
Why Academic Advisers Need Sabbaticals: Support for Scholar-Practitioners

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Abstract: Academic advising leaders have called repeatedly for academic advisers to engage in research to encourage research-informed advising practice and to advance the advising profession. However, most primary role academic advisers have little time, few incentives, and minimal institutional support to pursue the requisite level of scholarly activity. To stimulate such research, I propose sabbatical leave for academic advisers as an essential practice and a direct implication of the scholar-practitioner paradigm. Sabbaticals for academic advisers would be comparable to the semester or academic year leave available to tenure-line faculty. During the sabbatical, academic advisers would pursue advising research and writing, free from advising practice duties. Establishing sabbatical leave would confer multiple benefits. Academic advisers would experience improved advising practice anchored to research and scholarship, and the profession would gain a strengthened practitioner-driven knowledge base. Institutions would find these sabbaticals a valuable resource to attract advising job candidates and to mitigate the primary causes of academic adviser attrition—burnout and lack of recognition. To reap these benefits requires re-imagining academic adviser positions as an intermediate blend of regular faculty and administrative roles. Doing so is needed to create the structural framework to support advising research (including expectations, incentives, and funding) that most primary role adviser positions lack. I conclude with strategies for advisers and advising administrators to implement reformulated positions designed to support advisers as scholar-practitioners.

Keywords: sabbatical leave, scholar-practitioner, adviser retention, advising research, advising role, advising profession

SABBATICALS FOR ACADEMIC ADVISERS

Sabbaticals are a longstanding practice in higher education. While the concept of rest at designated intervals has ancient origins, the first system of sabbatical leaves for university faculty members in the U.S. dates back to the 1880s. With the

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promise of every seventh year off, Harvard president Charles Eliot lured philology professor Charles Lanman to leave Johns Hopkins to join Harvard's faculty. At the close of the nineteenth century, 10 institutions had implemented sabbatical leave programs, and the number increased considerably during the twentieth century. At the time Kenneth Zahorski published his widely-cited faculty manual on sabbaticals, he found over 80% of four-year and 60% of two-year public and private institutions had some form of sabbatical or extended leave programs (1994). As universities formalized faculty development programs, they included sabbatical leaves as a component of these programs. In a standard formulation, faculty become eligible for sabbatical leave after meeting various conditions, the most notable being prior service. Traditionally, faculty become eligible for a sabbatical after six years of service. Sabbaticals usually last at least a semester and can extend for as long as a year. They are designed to provide faculty a respite from the daily duties of college life, particularly those associated with teaching and administrative tasks, in order to stimulate professional and intellectual development (Sorcinelli, 1986). Additionally, institutions granting sabbatical leave expect that proposed sabbatical projects will benefit the institution through stronger programs, an improved learning environment, or an enhanced academic reputation (Zahorski, 1994).

Notably, sabbaticals are not work-free periods. In contrast with non-sabbatical periods where faculty take on multiple commitments that include teaching, administrative tasks, committee work, research, and scholarship, faculty on sabbatical focus on a much narrower range of activities. Freed of other responsibilities, they take the opportunity to research a new area or problem, catch up on and refresh their knowledge of their field, and expand their professional networks. They devote themselves to these activities, dive deeply, and spend the sabbatical period almost exclusively on them (Sorcinelli, 1986, pp. 10–11).

Although sabbaticals are periods of work, faculty consistently cite them as periods of emotional and intellectual renewal. Renewal stems from the reduction of stressors from teaching and administrative responsibilities, that many faculty cite as especially draining (Davidson et al., 2010). Importantly, faculty renewal through sabbatical leave also benefits institutions. Faculty returning from sabbatical renewed and refreshed will improve morale and benefit colleagues and students alike with their energy and enthusiasm.

Despite enthusiastic support and multiple benefits for faculty and institutions alike, sabbatical leave remains almost exclusively available to faculty members. In this article, I make the case that sabbatical leave should not remain the exclusive domain of faculty but should also be available for academic advisers. Based on a scholar-practitioner paradigm, academic advisers ought to be engaged in research and the scholarship of academic advising. Scholarship for academic advisers is essential for strengthening academic advising practice. Additionally, advising leaders have called for academic advisers to engage in research to develop a robust knowledge base as a key element of the academic advising profession. By providing academic advisers an opportunity to plausibly engage in research and scholarship, sabbaticals will enlarge, deepen, and strengthen this resource. While essential for

advising-related research, sabbaticals are also needed to address academic adviser attrition. Around 40% of academic advisers leave the profession within the first five years of entry, and another 20% leave within seven to 10 years (Marshall et al., 2016). This attrition results in tremendous costs, financially and in other ways, for colleges and universities (Anderson et al., 2000). Sabbaticals for academic advisers can serve as a key practice to reduce their attrition by directly addressing its two major factors—burnout and lack of recognition.

ACADEMIC ADVISING RESEARCH INFORMING ADVISING PRACTICE: THE SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONER PARADIGM

One widely-held understanding of the work of academic advisers is that of the scholar-practitioner. Advisers who identify with developmental, learning-centric, and other paradigms share this perspective. A scholar-practitioner is characterized as a professional who, while holding a role as an administrator, as opposed to a faculty member, engages in research and scholarly activities (Kidder, 2010). In the case of academic advisers, combining the “practitioner” and “scholar” roles has a pragmatic emphasis; namely, to apply the insights of scholarship and research to an academic adviser’s work with students (Hatfield & Wise, 2015).

As a brief example, Virginia Gordon is one academic adviser who pioneered this approach. Over the course of her career, Gordon authored scores of journal articles and multiple books on various aspects of academic advising. Gordon’s approach might be characterized as understanding research and advising practice as mutually-supportive activities. Gordon formed a research agenda, starting with her doctoral education, that was drawn from her academic advising practice. Her practice raised questions for which she sought answers through published scholarship. Based on the answers she found in the existing literature, she would modify her advising practice based on what she discovered. Gordon’s searches through the literature often identified areas for further research, which would feed back into her research agenda. In short, she sought to align her research and practice to be mutually informative and supportive (Nguyen et al., 2019).

The scholar-practitioner view has a number of appealing aspects that can benefit individual academic advisers and the profession more broadly. As practitioners, academic advisers can generate unique research questions based on what they encounter from their own practice. Through researching these questions, academic advisers become more likely to access existing scholarship, which supports their advising practice. Research that taps into existing scholarship helps academic advisers expand and deepen their knowledge beyond what can be learned first-hand from students and institutions where they are employed. The connection to research results in a deeper and layered knowledge that can lead to better advising through enhanced skills and knowledge (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Troxel, 2019). Similarly, when conducting assessment of academic advising, taking a theory-and-research-based approach can lead to more reliable and more generalizable results compared with relying on local, campus-specific knowledge, or “gut instinct.”

Furthermore, research leading to publication can enhance not only the prestige of the individual academic adviser, but also does so for the institution (Troxel, 2019).

Scholarship also plays an important role in the identity of academic advising as a profession. There are a number of dimensions, sociologically speaking, for a field to be considered a profession. These include an identifiable full-time occupation, schools to train new recruits, one or more professional associations, and a code of ethics (Shaffer et al., 2010). As a component of training new professionals, advising leaders have focused considerable attention on developing a base of advising scholarship. Scholarship is important for multiple reasons. First, scholarship provides an extensive and standardized knowledge base that advisers can utilize in their professional practice (McGill, 2019a). Second, it provides a definition or boundary for the field; this helps advisers and those outside the field to understand what academic advising is and what it is not. And there are practical implications for determining what advisers should (and should not) be doing in their roles. Indeed, where these boundaries are drawn can further advance the scholar-practitioner view by including scholarship within advisers' purview. Clearer field boundaries may also lead to greater autonomy for advisers and their fuller involvement in crafting campus policies around academic advising. Finally, scholarship can demonstrate the effectiveness of academic advising. Research that convincingly shows that academic advising results in increased retention, timely degree completion, and more meaningful student experiences reinforces its value. Such evidence provides further legitimacy for the profession and lays stronger claims for colleges and universities to allocate additional resources for advising (Habley, 2009; McGill, 2019a, 2019b; Shaffer et al., 2010).

Although crucial for the profession, a critical mass of academic advising research has yet to be reached. In one early assessment, Kuhn and Padak (2008) identified a lack of scholarship as one significant barrier to establishing advising as an independent discipline. In a recent review of the profession, McGill (2019b) similarly concluded progress in the area of advising scholarship is still needed. Thus, encouraging academic adviser scholarship can make a much-needed contribution to this crucial area.

Despite the benefits inherent in a scholar-practitioner view, few primary role academic advisers engage in advising-focused research. As a few researchers have observed, most colleges and universities do not expect academic advisers to be involved in scholarship and research (Troxel, 2019). As a result, there are comparatively few primary role academic advisers involved in these activities. A lack of expectation is clearly a significant barrier, which I will consider more fully in the section *Redefining Academic Advising Positions for Scholar-Practitioners*.

Additionally, there are perception-based factors that may contribute to academic advisers forgoing scholarly activities. On many campuses, advising administrators and other campus leaders regard academic advising as a service, rather than an educational relationship. As Steele and White (2019) maintain, this perception results from campus administrators' attempts to address the multiple criticisms leveled against higher education. Administrators increasingly turn to

what the authors deem a "corporate" approach. Students come to be viewed as customers to whom the educational institution provides a service as a business would. Academic advising becomes a service focused on creating satisfied customers (Menke et al., 2020; Steele & White, 2019). In this mindset, there is not a compelling need for academic advisers to engage in research.

Campus advising administrators are not the only source of perceptions that differ from a scholar-practitioner view. For many academic advisers, research and consulting scholarly literature is not a regular practice. This may not necessarily arise from a customer service mentality, but rather from a pragmatic orientation where practice is heavily emphasized. Many academic advisers approach their craft pragmatically and tend to be interested in solving daily advising problems. Since much research around academic advising and related issues tends to be of a discovery orientation, or considers more theoretical issues, academic advisers rarely consult existing scholarship (Kezar, 2000). Instead, academic advisers turn to more informal channels, such as staff meetings or discussions with campus-level contacts. Many presentations at academic advising conferences have a similar emphasis. Presenters highlight best practices drawn from a successful campus program, rather than discussing results of research or theoretical developments (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010).

These observations do not negate the need for practical solutions and a pragmatic emphasis. Indeed, the scholar-practitioner view regards academic advising practice as an essential activity. However, relying primarily on practically-focused information sources forgoes the benefits of research-informed advising practice and the mutually-reinforcing relationship of advising research and practice.

A number of authors have proposed ways to re-orient perceptions of academic advising to give research a more prominent role (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Menke et al., 2020; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Steele & White, 2019; Troxel, 2019). While persuading academic advising administrators to adopt a scholar-practitioner paradigm is an important—and formidable—challenge, the topic of strategies for changing perceptions has been sufficiently addressed. What has not received sufficient attention, however, is a major implication of the scholar-practitioner view. Namely, academic advising positions require structural components and incentives that encourage advising research. A key component to make such research plausible is sabbatical leave for primary role academic advisers.

ACADEMIC ADVISER SABBATICALS: A PRACTICE TO ADDRESS MULTIPLE NEEDS

Anyone who has provided academic advising in a significant capacity readily comprehends the need for—and the intuitive appeal of—sabbaticals. As Kenneth Zahorski (1994, p. viii) observed:

In a demanding profession which gobbles up our time as relentlessly as Chronus devoured his children, the unencumbered semester or two the

sabbatical affords is truly a priceless gift. Perhaps “necessity” is the better word, since most ambitious, scholarly, pedagogical, and artistic projects stand little chance of being launched—let alone being completed—without the boost of sabbatical leave.

This colorful characterization is a similarly-apt description of the advising practice of many primary role academic advisers. If faculty, who have additional means that support research, need sabbaticals, then academic advisers also clearly need them to engage in serious scholarship. While some academic advisers do manage to conduct research without sabbatical leave, embarking on a major research project leading to publishable output takes time and attention that most front line academic advisers do not have. The prospect of time devoted exclusively to research and scholarly activities would not only incentivize these activities, but also make it reasonable for academic advisers to pursue them. In this respect, sabbatical leave would be revolutionary. Likewise, the restorative qualities of sabbatical leave further enhance its value. Most academic advisers readily comprehend the need for respite from the emotional and psychological demands of advising practice (Ali & Johns, 2018; Davidson et al., 2010; Harman, 2018).

From the perspective of academic advisers, the benefits of sabbatical leave—focused time for serious research and extended relief from the stress of advising practice—are readily apparent. Additionally, sabbatical leave for academic advisers provides the advising profession and educational institutions a significant means to address some of their most pressing challenges.

SABBATICALS TO ADVANCE THE ADVISING PROFESSION

Sabbatical leave is a necessary practice to strengthen academic advising as a profession. The availability of sabbatical leave expands the potential number of academic advisers who might plausibly engage in advising-related research. Currently, dedicated researchers, graduate students, and advising administrators conduct the vast majority of academic advising research. Primary role academic advisers contribute a comparatively-small percentage (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Troxel, 2019). One likely outcome of sabbatical-supported research would be academic advisers contributing a greater share of the literature. This would result in further expansion of the advising knowledge base. Multiple commentators identify this as a critical component for academic advising to continue developing as a profession (Habley, 2009; McGill, 2019a, 2019b; Shaffer et al., 2010).

A related implication of a primary role adviser-driven knowledge base is the greater likelihood that academic advisers will use scholarly literature to inform their advising practice. Existing scholarship tends to be underutilized because academic advisers do not see its relevance to their daily practice. In short, the more academic advisers generate literature, the more likely it is that they will find relevant scholarship to address challenges in their practice.

On a related note, more academic advisers contributing to the literature would represent an important shift in its production. Sabbatical leave for primary role academic advisers would lead to an increase in their contributions. Over time, this will diminish the relative share of other contributors. While only in a small manner, extending sabbatical leave to a larger population challenges the hierarchical nature of higher education through expanding a privilege typically available to faculty alone.

More primary role academic advisers engaging in research can also expand adoption of the scholar-practitioner view among the ranks of advisers. Many academic advisers forgo the distinct benefits of incorporating research and scholarship into academic advising practice as the scholar-practitioner view maintains. Sabbaticals for front line academic advisers could lead to a possible reversal of this current state. Primary role adviser-directed research would be oriented toward questions and challenges arising directly from advising practice, or what in Boyer's model is referred to as inquiry of application (Troxel, 2019). In their research, academic advisers could also collaborate with faculty or researchers. Such teamwork combines research questions drawn from firsthand experience of academic advisers with the research methodology expertise of faculty. The resulting research is directed toward finding solutions to advising challenges that appeal to the practical orientation of academic advisers, yet is rigorous and more generalizable (Kezar, 2000). Similar to the exemplar of Virginia Gordon where research and practice are mutually supportive, a shift toward this type of scholarship would further encourage its consumption. When academic advisers find clear and relevant connections between the literature and daily advising practice, they will be more likely to return as new challenges arise. As a result of engaging in research, more academic advisers will identify as scholar-practitioners as they connect their practice to research and the theoretical constructs that support it.¹

WHY INSTITUTIONS NEED ACADEMIC ADVISER SABBATICALS

Institutions experience various positive outcomes from granting sabbatical leave to regular faculty members. These include increased faculty productivity and versatility, improved morale, stronger institutional programs, greater institutional loyalty, and enhanced institutional academic reputation (Zahorski, 1994). By extension, institutions could expect similar results through expanding sabbatical leave to academic advisers. There are two additional outcomes that are particularly germane to academic advisers, which merit further discussion.

Sabbaticals For Academic Adviser Recruiting

¹ As Menke et. al (2020) observe, connecting academic advising practice to a theoretical grounding is essential to counter the perception that academic advising is a service.

Sabbaticals can be used as an incentive when recruiting academic advisers. In the same way that Charles Eliot used sabbatical leave to entice Charles Lanman to Harvard, academic advising administrators could employ them when recruiting academic advisers. Particularly when competition for desirable candidates is tight, the prospect of a sabbatical could be a powerful incentive when announcing a position and making an offer to a candidate. This could be especially useful to entice a candidate when an institution might be unable to offer additional compensation during negotiations. With the lengthy process to add a position or fill a vacancy, an extra incentive that results in hiring desirable candidates is significant. These advantages are especially attractive when the alternatives are either settling for a second-choice candidate or a failed search.

Reducing Academic Adviser Attrition

The most compelling benefit institutions derive from academic adviser sabbaticals is a reduction of academic adviser attrition. While potentially reducing attrition for all levels of academic advisers, this effect of sabbaticals is particularly relevant for mid-career advisers who have worked in the field for five to 10 years. Around 60% of all student affairs professionals, including academic advisers, leave the field within 10 years of entrance (Marshall et al., 2016). This poses a significant issue for institutions struggling with limited and declining resources to cope with the expense of recruiting, hiring, and training. Additionally, when an academic adviser departs, institutions incur organizational costs that include reduced consistency and quality of academic advising, as well as a loss of institutional knowledge (Anderson et al., 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Academic advisers consistently cite similar reasons for considering leaving or actually leaving the field. First, many academic advisers who reach mid-career have not been promoted, despite admirable performance. This results from vaguely-defined career ladders, few opportunities for administrative roles, and other, similar factors. Compounding this situation, academic advisers repeatedly report feeling unappreciated for the grueling work of struggling under heavy advising caseloads. Finally, academic advisers are more likely to feel burnt out or suffer from compassion fatigue after five or more years of advising practice. As a result of these factors, institutions lose academic advisers at the increasingly-high levels cited above (Marshall et al., 2016).

Through sabbaticals for academic advisers, institutions can directly address lack of appreciation and burnout. Granting a sabbatical to an academic adviser would provide public recognition. Similar to regular faculty, approval of sabbatical leave signals that the academic adviser is a serious scholar and a valued employee whose efforts the institution is eager to support. Since academic advisers who propose sabbatical leave would do so to continue advising research, the advisers will have demonstrated some scholarly activity already, or at a minimum, they would have proposed a solid research agenda recognized through approval of a sabbatical. In this way, sabbaticals would provide an incentive for academic

advisers to engage in scholarship and persist in a position with the prospect of sabbatical leave on the horizon. Thus, sabbaticals provide academic advisers with incentives for research, a reward for doing so, and a prominent avenue of recognition. Furthermore, scholarly accomplishments, in the case of publications, provide a significant form of recognition. While not directly from the workplace, publication of a scholarly work recognizes the academic adviser in a broader and highly-public context. This recognition can provide a deep sense of satisfaction in a field where public acknowledgment of one's work can be rare.

In addition to providing recognition and an incentive for scholarship, sabbaticals can provide emotional and psychological restoration for academic advisers at risk for burnout. Sabbaticals facilitate renewal primarily through the reduction of job-related stress. In his findings on faculty sabbaticals, Zahorski reported that: "most (faculty) comment on (a sabbatical's) importance as an agent of renewal and rejuvenation, stressing its potency as an antidote to stagnation, stress, and burnout. Faculty returning from sabbatical are infused with new vitality and energy" (1994, p. 116).

Due to the high degree of human interaction from student meetings, academic advisers can be particularly at risk for emotional and psychological exhaustion. Students routinely share a wide range of challenges with their academic advisers. These may include stress, mental health diagnoses, learning disorders, financial concerns, and emotions of loss, grief, or disappointment. Academic advisers must connect with students and support them with care and empathy to realize successful outcomes from advising appointments. The need to respond repeatedly to student struggles with empathy places stress and emotional strain on academic advisers. Left unaddressed, the strain can result in burnout and compassion fatigue, both of which substantially reduce adviser effectiveness. While academic advisers with smaller caseloads may not experience burnout or compassion fatigue as routinely, those with caseloads approaching 1500 students can easily find themselves emotionally exhausted.

Burnout is a response to workload and time pressure and is most associated with professions where there is a high degree of human interaction. It is a gradual process that over time erodes an employee's ability to respond with empathy and fully support clients' needs. Burnout is sometimes accompanied by cynicism, and this can lead to further-reduced efficacy in carrying out job functions. Furthermore, burnout-induced cynicism and related attitudes can easily spread to other staff members (Harman, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001).

Compassion or empathy fatigue refers to emotional exhaustion resulting from constant exposure to situations where students, patients, or clients share various emotions, such as grief or loss, or emotion-laden concerns, such as doing poorly on an exam or failing a class (Stebnicki, 2008). As these emotions and difficulties are observed in students, academic advisers may absorb and internalize them. Internalization, along with a constant requirement to provide empathy and caring, often one-way, leads to a gradual depletion of compassion stores. This can leave advisers feeling emotionally fatigued and exhausted. Similar to burnout,

compassion fatigue saps staff members' effectiveness and sense of efficacy. A loss of efficacy translates into an adviser finding it challenging to complete what were once simple, routine job activities (Ali & Johns, 2018; Harman, 2018). For institutions to retain academic advisers long-term, they need to mitigate the effects of these phenomena.

Since burnout is a significant factor contributing to adviser attrition, sabbatical leave could address it at the critical juncture when academic advisers may consider exiting. Since burnout and compassion fatigue happen gradually, it may take time for academic advisers to feel their effects before deciding to exit (Harman, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Stebnicki, 2008). With this in mind, institutions would invite academic advisers to apply for a sabbatical after five to six years of service. This timing places sabbatical leave at a strategic point where an academic adviser may most acutely begin to experience burnout and compassion fatigue and contemplate leaving.

On a positive note, mid-career advisers are ideal sabbatical candidates from a scholar-practitioner perspective. After five or more years of advising practice, academic advisers have developed substantial firsthand knowledge. They have probably identified an area of professional interest such as a particular student population or a favored advising approach. Like Virginia Gordon, they may have found interesting problems from their practice, done some research, and used the results to inform their advising accordingly. After following this pattern for five or more years, an academic adviser will have a perspective on their practice and could identify an in-depth research project that would benefit from a sabbatical environment.

SABBATICAL LEAVE DESIGNED FOR ACADEMIC ADVISERS

Sabbaticals for academic advisers should be comparable to what institutions offer to regular faculty members. Following standard practice, academic advisers would be eligible to take either a semester (half an academic year) or a full year of sabbatical leave. Since the primary sabbatical activity will be research and writing, this length makes serious scholarship a plausible proposition. The academic adviser would weigh various considerations when deciding on length. Salary will be one factor. A common sabbatical practice is to offer either one semester at full salary or a year at half salary. An adviser's personal circumstances, such as family and housing considerations, may also play a role. These are usually more pronounced if the planned sabbatical leave is to be taken away from home. Staffing needs of the advising unit will also be a factor and may dictate a semester leave rather than a year. Finally, the scope and plan of the research to be conducted will also shape the decision. Some research projects may require more than a semester, especially if they will involve human subjects, data collection, or other aspects requiring an extended time frame.

Sabbatical eligibility would be based on a predetermined length of service. Five to six years would align with standard faculty practice and would be doubly

appropriate for academic advisers. It would situate sabbatical eligibility during the critical period where academic adviser attrition is most likely. Prior to eligibility, academic advisers would be ideally establishing a foundation for sabbatical activities. This would involve developing one or more areas of expertise, noting interesting problems from advising practice, and conducting some preliminary research. During this period, the adviser could develop relationships with possible collaborators including faculty and other researchers. As Kezar (2000) and Troxel (2019) observe, such partnerships may be especially fruitful. They combine timely research questions from front line advisers and the methodological expertise of faculty. The resulting research can satisfy the pragmatic orientation of academic advisers while providing methodological rigor and theoretical grounding of interest to faculty and researchers.

Once the eligibility requirement is satisfied, an academic adviser would present a standardized sabbatical application. Proposals would include pertinent details including a description of the intended research, its rationale, projected outcomes, and most importantly, how the project provides value to the academic adviser, unit, and the institution (Zahorski, 1994). One of the proposal's important functions is to confirm that the proposed research will be academic-advising-focused. Many academic advisers have disciplinary training in a variety of fields and may be tempted to use sabbatical time for other research. Including this discussion in the proposal would serve to address this concern. Approved proposals would be formalized in a sabbatical contract listing details including length, planned research, and compensation.

The most important contractual stipulation for academic adviser retention is the post-sabbatical obligation. As a condition of sabbatical leave, academic advisers would agree to continue in their position for a standard, pre-arranged length of time. This is often a minimum of one, and more commonly, three years and would be specified in the contract. If not met, then the academic adviser would be subject to specified consequences. Usually this involves repayment of a percentage of salary provided during the leave. In terms of retention, such stipulations would provide academic advisers a significant incentive to continue post-sabbatical.

Proposing sabbatical leave for academic advisers undoubtedly will raise staffing concerns. In particular, the absence of an adviser with five or more years of experience, programmatic responsibilities, and an advising caseload can leave a significant gap to cover. With many advising offices facing chronic understaffing, an adviser taking sabbatical leave may seem untenable. Nevertheless, when a faculty member takes sabbatical leave, academic departments find ways to cover the vacancy. They might adjust teaching loads for other faculty, hire adjunct instructors, employ graduate students, or temporarily reduce course offerings. Since sabbaticals are a well-established practice, over time, academic departments have developed options, such as adjunct instructor pools, to address faculty on leave.

Academic advising offices, it might be argued, typically do not have comparable alternatives. Such concerns are likely overstated and narrowly focused on the short term. This becomes evident when considering that academic advising

offices manage staffing deficits fairly regularly. When an adviser leaves, which attrition data indicates is a frequent occurrence, or retires, academic advising units find themselves in an analogous position. Even with advanced notice, as in the case of retirement, it can be a semester or longer before a replacement is hired. So, while an adviser on sabbatical leave can pose challenges, a temporary reduction in staffing is nothing particularly new for advising offices. From a long-term perspective, the financial and human resource costs when an adviser departs far outweigh the short-term challenges of staffing during sabbatical leave. Furthermore, once sabbaticals become an established practice, academic advising units will find ways to manage reduced staffing just as academic departments have done.

Staffing concerns do suggest a general observation that institutions may not have structures to implement sabbaticals for non-faculty employees. If advising administrators and human resource offices do not have established structures and procedures for an academic adviser taking sabbatical leave, then implementation can pose a significant challenge. This should not be an insurmountable obstacle. Colleges and universities that offer sabbatical leave to faculty have figured out systems to make sabbaticals possible. Indeed, the existing processes for faculty sabbaticals provide a starting point to build a similar system for academic advisers.

REDEFINING ACADEMIC ADVISING POSITIONS FOR SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONERS

While many colleges and universities have well-established procedures for faculty sabbaticals, implementing academic adviser sabbaticals will require more than simply applying the same procedures to advisers. A solution must account for both scholar and practitioner aspects, which distinguish academic advising from regular faculty roles.² A comprehensive and tailored solution therefore must redefine academic advising positions. It must take the scholar-practitioner view as normative and make academic advising practice and research a reality. This means that academic advising positions ought to be redefined so research and scholarship become expectations. Doing so will also involve reallocating academic advisers' time to accommodate advising research along with advising practice.

A redefined set of academic adviser duties must be reinforced through organizational-level policies and appropriate incentives. To provide opportunities for scholarship in the midst of advising practice, advising offices would develop procedures and policies to balance advisers' time between the various aspects of their positions. In practical terms, this will mean adjusting advising caseloads or expected advising hours. This could be done strategically throughout the academic year. During periods of lower student traffic, fewer hours for student meetings would be required, or in some terms a percentage of the advisers would have

² Regular faculty refers to tenured or tenure-track faculty with teaching, research, and service responsibilities.

reduced advising hours. For units with assigned caseloads, advisers could have periodic “release terms” where some students are temporarily redistributed to other advisers to permit more time for scholarly activities. While these are possible ideas, they are not meant to be exhaustive. Advising units will undoubtedly develop innovative solutions to allow time for scholarly activities.

Time is not enough. Institutions must also establish incentives that encourage academic advisers to engage in research. This will be a significant shift, as very few institutions require adviser scholarly activity and consequently do not provide the related incentives (Troxel, 2019). While sabbaticals must be a prominent feature of this incentive structure, additional components are required. With scholarly activity as an expectation, academic adviser evaluations must include it. Likewise, consideration for promotion should be contingent on demonstrable research activity and could include a peer review component. The expectations for scholarly activity would be proportional for an academic advising position where practice is also a significant component. While the balance between scholarship and practice may look slightly different across institution types, both should be expected.

While reformulated academic advising positions represent a substantial transformation, the leap is not so large as it seems. Colleges and universities have well-established faculty positions that operate outside the traditional tenure-track position format. These roles, often teaching-oriented, have titles of "instructor," "lecturer," or "professor of practice." Many are permanent roles, and some may even have ranks attached. The expectations for teaching and research for these positions is similarly-varied compared with tenured and tenure-track faculty. Such positions provide potential models for designing a unique academic adviser role. More importantly, they are evidence that academic advising roles that blend aspects of regular faculty roles with essential advising functions are well within reach.

University librarians present an especially-relevant model to base academic advising positions. On average, over 50 percent of university librarians are numbered among the faculty ranks. Although implementation varies across institutions, librarians can have many of the components associated with faculty status. These can include professor ranks, research funds, peer review for promotion, participation in institutional governance, and eligibility for sabbatical leave (Walters, 2016).³ Nevertheless, librarians with faculty status have duties that differ considerably from traditional faculty roles and can include teaching and research. If librarians have a range of responsibilities that vary from regular faculty and yet have components associated with faculty roles, then accommodating academic advisers as scholar-practitioners is possible as well. The envisioned

³ Walters' (2016) study revealed that nominal faculty status did not necessarily translate into librarians enjoying rights and privileges of regular faculty. Thus, when redefining academic advising positions it is *not* the conferral of nominal faculty status that academic advisers should seek. Instead, they should pursue the *components* associated with faculty status that support adviser scholarship (e.g. sabbatical leave, research funding, release time, nine-month year, etc.).

position for academic advisers represents an intermediate point on a continuum of regular faculty and administrative staff. It blends some rights, privileges, and responsibilities of regular faculty roles and others from administrative roles. In short, the intertwining of these roles aligns with the scholar-practitioner view and its vision of mutually-supportive scholarship and practice.

In this light, a redefined academic advising role represents an intermediate position that blends characteristics of faculty and administrative roles. College and university employees who provide academic advising and are not regular faculty members ought to be designated to this new intermediate role.⁴ As an application of the scholar-practitioner paradigm, institutions would design these roles to fully support advising practice and scholarship activities. They would also provide the appropriate incentives and expectations for both academic advising practice (the administrative aspect) and scholarship (the faculty aspect). Academic advisers would have proportionally-designed research expectations and structures to support research. In addition to sabbatical leave, this could include advising release time, a flexible work schedule, research funding, and possibly a nine-month year.⁵ Administrative components would include advising practice activities such as student meetings, advising-related projects, and program management. In this vision, an academic adviser's advising practice would be constrained to provide time devoted to advising research. It should be stressed that redefining academic advising positions is crucial. This serves to firmly establish the balance between practice and scholarship and to formalize the necessary structures to support adviser research. To merely add the expectation of research without time and resources to pursue it will not substantially alter the current state of affairs.⁶

⁴ Doing so would help address the challenging reality that a wide range of employees may provide academic advising. At smaller liberal arts colleges or in academic majors with few students, faculty may provide nearly all academic advising. At larger schools, primary role advisers may advise most students with faculty involvement considerably reduced. Complicating this situation further is graduate students, peer advisers, and even administrative support staff may end up, whether by design or necessity, advising students.

⁵ Components of regular faculty positions may also help reorient the perception of academic advising as a service. Connecting academic advising more closely to academic affairs (rather than student affairs) ties it more directly to the educational components of institutional missions. While this is largely symbolic, symbols can be powerful tools to reinforce the view that academic advising is a learning relationship rather than a transactional service.

⁶ My proposal aligns, to some extent, with the spirit of Marc Lowenstein's (2011) suggestion to collapse the distinction between faculty and staff advisers. Instead of a sharp distinction, he envisions academic advising on a continuum where faculty/advisers are distributed based on the degree of academic advising *vis à vis* disciplinary teaching and research. An intermediate role blending faculty and administrative characteristics is perhaps not quite as seamless as Lowenstein's vision. Furthermore, it highlights research and scholarship where Lowenstein primarily emphasizes academic learning. The

STRATEGIES FOR MOVING FORWARD

Academic advisers can take action to bring about revised positions that support advising practice and research, including sabbaticals. Some of these work to change perceptions of academic advising, while others aim to modify advising positions. First, academic advisers can begin utilizing existing research to inform their advising practice. Admittedly, many advisers have little time to consult the literature. They face heavy caseloads, shoulder many duties, and continually feel pressured to do more. When possible, even minimally, using research to support and inform practice can produce improved advising. Advisers can present the results to supervisors and advising administrators to demonstrate the value academic adviser scholarship provides the unit and the institution. Additionally, when academic advisers make consulting research and forming research questions a habit, they reinforce their identities as scholar-practitioners. As James Clear (2018) observes, “the most practical way to change *who* you are is to change *what* you do” (p. 38, italics in original). As more academic advisers identify as scholar-practitioners, it will become easier to advocate for revised positions when research is already a widespread adviser activity.

Similarly, Steele and White (2019) maintain that academic advisers must be proactive in other ways. They must seek out opportunities to offer input to campus administrators on pressing issues related to academic advising. This is one way advisers can have their voices heard, and begin to correct the view of administrators who regard academic advising as a service. One immediate action academic advisers can take is to stop referring to academic advising as a service. Academic advisers must instead refer to advising as an educational relationship. From the advising relationship, students should be able to demonstrate learning such as mastery of the curriculum, development of academic planning skills, and evidence they have reflected on their educational goals. Describing academic advising in this way is crucial because language significantly shapes how academic advisers and others understand the profession (Steele & White, 2019).

Academic advisers can also advocate directly for arrangements to support their advising-oriented scholarship. Opportune moments can come during hiring negotiations, discussions around position revision, or even performance evaluations. In these situations, academic advisers often have more influence and may be well-positioned to negotiate. If an academic adviser has demonstrated their effectiveness and the value they provide the unit, this can be leveraged into practical means to support scholarly activities. An academic adviser might request, for example, release time or a regularly-scheduled reduced advising load to gain time for advising research and related scholarly activities. To maximize the request’s success, advisers must seek time and support for a project already underway or one

common thread between them is aligning academic advising more closely to academic affairs and thus the academic learning and research components of institutional missions.

that is not yet begun, but is well-defined. Similar to a sabbatical proposal, the requesting adviser should explain what they will be working on and the benefit it will provide the unit or institution. While not intended as a substitute for sabbaticals' critical role in launching successful research projects, such requests highlight for campus administrators that academic advisers are involved in research.

Other opportune moments to implement reimagined academic advising positions may come when hiring for a new position or when the need to revise an existing position arises. Deans and advising administrators who recognize the benefits of a scholar-practitioner paradigm can push to hire academic advisers in re-designed intermediate positions as explained above. While this may be an uphill climb, campus administrators may have the ability to craft such positions in ways that individual academic advisers will not.

On a broader scale, academic advisers may consider organizing to gain collective influence. On a local level, academic advisers might form a campus-based academic advising association modeled on NACADA or similar organizations. Such associations can encourage consumption of advising scholarship through reading groups modeled on journal clubs or organizing research-oriented academic advising symposiums on campus. Once established, advising associations can become influential on the campus level and could advocate for policies that support academic advising scholarship. More ambitiously, unionization or a politicized professional organization, such as those of physicians, accountants, and lawyers, while a complex and substantial undertaking, would have distinct benefits. The ability to define work, enjoy professional autonomy, and exercise influence that comes from such organization would provide a formidable vehicle to craft work environments that support advising practice and scholarship.

Regardless of the specific path forward, primary role academic advisers need sabbatical leave to make significant strides in advising research. The advising profession and educational institutions likewise need the fruits of their research and the accompanying benefits of sabbaticals for academic advisers who have become fully practitioners and scholars of academic advising.

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