On Professionalization Through Scholarship: A Conversation with Dr. Leigh Shaffer (1947-2017)

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Abstract: Craig M. McGill interviews the late Leigh Shaffer on the professionalization of academic advising and his contributions to the field. Shaffer responds to critiques of his work and how he sees the field needing to increase its scholarly base in order to move towards professionalization.

Keywords: academic advising, professionalization

Although fields such as medicine, theology, and law have held the status of "profession" for hundreds of years, newer emerging fields hoping to gain more respect and influence have more recently sought to attain this revered status and a societal seal of approval (Abbott & Meerabeau, 1998). The fact that various occupations have sought to gain professional status should not be surprising. A great deal is at stake for people working in areas that have not yet been *deemed* a profession because "professionals wield great power in determining what goes on in our society" (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 218). Marginalized and/or misunderstood fields face obstacles in vying for resources to which established fields have access. Professionalizing an occupation is one means to improve reputation and public understanding of that occupation's work (Cervero, 1992).

Nine years ago, the article "The Professionalization of Academic Advising: Where Are We in 2010?" (Shaffer, Zalewski, & Leveille, 2010) changed the way the field of academic advising discussed its professional trajectory. Leigh Shaffer and his colleagues applied sociological theories examining how various occupations became professions to the case of academic advising. In particular, the authors built on Wilensky's (1964) framework delineating four stages of professionalization: creating occupations, establishing schools, forming associations, and ratifying codes. Although the authors find that academic advising shows characteristics of all four stages, they note an important anomaly: The chartering of NACADA (stage three) predated the establishment of schools and a body of scholarly knowledge (stage two). Although non-sequential order of

these stages was not unprecedented in Wilensky's study, when professionalization runs rampant before a clear establishment of a scholarly base, the results are not always favorable. Thus, Shaffer et al. (2010) urged scholars and practitioners to note this disparity: An active professional association guides practice on a national level, yet there is insufficient scholarship to deem academic advising an academic discipline, field of inquiry, and profession. Without a standard knowledge-base to define the discipline, academic advising faced obstacles in its quest to professionalization and was missing important benchmarks to be considered a profession.

Although conversations about professionalizing the field have taken place since the publication of the first issue of the *NACADA Journal* in 1981 (McGill, in press), Shaffer et al.'s article struck a chord. On one side, practitioners were excited about moving the field forward. To them, this article was a breath of fresh air, a way to evaluate their status, and something that explicitly said, "We have work to do to let our stakeholders understand the value of our roles." On the other side, practitioners felt defensive, offended at the suggestion that the important work they were doing was not considered "professional" (McGill, 2018).

The article also changed the trajectory of my own academic career. I felt like an undervalued adviser. I knew I was doing important work with the students I was seeing. However, there was something missing. Why did I feel lesser than compared to my faculty colleagues? Why was I encountering so many students who would, before getting to know me, first come to me thinking my main role was getting them enrolled in their next semester's classes? Why was I spending so much energy trying to change student, faculty, and administrator perspectives about the work my advising colleagues and I were doing? The article cued me into some possible reasons and, a few years later, became the basis for my dissertation work. My forthcoming *NACADA Journal* article's title directly references their article's title.

What follows are experts from an interview with Leigh Shaffer I conducted at the NACADA Annual Conference in 2014. Although I had interviewed him for my dissertation, given my personal and professional regard for him, the interview went beyond my prepared questions. In addition to the above discussed article on professionalization, it is worth noting that he is the most published author in the *NACADA Journal* (11 articles) and produced a cumulative index of the second half of the *NACADA Journal* (Shaffer, 2010). So, he was arguably one of the most knowledgeable individuals of our time on academic advising scholarship. As someone passionate about teaching, developing young scholars, and the work we do in advising—whether full-time or part-time in our positions, as faculty or primary-role advisers—his eloquent words and articulate thoughts convey more than a summary ever could. Thus, I include his words and thoughts during our interview at length below.

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McGill: You've written a lot about professionalization, but if you could indulge me, how would you define a profession?[1]

Shaffer: A profession is an occupation that's distinguished by the degree of skill and special knowledge that people have to have, and ordinarily that skill and special knowledge comes with credentials so people on the outside know the people have the goods and they can trust them for the services they are going to have from them. Essentially, a profession comes together when there is a specialized body of knowledge that needs to be transmitted so new people can be up to speed and deliver state of the art performance in whatever their particular area would be. So typically, from an educational point of view, that means there is a curriculum. They have to demonstrate mastery of that curriculum. Can be a certificate. Often times it's a degree. Then, there is the expectation that over the lifetime of working, the person will maintain that level of mastery over the field. So, whatever the current state of the art is, and the current understanding of things, they'll continue to practice and not lose track or be behind it. When you get a profession organized from a sociological point of view, ordinarily there then becomes some kind of a group that looks at the issues of standards and does something about being able to continue to license or certify people. As that develops, it has as much to do with the legalities of things than anything else people are charging for their services, and ordinarily, the government wants to be sure people are getting what they are paying for and what they're expecting. The biggest thing about a profession—just simply from an intellectual point of view—is it's an advanced body of knowledge a person is at some point brought up to speed with, and then continues to practice. Whether or not that person also becomes a discoverer or an inventor or someone who contributes to that literature is a real variable. In every field like medicine, nursing, and so forth there is usually a very small number of people who contribute all of the new knowledge and most of the people simply become acquainted with that knowledge and use it in their practice. So, the research and development, discovery part and the application part can be different people, and often times it's not an equal balance in individuals' careers, but both of those is expected if the profession's going to grow, and so there is going to be somebody to grow it, and normally those folks are from within. In my intro class, the thing students would normally think

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[1] Portions of this interview have been edited for length and clarity.

of first in terms of a profession is it's just somebody who is making their living from this, professional golfers and things of that sort. So, we usually talk about the distinction between "the professions," as they are understood in the academic world and *that* meaning of the term.

McGill: In some of the models and frameworks of professionalization I've studied, an important part in defining the field or profession is to have a common understanding among its practitioners about the field's essence. So, what is the essence of academic advising?

Shaffer: There is a biblical concept that always comes to my mind. It's the paraclete. Paraclete is the Greek word in the New Testament that's used to describe the Holy Spirit, and in literal Greek means "one who is called alongside to help." And I think of an academic adviser as that. The challenge for academic advisers is what students need help with can be so wide and varied. This can encompass a whole toolkit in terms of skills, depending on whether what a particular student is saying is difficult. Additionally, in some translations in the New Testament, Paraclete is translated as "advocate," which suggests somebody who represents in a court of law. In some ways, that's also inherent for an academic adviser. When my students are in trouble or afraid they are going to be in trouble for academic standing or they violated university policy or something of that sort, then my feeling is they need somebody who can help them to stand up for themselves and sometimes they've done wrong and they need to take their medicine, but somebody needs to be on the campus to stand for them. That's always been one of the distinctive things about being an academic adviser, but yet it doesn't come out to the forefront. It's just one of those things you deal with when the students present themselves with that kind of a need.

McGill: You mentioned advisers need to be prepared to respond to the varied needs of students. What do academic advisers need to know to perform their work?

Shaffer: I think of an academic adviser as being like a knowledge or culture broker: they can bring knowledge communities together. I think of the disciplinary thing as being something that everybody, no matter where they started in the academy, will have something distinctive they can bring to it. Now down the road, if we think about trying to professionalize the field to the point where it is recognized outside as a profession, I think there is going to be a body of knowledge

and set of skills that will basically be agreed upon that somebody ought to, formally, become acquainted with. But they have more to do with the tasks of advising on the one hand, and the ability then to work with the student and bring them in touch with all of the other people and all of the other experiences a college campus has to offer to help to bring them out, to get a vision for who they are and what they are going to be when they graduate, and help them figure out how to develop those skills. I don't think of this as being a narrow thing. I can imagine having an academic advising staff of people from all kinds of different backgrounds, who bring all kinds of rich and interesting things to what they do. People have different styles, but after that we all got to know our basic academic policies. But in terms of philosophy of how to work with students and envision how to help them understand themselves and their situation and help them to develop some vision about the future, there are all kinds of ways people can go about doing it.

McGill: In thinking about how our field compares to other similar fields, what fields inform academic advising?

Schaffer: If I were looking forward toward the future about a curriculum for a degree program in academic advising, I could see lots of disciplines contributing to that, not just one. I don't think from a theory point of view you have to have one specific way of looking at things. People can bring lots of different examples to it. I brought a little article from AAT [*Academic Advising Today*] that I am going to photocopy and hand out Friday at my talk. A woman who's working in graphic arts and is talking about the transferable skills a person develops within an art curriculum. She talks in the introduction to this article about both students and parents talking "What can you do with a degree in X…etc.?" And so she talks here about the kinds of abilities and skills and special knowledge an artist has to have to be successful that are also transferrable to many different kinds of workplaces, and indeed even if people started out with a very good academic curriculum in business, they still stand to profit from these kinds of things when they got into the workforce. I can't think of any field in a college or university in the United States that's useless, and if that's true for our undergraduates, it's also true for academic advisers. So whatever people majored in, irrespective of whether they ultimately picked up the NACADA certificate or degree program, there's still inherent value in what they studied, and what they can bring from that field to make them different and maybe why some people

would learn more and get more from working with you than they would with me.

McGill: Part of thinking about a unified profession is thinking about the standard and operational roles professionals within that profession do. Are there specific roles academic advisers play that are unique to advising?

Shaffer: When I look at what I've read about the history of academic advising, the articles that have been published in the *Journal* the last decade or so, academic advising has been reinvented independently at many institutions over the years but the one thing that's common all the way through is the helping people make decisions part. And the question of decisions about what have multiplied over the years. And that's where the challenge of being up to help students really grows. Because some of these questions are simply curricular. Some are really intellectual. Some are truly developmental in the sense that the student, after two or three years, is a different person. They've really grown. And so I'm not talking to really the same person any longer that I was talking to two years ago. I need to talk with them differently, because they are a different person. The one distinctive that's caused the adviser role to keep being reinvented is people have to make decisions. If I think of that as the issue, then helping people make good decisions has to do with content, decisions about what, and do you know what you need to know in order not to do self-defeating things. Or it has to do with self-understanding: "Am I really aware of myself, of my future, and aware of some of the consequences and some of the decisions I'm thinking about making." That's more of an exploration of the person and how much the person has explored themselves. The distinctive thing is I'm called alongside to help people make choices, and I need to find out a lot about them as well as a lot about the information going into those choices.

The concept of knowledge worker is a good one to talk about academic advisers, because knowledge workers are lifelong informal learners, and they grow themselves, and they see growing themselves as something they not only need to do, but also as something they want to do, and part of their self-definition. When I talked to students about graduate school and say ok, "I am going to ask you a tough question. What have you read lately that somebody didn't assign to you?" If you don't have any interest outside of what somebody does to you in a classroom, and if you don't read anything, assign yourself some homework. "You don't

want to go off into these other fields because we need people who are self-motivated." The nice thing about being in an academic environment is I got a library. I got access to all these great databases. I now have all these amazing tools, even on little devices like this where I can go off and search the world and find this stuff in nanoseconds. The world is now mine. So, I am reading lots of stuff I have assigned to myself. Well, academic advisers can grow that way, too. If you think about the history of NACADA, it's that kind of an organization. These were people who came, were doing it conscientiously, and said, "I got together with other folks who are doing this conscientiously too. They'd have all kinds of great ideas I'd love to know about, that I can incorporate at least some of in the things I do." And they started an organization so they can share these things. It started out as a newsletter, the *NACADA Journal*, before it became a formal journal. That's the essence of it. They were knowledge workers, and they didn't have to have a certificate, and they didn't have to have a degree. They just, "I want to do this. I want to do this well. I don't know how to do this."

McGill: With the development of graduate programs like the one at Kansas State, there has been some discussion about an emerging graduate curriculum for academic advising. In thinking about academic advising as an emerging academic discipline (see Kuhn and Padak, 2008), should there be a distinct program of study for academic advisers? If so, how would that look?

Shaffer: The degree program would have coursework and experiences to make somebody have the background of a scholar to be able to do research, write it up, publish it, talk about it, teach it, and those things could indeed be in a curriculum. If we were thinking in that vein, it makes sense to me that there should be a master's program. It would really look very, very different. So many master's of education courses and programs in the twentieth century were modeled on the non-thesis approach. No. No. No. No. If somebody is going to be a scholar, they've got to write. You got to go through your apprenticeship of learning how to write. Hopefully your major adviser for a master's thesis is somebody who is good at mentoring writing and thinking as well. And ironically, it wouldn't necessarily have to look like something specifically academic advising. It could be more generic, and it could even be housed in different kinds of places. The scholarly part would be a part of that degree program, because I'm not just certifying an academic practitioner. I am credentialing somebody who is going to be a

scholar in the field, and that's a whole different ballgame. It would be really different. You know the history of the field would be well worth somebody studying. Of course we've got things we've published over the years in the *Journal* that speak to the history that could be something that could be assigned to part of the course. We've got this certificate. We also got the degree. Besides it just being more hours, how should the degree be different than the certificate? I think it would be on the ability for somebody to become part of the scholarly community and writing and learning how to write and research. And I am not always quantitative. Qualitative is a perfectly valid approach too. People ought to be exposed to both, but have some experience and depth doing something. That would be the biggest change because learning how to do research is something you do as an apprentice. You go hang out with people who do it. And to use an old athletic expression, some things are caught rather than taught. You realize watching these people do their work and listening to them think. You never think to put that into a curriculum to try and write it on the blackboard, but you hang around those folks. I don't know anybody who's a scholar who hasn't been around people who are scholars. You drink it in. It's a different kind of experience.

That's the thing about scholarly work. You go study with somebody who's doing it, not somebody who's just teaching a course in it. You see how they do it. You listen to their thought process and how this all goes together, all the zillions of stories academic people have about all the things they've done in their careers. It begins to soak in, and it begins to change you. Some things are conscious enough you can articulate them, and others are more unconscious you unpack later on in your life. That's what folks really need. When we are thinking about growing the field—whether we think in disciplinary terms or growing as a profession—somebody has got to grow the knowledgebase. And what we are dealing with now is we have lots and lots of folks who are interested in advising, but they don't have the background you really need over a career to grow the base. I don't think there is just one background that is appropriate to that, but we need to get people to recognize that to conduct the research and to do scholarly things.

The word "research," in my vocabulary, is the old fashioned nineteenth century version that includes the time in the library, the thinking, the writing, as well as going out and collecting data. When I taught methods, what I fought my students a little bit with

is, this isn't a recipe: "Here is a formula for cranking out results. You do this research. You test that hypothesis. You do this significance test. And then if your alpha level is sufficiently small, I got a discovery." Yeah, we do some of that. But the real thing is what questions am I asking? What are the appropriate data? How can I get those things to happen? All of that is spent in the library and thinking about the processes, not just turning the crank and collecting data in that way. So, when I say "research," I don't just mean the collecting data part. I am thinking about everything, including the quietly at night reading the books or reading the articles and building up your knowledgebase. That's very much a part of it. The discussion we are having 3 or 4 weeks ago now on the internet about getting ideas for writing for NACADA, I had made one comment about how people weren't reading enough, and that fits here, because, "What do I write about?" Well, when you are a scholar and in scholarly mode, you never think that way. I'm reading and as I am reading I'm saying, "Oh my gosh. There is this. I know this is a valuable piece, because I am now talking about the state of the art. And here is something we don't know in the state of the art. If I discover that or if I can advance it, I know this is worth doing, because I have started at where we are as a field and if I find something that's of value and I do good work, it's going to advance us forward." I don't just say, "What am I writing about?" Well yeah, you can get subject matter that way in content, but you discover a problem, a hypothesis, in the literature. Until you think about it in that context, you don't really have it yet. The "doing your homework" part is the core of research, it never goes out of fashion. It is never replaced by technique, no matter how sophisticated.

The traditional doctoral dissertation has a literature review section in it. Well why is it in there? In some ways, it helps the people who are assessing the growth say, "The writer of this clearly took the time to know the literature on this subject." Turn around the other way. Besides just showing that you did the homework, you hope the person when they are doing it realizes, "Wow, if I hadn't done this homework, I couldn't have done this study. I wouldn't even know to ask the question." This little piece and how we do this piece is the most transferrable skill in the whole dissertation exercise, and that's what you are going to be doing again and again and again. And you are going to be doing it again and again because it's how you'll get to the point where you'll have something that's worth writing about or something worth collecting data about. If you don't like doing that, you don't ever

want to do it again, there should be some red flags going up and saying, "Maybe I'm going in the wrong direction because this is what people do." That's what a degree program needs to have because if we are talking about a practitioner who's never going to be a contributor to the field in that way, what's in the certificate program is probably sufficient. As long as they are lifelong learners and they are going to continue to read what's there so they aren't practicing the way we did 20 years ago, they are going to have the content base for doing what they do well, but if we are going to build a degree program, it really ought to have the skills that are going to be necessary to build a scholarly field, it's the scholarly skills.

McGill: Many in the field think about the scholars and practitioners as being two different things when probably you and I would agree they are not two different things.

Shaffer: They shouldn't be.

McGill: Would it be your belief practicing academic advisers should all be reading and writing as well?

Shaffer: As long as people are writing when they have something to contribute, I am fine with that. If they are writing because "I've got an administrative protocol that says in five years I would have published two articles in refereed scholarly journals," no. If you are growing as a professional and you are moving into mid-career, you ought to have something you can turn around and pass onto a younger generation that isn't just what you yourself learned 20 years ago when you were their age. It should be your own. And what I like about the way NACADA has gone in its publications approach in the last decade when I've really been active is now we have the *Clearinghouse*. We have *AAT*. We have the *NACADA Journal*. There are certainly other academic journals out there for people who are jumping in and starting up the process. There is a place for them to get something out there and also in a CV-sense get some credit for doing that as they go along. I usually say this at the "writing for NACADA presentations": If you think about "how do I jump in?" jump into the *Clearinghouse* and find something that's of interest. And then when was that deposited in there? 10 years ago? Well why don't you update it? Bring it up to speed? That's step one. And now you have something for which to think about the step. It's a place where the literature review can actually be a contribution and be creditable out there.

What we used to do in the social sciences was present the project at a local or regional or national convention. Then we'd write it up for publication after we got some feedback on it, and then we'd move in that direction. But every step there would be something you could document. It wasn't that you didn't have anything until the finished product got published from year to year. There is a cumulative paper trail. Somebody can start off, "I want to write for the *NACADA Journal*." Well great, do some homework and chances are that will be publishable in the *Clearinghouse*. And then start thinking, "I can try this in my practice." If it's working and you think it would be shareable, something that could be an *AAT* publication or that could be presented at a regional conference, if not the national conference. Then grow it to the point where it's an original contribution to literature, and then the *Journal* would be glad to take a look at it. It's not like you didn't have anything until the *NACADA Journal* said "yes." You can have a cumulative record of growth doing all that thing. It's actually natural. It's the organic way in which really good ideas come about. So, I'd like to see any practitioner be able to contribute to the *Clearinghouse*, because there is always new stuff as well as stuff to bring up to date.

The concept most people are missing is the transferrable skills from all the academic disciplines for people doing academic advising. When we are doing academic advising, teaching our students about the notion of transferrable skills is a way of beginning to open the window on their future. "You like this and you are studying this, but you're not necessarily going to graduate school in this, not a problem. Let's find out what you are learning to do and what special knowledge you have that most people don't, and let's begin to try and see if we can identify places in the workforce where those things will be of value, and people will be looking for those kinds of things." Now we are starting to discuss career advising and not just academic advising. That's what my approach is all about.

McGill: With the advent of the Theory, Philosophy & History of Advising commission (now community), there has been a lot of discussion about theory and its role in the professionalization of academic advising. How do you view this issue? Does theory contribute to the professionalization of advising?

Shaffer: In his article, Marc Lowenstein (2014) is talking about an approach toward defining what theory for academic advising should be. My

understanding of what he was saying was the way social scientists and scientists use the word "theory" doesn't lend itself to one common thing. But if you look at how people in the humanities use the word "theory," they use it more *pre*scriptively. And he said we can have a theory of academic advising if we develop it into a more *pre*scriptive thing: What should academic advising be? What should academic advisers do? Then he outlined aspects that would go into such a theory. To me, that makes a good deal of sense. It goes back to your original questions about what is distinctive about academic advising? It would be flushing that out in terms of a vision, of vocabulary people could adopt no matter what institution or particular job description they are getting in academic advising. If we went *that* way, then there could be *a theory*. If we are thinking in terms of the social sciences, there are multiple theories. There are theories *of*. We have a theory of this phenomenon and how it works and how we can apply it. No there wouldn't be any *one* theory. There would be all kinds of theories. I draw on personality theory and I draw on a lot of theories from social psychology for things I contribute. They would be micro level theories. They'd be theories of specific things and specific issues. So, my human capital approach is socioeconomic theory, and saying, "Gee, if people are thinking about investing in a college education as a platform for success in the workforce, this is the way to think about it." It's the way people in business think about it. It's the way economists think about it. So, you ought to know the terminology and have a sense of how they value things, and that's what I did. It's not to supplant all of these others, all of these things in the approaches book NACADA just published. Mine isn't in there, so I'm not saying this is the one and they are all wrong. No. No. No. It's supplementary. It's another piece. Marc has really hit on an important an issue. If institutions could all agree to—not so much a job description down to the level of that employers have to have for evaluation and assessment of what they do—but in the generic sense of these are the values and these are the outcomes, and the framework that we all agree upon, yeah then theory can be both an important thing to develop and also something that would imminently be a plank in the curriculum that ought to be one of the very first courses somebody in the formal advising curriculum should take.

McGill: There is a debate about whether there is a difference between an advising philosophy and advising theory…

Shaffer: When people talk about theory and talk about philosophy they are starting to include the values questions, which are very appropriate. If somebody would say, "What should advising be?" well, they are asking a question of value as well as a question of philosophy and theory. And I think we should, and I can see a consensus coming if people can articulate themselves well enough. "At least in the minimal sense, these are things we can all agree academic advising should be, and therefore academic advisers should be well-prepared to facilitate." The problem is if you begin to think in terms of *a* theory in the social or natural science sense, then you move into the mutual exclusive thing. And the issue is: "Is academic advising teaching? Or is it coaching?" Well, that's the wrong question. It's thinking about one of these as being the paradigm, and their paradigms are mutually exclusive. They can't all be true, and I just don't think that's the right way to do it. The ironic thing is you could have in Marc's sense, as I understand him, you can have a theory we can all share, and yet, we can all disagree about particular theories like is Erickson's a really good platform for understanding human personality and intellectual development? I can see some limitations and flaws there. To me, some of the most interesting stuff in the 20th century has been Perry and Chickering and people like that who've tried to say, "What is this intellectual life like? What changes happen to students as they are working their way toward a college degree?" It's intellectual changes. It's attitudinal changes. It's development changes in maturation. It's personality changes. It's changes in approach to religion, to politics, and everything else under the sun. All those kinds of changes can and do happen are really fascinating things, and now you understand it well enough to try to facilitate it is really a fascinating thing. We keep working on that for a very long time, and still have some differences about it, and yet we can probably work toward a point where we can have a consensus about what *should* academic advising be. So whatever terminology we try to settle on, I tend to think of theory as having too much baggage to facilitate that discussion, frankly. From what I know from just hanging out with folks who are really active in the theory sub-section of NACADA, that's what animates them. Peter Hagen is that kind of a thinker. Boy, talk about depth. You want to listen to Peter, because he is a really thoughtful, as well as brilliant mind. If that's theory, that's good stuff. That's what we want.

McGill: I'm always sad to see good advisers leave the field feeling they cannot advance in their advising roles. What are important

considerations for a career ladder for the professionalization of academic advising?

Shaffer: Well, if we think about the adviser as scholar, what you'd like to see is some progression that's cumulative. If you think in a tactical sort a sense: "I'm hired in 2015. I am going to be evaluated in a really formal way in 2020. So people are going to look at my CV." You'd like to mentor people in a way you can say, "I want you to really grow intellectually, your skill and special knowledge, but we can think tactically in ways of making those milestones so they can show up on a CV and show you've been doing something other than just sitting there thinking." You can participate in the local, regional, national organizations. You can write for the *Clearinghouse*, for *AAT*, and you'd like to see some cumulative growth so that down the road it might take a while before people can write something to really be appropriate to publish in the *NACADA Journal*, as it's now constituted. You'd like to see people having ways of publishing these other kinds of things. Certainly, there are other journals in related fields like retention, where people are doing things with advising in particular.

The career ladder is not going to be as well defined as career ladders in some of the other professions right away because the profession itself hasn't solidified yet. There is not a ladder like that for academic advising and can't be because of the history. It's something that's been reinvented by every institution historically. On the other hand, you can see cumulative growth, and you'd love to be able to look for evidence of that. There is a cumulative pattern and growth there. Anybody who's a scholar, that's the thing you see and can be done now. It's publication based, and we do have the three levels with the *Clearinghouse*, *AAT*, and the *Journal*. It's not like it's the *Journal* or *nothing*. If you add presentations at the national conference, which are perfectly reasonable scholarly things, you have a lot of ways to document it. That's what I would think of as the closest thing we have to a ladder from the professional thing. You are trying to grow yourself and at the same time trying to grow the field, and you begin to see some things the field has not done before or things you are now learning how to do, and you can sense some value in it, and you'd like to share them. You are out there actively, professionally doing that with the means that are available to you.

McGill: In your article "The Professionalization of Advising in 2010," you identified research as the major missing piece, and you talked

about that today. Is there anything else you want to say about that? Are there any other considerations for us as a field to professionalize?

Shaffer: What's missing is the scholarly base upon which professional practice should be anchored. In my use of the word "research," that's an ok way. But as most people use it, they would misunderstand this to be narrower. Clearly, every article we publish in the *NACADA Journal*—as its mission is currently constituted—would be something that would be in this knowledgebase that people ought to know about. But it's really a knowledgebase as opposed to research, and the literature that's relevant to academic advising isn't just published in academic advising journals. The biggest thing, there is already a lot out there we simply need to access and bring in for our own usage. So, it's the knowledgebase that's missing as opposed to the research, per se. Particularly since most people define research more narrowly as original empirical qualitative or quantitative data collection, and that's a piece, but that's not all there is to it by any means.

There is this knowledgebase out there. If people know how to access it and have it accessible, then grow themselves, they can be knowledge workers. They can be informal workers. "No, I may not ever have had a course in intercultural or multicultural competence, but there is stuff out there. I go find it and read it. In a few days, I will be a little bit up to speed here." And that's what a profession does. We are getting there. When I read Marc's (2014) article, which I really liked, he had taken me to task for the professionalization article, and I think he misread me, because he thought I was talking about theory. No, I'm really not talking about theory. What's missing is the knowledgebase, not so much theory. Particularly, given that I tend to agree with your approach to thinking about how to use the term theory this way, but it's really the knowledgebase. I've never done an original data collection project on foreclosure (see Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011), but I am a competent reader of professional literature in my field. I am a knowledge broker. I can take what only psychologists might otherwise know and turn it around and make it available for academic advisers. I know it's relevant and useful, but academic advisers, even if they had this literally right in front of their eyes, might not recognize immediately that this was of great value because it's not framed in a way that's appropriate.

That's why I was bringing this up in the context of research, because if somebody says I'm saying in a piece that we need research, it's not quite what I am saying. I'm saying we need a scholarly base, some of which needs to be original research because we do need to know what things are effective, what makes them effective. We can't do that without actually investigating that. On the other hand, here's all this other stuff out here for practice that's wonderful grist for our mill, if people just knew it was out there, and let's make it available here. Now hopefully somebody who's read about foreclosure can now do a study. There are empirical tools, paper and pencil measures for judging whether or not you have a foreclosure student in front of you. You can take those that exist—they've never been studied in an advising context—and turn them into a study.

McGill: I found your article on foreclosed students (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011) last year at the perfect time when we were trying to explore this issue we were having… I read your article, and I'm like "Bam! This is it!" I had my colleagues read it and they're like, "Yes! This is it!"

Shaffer: That really encourages me, because it's the kind of thing you hope will happen when you write a piece like that. That's that organic thing… If you've got somebody who's a scholar, and you realize there's a good idea here, there are things you have to overcome. And you have to conceptualize things that were too general to just be immediately applied. Then you still have the institutional things like, not only IRBs, but how many data points do I need to collect to have something to say. How long will it take me to collect those? That's the kind of thing that I, as a person writing an article, hope would come out of that… The piece that you would do would be specific to the field of academic advising, wouldn't just be applying something from another field. That's the way it should happen. The tough part for all of us is, unless you are at a research university, something that is going to take you three to four years to do may be hard to sustain for all kinds of reasons. I hate this phrase, but the "quick and dirty studies" people talk about are often times done, because they are just simply the only things that are doable because somebody is going to be around as long as they are working on a degree, or somebody is going to be juggling this along with all the other things that they have to do. That's how the field will ultimately grow. That's how you get good research ideas, because you thought to do it, because I've situated it in some literature for you, and now you've got a way of asking the

question, and a way of thinking about collecting actual data on it. That's the way professions grow.

The message in our professionalization article was that NACADA was the interesting case of having a professional organization mature and grow and establishing the *Journal* before there was a real definition of the field. What is an academic adviser? What do they do? What should they be doing? Until you have that, there's a real limitation as to how much else you can flesh out. Ordinarily, those developments don't happen until there is already a body of knowledge and a practice that's starting. That was nascent, but now it's becoming something to be reckoned with. And then you begin to need some standardization and some work to distinguish between poor practice and good practice.

It takes a while to grow the level of activity. And the business word people use is "synergy," how one thing begins to make another thing more possible. And that's when you begin to think things are really percolating. When I'm writing something that's enough value that it starts you and your colleague thinking and beginning so this solves a problem and frames an issue and we'd like to take that even a step further and begin to do some research on it, that's the way professions in academic disciplines really work. And one person's writing is not an end in itself; It's something that inspires somebody else to jump in there and say, "Oh, now that you've mentioned that, I'd like to do this. I know about this." Then things really grow. We don't have *that* yet, and the fact that we are having a conversation…

It's a symptom of the fact that we are not there yet. But why are we here? Well, it's because the services academic advisers offer are absolutely crucial. That's the reason the carts run ahead of the horse. If we weren't doing something that was really important, this would have just died out a long time ago. Academic administrators may want to put their thoughts and their resources someplace else, but if all the sudden students weren't getting their advising questions answered, those folks would just be overwhelmed with students in need, complaining and screaming, and calling the president, and calling the board of trustees, local legislators, and all the things people do when they are upset. It's an essential function, so we've been able to run ahead of ourselves because every institution knows we are essential. So, they keep having them even though they underfund it and depend on people's goodwill and willingness and ability to run way ahead of the

resources and the time and the emotional support they need to have. So, it's not going to go away, even if our knowledgebase hasn't grown. When it really starts looking like the right thing, it's going to have the cumulative quality. Somebody's work inspires somebody else's work, and one writer inspires two, two inspire four, four inspire sixteen. The next thing you know, you have one subtopic that's really well thought through, and there is something there for people to study in a formal course.

McGill: That's what happened with your article. I read it and I was like… on the one hand—and there honestly was, and I'm not saying this to stroke your ego—there was a part of me that said, "This article was so good, what could I possibly contribute beyond it?" But another part of me said, "No, this is so interesting, and we are not there yet. So, if we are not there yet, then this is something we got to keep talking about and doing."

Shaffer: Yeah, absolutely. For me again, that's wonderful to hear.

McGill: Can you tell me about the impetus for the article?

Shaffer: If we are thinking about academic advising as a profession or as a discipline—Terry and Gary wrote about it that way (Kuhn & Padak, 2008)—then we need to think about the people who grow the field by growing the basic research. The first time Rich and I were sitting around in NACADA headquarters in Kansas State in 2009, here's the state of the *Journal*. We got an issue that's coming in nine months. We've got maybe one article. How did Gary and Terry keep the ship afloat? Well, they produced all kinds of content. Rich and I are going to have to write some. What can I write about? Well, this is one that's been in the back of my mind for a while. By that time, I had heard first six, seven, eight years all these issues about whether we should have had some licensures. Should we have any accrediting body? NACADA is not supposed to be an accrediting body. Should we have certificates? What do you do with people who've been doing this for 20 years, but haven't gone through this curriculum? Do you grandfather those people? Marsha, the institutional memory of NACADA for most of this will tell us well, this is what happened in 2004, and five and six. All this stuff I never knew. It was one of those things: We need an article. I didn't know what I was going to find either. It's not like I already knew that. If you think about professionalization, that is something I've taught in intro to sociology because sociologists study this process. I'm not an expert on that literature, but I've got

two colleagues who teach that. One teaches sociological theory. One teaches work and organizations. Let me go back and talk to John and Jackie and say, "How about this? Yeah that could be interesting." So, we did our homework and found all this stuff and started sifting it through and, "This is what I am seeing in here. What do you see?" Then we put it together and got it out there. The only reason I could write it was I already knew there was this literature out there and I was a little bit familiar with it. I knew it would be relevant. I could at least say, "Well ok, if this was the way historically most professions have matured, what does that look like in a general sense? What does that tell us about ours? Oh, that was an interesting anomaly."

McGill: Well it's something like adult education and human resource development. There is writing in both fields about this. In fact, in adult education there is quite a bit of controversy about it. There's this guy named John Ohliger, a major scholar in the field who said, we should not professionalize. Professionalizing is against the very nature of what adult education aims to do (Grace & Rocco, 2009). So, there is a pretty interesting debate.

Shaffer: The phrase you sometimes see is an "emerging profession." From a sociological point of view, that is an interesting thing. What's that look like? What's that process? Where can you say that something has crossed from being emerging to being a full-fledged profession? I have read a few papers about different fields like that, and it's that same sort of thing. They are emerging in part because they are conscious it's advantageous to be able to call yourself a profession with some legitimacy. That the old saying, a *de*scription of something desirable becomes a *pre*scription for those who want it. The reason sociologists were interested in professionalization was that the professions had always had a special place, not only in the academy, but also in everyday life. It's clear when people look at their field and they would love to have some of that respect if for nothing else that they get from that. It would be nice to be able to say, "How do we do that?" There isn't a formula. Not a recipe, but there probably are some commonalities there you can at least point out.

The thing about scholarship is… I will say it in a personal way: I didn't get a Ph.D. to *teach* social psychology. I got a Ph.D. to be a social psychologist. And I've never had an appointment in a research university. So, all of my life I've been teaching four courses and three preparations every semester with a few occasions

where I've gotten release time for something else. I had to do this on my own time, above and beyond. Well I did it because it's what I wanted to do. That's why I got into the field. There's an irony about being a tenured faculty member at a non-research university. I can go in all kinds of directions and do all kinds of things of interest, especially with colleagues, that I am free to do, because I don't have to be developing the kind of career Harvard wants to advertise in the field. It's there because that's *me*. When I stop it's going to be because either I've kicked the bucket or I'm too old to cut the mustard anymore. I do that because that's me. You know? And that's what I am looking for and in somebody else. When I see that in somebody else, I'm like, "Wow. That person's got it. That impresses me."

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