the conversation around these initiatives. Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) built upon earlier work to identify eight conditions common across HIPs that facilitate their effectiveness (Keup & Young, 2018). With a clearer understanding of the pathway from practice to results, these guiding principles became the framework for HIPs' development, scalable delivery, and evaluation. They also established the foundation to consider how the conditions of HIPs "can be adapted and incorporated into any teaching and learning situation inside or outside the classroom to promote higher levels of student performance," engagement, and success (Brownell & Swaner, 2010, p. 11).

Advising is a prime example of one such teaching and learning situation that shows initial evidence of strong relationships with HIPs. As leaders in this conversation about holistic advising and HIPs, principals at the Center for Postsecondary Research, home of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition studied these relationships in depth. They used existing national data and were guided by the principles of the Advising Success Network (ASN), which have provided the foundation for this research brief series.

More specifically, the aim of these four research briefs is to examine and interrogate the theoretical, scholarly, and practical connections between advising and high-impact practices. The briefs draw from existing data collected via recent administration of the NSSE by the Center for Postsecondary Research (at Indiana University) and evidence drawn from the suite of surveys administered by the National Resource Center (at the University of South Carolina) on first-year experiences, sophomore-year initiatives, and capstone experiences. These data were organized and analyzed with a particular lens focused on exploring the relationships between advising and HIPs, based on the following topics:

- examining evidence of advising as a HIP;
- describing advising in the context of existing HIPs, and;
- exploring the role of advising as a vehicle, or pathway, for equitable participation in and outcomes of HIPs.

These three topical analyses yielded important considerations and conclusions as well as implications for current practices in advising, teaching and learning, experiential education, student transitions into and through higher education, and student success. However, they also revealed numerous areas in which more research is needed to advance the line of inquiry around advising, HIPs, and the connections between these two constructs. This final installment in the research brief series will address these gaps in the literature to suggest a research agenda on this topic and chart next steps in higher education scholarship and practice.

Refining Definitions and Clarifying Advising Roles

One goal of this work is to advance the understanding of HIPs and include advising as a recognized learning experience therein. The first research brief advanced the argument that advising exemplifies many key characteristics of HIPs, illustrates areas where more evidence is needed, and discusses a research agenda to fill these gaps. However, the work undertaken for this series of briefs is not just about adding to the collection of HIPs. These findings also show a need to refine how we operationalize advising in scholarship and practice, as well as modify our understanding of advising.

As noted throughout this series, advising has evolved beyond transactional services to more holistic support encompassing academic, career, financial, and personal development. In addition, these findings support the notion that comprehensive advising needs to "meet the individual needs of a diverse student population" (Karp et al., 2021, p. 14) and that it has the potential to offer differentially positive impact for historically underserved and underrepresented students. Further, the Advising Success Network defines advising as "encompassing more than the student interaction, to also include the structure and operations of academic advising; the roles and responsibilities of primary-role and faculty advisors; and advising pedagogies, approaches, and models" (ASN, n.d., ASN definitions section).

Thus, we conclude that the working definition of advising must be broad, inclusive, and systemic. Although studies of advising are expanding to explore a greater range of roles and types, most research, and particularly studies using national data, still define the practice in a rather rudimentary manner. Most often, research studies default to conceptualizing this practice as solely focused on academic advising, while limiting the range of advising responsibilities to a set of traditional and transactional activities. Broader considerations of developmental advising, career advising, and financial and personal advising tend to be the exception in these studies, yet they are becoming more the norm in the theory and expectation of advising practice. Research approaches must consider and interrogate the more nuanced areas of advising and stop treating it as a single monolithic category in surveys, protocols, and analyses.

The need for definitional clarity in scholarly literature is also true for a wider range of advising activities that introduce new roles and responsibilities. Research has begun, to a degree, to acknowledge and address models that include faculty advisors in addition to primary-role advisors, as well as to examine the various partnerships between the two. However, much like the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide on Effective Advising for Postsecondary Students articulates, a need to "clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the different staff delivering student supports," empirical studies need to follow suit (Karp et al., 2021, p. 16). There is less empirical evidence that includes and examines advising approaches such as coaching, mentoring, peer learning,

early alert, support for academic recovery, and supervisors for internships.

Further, in the wake of COVID-19 and with the inclusion of AI-infused practices in higher education, it is critical that research examine and differentiate various media for advising, including virtual and chatbot-based approaches, along with greater use of technology-supported nudges, and online tools for advising practices such as course selection, major exploration, career consideration, academic progression, degree progress, and graduation requirements.

To address these areas of need in future scholarly work on advising and HIPs, researchers might want to consider the following actions in pursuit of a scholarly agenda:

- Acknowledge the implications of a traditionally narrow definition of advising in the “limitations” section of current scholarly work and as an area of further exploration in the “future directions” section.
- Expand the bank of items on questionnaires to capture the wide range of advising focus areas (e.g., academic, career, financial, personal), advising roles, and various technological tools and platforms used within advising practice, especially as they relate to the characteristics and outcomes of advising as a high-impact practice and in high-impact practices.
- Design studies that examine the differential, comparative, combined, and interactive impact of advising focus areas, roles, and media to advance the field.

Evolution of Advising

Another area for consideration in future scholarship on advising and HIPs is the evolving role of advisors. One instance of this evolution concerns the movement from advising focused on transactions and compliance, to holistic and developmental advising approaches that support the entire student experience. In another example and as noted earlier in this brief, the wider range of titles and positions around advising, which include faculty, primary-role advisors, peers, internship supervisors, and informal advisors, comprise one more aspect of this evolution. The second and third briefs in this series further investigate two other key aspects of advisors’ changing nature, including (a) the role of advising in supporting students in HIPs and (b) advising as a pathway to these vital opportunities for experiential learning.

The second research brief highlights how advisors’ role changes based on the type of HIPs students are engaging with and over the course of their undergraduate trajectory. For example, first-year students are likely to rely on primary-role advisors for academic support, course selection, major consideration and selection, and to assist them in their transition to the institution. Other key personnel often serve as formal or informal advisors during this time, as students engage in first-year seminars and experiences. Roles for

advisors can include seminar instructors, peers in residential mentor and orientation leader positions, academic librarians, and faculty teaching general education courses.

As students advance through their undergraduate experience, they are more likely to engage in study abroad programs, undergraduate research, community service, and internships, each of which have their own staff and faculty representatives who serve in some type of coaching, mentoring, supervising, and/or advising capacity. Students in their final year of the baccalaureate will often have some form of curricular, co-curricular, or major-/career-based capstone or culminating experience that requires oversight and assessment of their work, offering yet another opportunity for advisement. As such, advising does not remain static for students during their undergraduate careers, and their engagement in HIPs often determines the type of advising role and relationship they require.

The third research brief introduces a different type of evolution of the advisor role and function: as advocates for equitable student success. While previous conceptualizations considered advisors as support for and partners in student success, we now are seeing them serve as (a) champions for student engagement, encouraging students’ involvement and success in HIPs, and (b) proponents of equitable student outcomes. Again, we see a call in the best-practice literature to “design comprehensive advising to meet the individual needs of a diverse student population” (Karp et al., 2021, p. 14), but the research has not yet caught up with this call. As noted in the third brief, the base of empirical work on advising as an equitable pathway to HIPs and their positive outcomes is the least developed area of the three topics explored in this series and needs more attention in future scholarly work. This is especially critical as we see other efforts toward equity and inclusion coming under attack in higher education, making the role of advisors as advocates for equitable engagement in HIPs and the outcomes of those practices even more critical.

To address these gaps in the research on the evolving role of advisors, scholars would do well to consider the following points in future empirical work:

- Exploring the role of advising in association with HIPs can be done by (a) incorporating a broad understanding of who is offering advisement in each high-impact experience, (b) describing advising practice in depth, and (c) specifying the range of advising roles particular to each HIP. For example, the role of advising students in two popular HIPs—internships and undergraduate research—might incorporate similar and unique advising functions and practices worth studying further.
- Describing and interrogating the role of advocacy in advising responsibilities and activities will fill a gap in the current scholarly literature.

- Examining the connection between advising and equity-based student experiences and outcomes, particularly with respect to HIPs as a vehicle for equity and student success, is a high priority for future research in the current higher education environment. Understanding the extent that advising practice facilitates students' access to and success in HIPs is a critical indicator of advances in equitable advising practice.

Including Various Methods and Methodologies

So many of the new directions for research mentioned throughout this series require greater attention to analytical approaches, methods, and methodologies. In other words, we need to address how we study advising and HIPs in addition to expanding the research agenda on these topics. As noted, these changes include:

- improving the definitions and developing more complex variables for advising in their examination with HIPs and impact on student success outcomes;
- creating a larger bank of variables to capture the range of advising focus areas, roles, and media;
- examining advising and HIPs using more sophisticated methodologies beyond descriptive and inferential studies to explore comparative effects and differential pathways, as well as combined and interactive impacts;
- accounting for a wider range of student characteristics in analyses to capture the diversity of student experiences with and outcomes of advising and HIPs and to highlight equity effects. These approaches should include identity areas that are not always visible and might be considered concealed stigmatized identities (e.g., students who are first-generation, low-income, veterans, or LGBTQ+, those who have dependents, or those who possess learning differences or mental health issues (Busch et al., 2024)), and;
- employing more complex quantitative methods to examine pathways, compare student experiences, disaggregate student identities, address equity considerations, and consider advising as a component of systemic approaches and institutional ecosystems of student support.

Additionally, there is a need to engage different methods and methodologies to research questions focused on advising, HIPs, and the relationships between them. The need for better survey items, national data sets, and more sophisticated quantitative methodologies is noted above. These methods also need to consider advising not only as an individual practice, but as one component in an integrated, comprehensive system of student learning, development, and success. As noted in the third research brief, many current theories feature advising as one element of a complex

institutional ecosystem of student support. These theories need to be empirically tested in future research studies, especially with multi-institution and national data sets.

In addition to these advancements in quantitative methods, it is important to also highlight the need for qualitative approaches to capture lived experiences of students and advisors and advance our understanding of advising—as a high-impact practice, in HIPs, and as a gateway to HIPs in future research. Student experiences in advising and HIPs are highly personalized and might benefit from the greater nuance of qualitative methods used in combination with analyses of quantitative data. Additionally, new advising approaches, especially those that engage technology tools and platforms, could introduce new sources of data. Hit rates for nudges, interactions with chat bots, duration of online sessions, posts and connections in early alert systems, and posts in chat sidebars of online advising media offer potential new data sources and the foundation for novel analytical approaches.

Finally, the focus of research on advising and HIPs has overwhelmingly been at the student level, with some data collected at the program level. There remains untapped potential for understanding the advisor as the unit of analysis in future scholarly efforts. This approach might be especially useful as researchers begin to incorporate more complex and diverse definitions for advisors and acknowledge and examine the wide range of advising approaches, roles, entry points, and outcomes, particularly with respect to HIPs.

In sum, the future research agenda needs a diversity of analytical approaches. Considerations should include:

- increasingly complex quantitative methods and analytical approaches that include more national data sets, a wider range of variables to operationalize the practice and focus of advising, analysis of advising at different time points in students' undergraduate trajectory, and disaggregated and comparative analyses to capture the differential experiences and impact for a wide range of student identities;
- greater consideration of qualitative and mixed methods in the study of advising, including new data sources and formats captured by technology-supported advising approaches and tools, and;
- capitalizing upon advisors themselves as a rich source of data and a unit of analysis in future scholarship.

Conclusion

The topical briefs in this series have explored a range of novel connections between advising and high-impact practices. The first brief offers additional empirical evidence of advising as a HIP, demonstrating how advising can be transformative in undergraduate education. This evidentiary brief offers a strong case for classifying advising as a HIP, yet it also reveals shortcomings in advising practice that deserve more attention in professional advising networks.

The second and third briefs frame advising as essential to effective student participation and success in HIPs and also as a path to ensuring greater student involvement and equitable participation in HIPs. These briefs primarily highlight the practical implications for enhancing the relationship between advising and HIPs. This fourth and final brief draws scholarly conclusions and suggestions for research.

It is our hope that by outlining the body of evidence and framing the rationale for the relationship between advising and HIPs, we can inspire deeper research on the topic that will elevate advising for its central role in fostering equitable learning and student success while also amplifying its role. In doing so, we hope to ensure HIPs are made more widespread and effective for promoting student learning for all.

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