Advising as Pedagogy:

Facilitating Transfer of Learning and Academic Literacies in One-on-One Spaces

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Abstract (135 words or less; this is 124)

Academic Advising is a fundamental part of student support, but I also view it as a pedagogical practice in higher education. Drawing on rhetorical and educational theory, I use this paper to center advising as a space for teaching critical thinking, learning transfer, self-reflection, and decision-making. This is particularly true for first generation, transfer, or undecided students. Advisors regularly participate in scaffolding, audience awareness, and formative assessment and feedback, but are rarely viewed through an instructional lens. This paper offers a framework and language to help advisors articulate their impact and advocate for meaningful professional development and training programs. This presentation includes examples of learning transfer in an advising appointment, connections to composition studies, and recommendations for embedding reflective, student-focused practices in advising conversations.

Who Are You?

So, the imagined audience for my final paper is the group of advisors and administrators attending this year's **NACADA national conference**—that's the National Association for Academic Advising. The conference theme is *"Viva Advising: Excellence in Student Support,"* and it's being held in Las Vegas. These are people who care deeply about student success, but whose work is often considered "behind the scenes" or even invisible in higher education spaces.

I chose this audience because it's personal. This is the world I work in. I've been an academic advisor for a few years now, and every semester, I meet hundreds of students, each with their own goals, barriers, and backstories. What I've realized, and what I argue in my paper, is that **advising isn't just student support-- it's teaching**. It's pedagogy.

That belief comes from experience. In my work, I'm constantly doing things like helping students reflect on what they value, break down complex requirements, adapt to feedback, and build a plan for growth. Those are pedagogical moves. But in many institutions, advising is framed as transactional: pick classes, get a signature, move on. I think we miss something big when we reduce it to that. My paper tries to reframe advising as **an educational practice,** one that deserves the same kind of respect and theoretical grounding we give to classroom teaching.

So, who are the NACADA attendees I'm writing to? They're mostly professional advisors, some faculty members who advise students part-time, and administrators who oversee advising programs. They're very familiar with day-to-day work, but they might not always think of themselves as educators in the traditional sense. Some are newer to the field and looking for frameworks; others are veterans who have been doing this for years but want to put language to what they've already learned through experience. Many are hungry for validation and strategies and for more meaningful ways to talk about the work they do.

What I value, and what I'm trying to bring into this paper, is a blend of theory and practice, especially ideas from writing studies, rhetoric, and pedagogy, that gives people a new way to see something they already do. I want my paper to be useful but also affirming. I want to write something that helps people recognize the teaching they're already doing and advocate for better support and recognition of that work.

Introduction

"*Can you help me write this email to my professor? I don't know how to make it sound professional*." I get this question and many others ("*Where do I find my unofficial transcript?*", "*How do I know which classes are pre-requisites for that Animal Science course?*") on a near daily basis. Most often, these questions are asked in one-on-one conversations during advising appointments, not during formal instruction. Academic advisors are classified as administrative staff in the higher education field and are frequently utilized only as academic support or logistical guides. However, I propose the idea that these interactions can, and often do, serve as sites of non-classroom instruction.

The differences between infrastructural and instructional advising are clear. While both have benefits for students and their institutions, the problem with utilizing the faculty mentoring model only is that there remains a gap between the academic literacies a student is expected to enter college with, and those they are explicitly taught. This model also leaves students with the impression that professional advisors, many of whom have studied higher education for decades, are a necessary box to check each semester, and not a vital and useful resource dedicated to their academic success.

The idea that academic advising is in some way an instructional role is not novel. In a 2005 article published in the National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) journal, Marc Lowenstein positions advising as a place of teaching, where an advisor's role is not only prescriptive, but appreciative, engaging students in dialogue that facilitates deeper understanding of curriculum and higher education. Where my research and argument differ from this idea is that we should not view instructional advising strictly through the lens of curriculum and degree planning, but as a chance to enact real and lasting change in the lives of our students through pedagogical practices that align with established methods of appreciative advising.

In this paper, I will argue that academic advising functions as a pedagogical and rhetorical practice, one that fosters both academic literacy and the transfer of learning across academic and professional contexts. In situating advising as instruction, I explore how it enables students to develop essential skills in reflection, communication, and decision making that extend beyond the classroom.

Theoretical Framework: Literacies, Transfer, and Instructional Advising

The idea that learning can be transferred across academic and professional contexts is most famously articulated by Jody Shipka in "Toward a Composition Made Whole" (2011). In her work, she advocates that students should reflect on *how* and *why* they made a rhetorical choice. This is key to fostering "high road" transfer (Perkins and Salomon 1992), or the intentional application of prior knowledge through new means. This can also be called "vertical transfer".

Alternatively, "low road" transfer, also known as "horizontal transfer", occurs when an individual takes learned skills and applies them to the same or similar tasks. In Susan Ambrose's "How Learning Works" (2010), she notes that low-road transfer can be encouraged through identifying similarities and reinforcing patterns. This could be utilized

in academic advising by guiding students to reflect on how required core classes can be applied to their major courses to help develop pattern recognition.

In advising, both high-road and low-road transfer can be useful. Students may automatically recognize the patterns they've used since high school like writing in planners (low-road), but reflecting on those habits and applying them to new academic expectations (high-road) often requires additional guidance from someone like an academic advisor. Advisors prompt students to recognize how their previous experiences from high school, jobs, and personal life can be leveraged in academic and professional contexts. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak emphasize in "Writing Across Contexts" (2014) that reflective action is essential to facilitating that transfer. Advising appointments offer a unique space for students to have guidance in student metacognition by helping them become aware of how they learn best, make decisions and solve problems.

Similarly, advising is an ideal site for the development of a student's academic literacies. This is defined by the NCTE as the ability to navigate, interpret, and create meaning in varied contexts using multiple modes of communication. This goes beyond the ability to read and write. In the New London Group's "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" (1996), they suggest modern students must be able to understand visual, spatial, and digital modes of meaning-making. Arlene Archer's article on problematizing the visual and verbal divide for students was written in 2006 but can be very relevant for the ways in which this current generation of students prefer to deliver and receive information. These students engage with information that blends and blurs the visual and verbal divide, requiring instructors of these students to develop multi-modal forms of communication. As an advisor, I provide students with multiple locations of meaning-making through email, visual diagrams, verbal communication, and other methods that are tailored for each student.

As a rhetorical practice, advising involves the constant renegotiation of audience, purpose and context. Advisors adjust their communication strategies based on individual student needs, institutional policies, and individual student goals. This aligns with the

compositionist theory of situated practice, as presented in the New London Group's "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies". Situated practice allows students to immerse themselves in real-world situations, leading to deeper understanding of material and a better chance of learning across contexts.

As an academic advisor, I am responsible for ensuring that students are given the most opportunity to succeed in whatever way I can. This often means adjusting my advising strategies for each student, including in my communication (visual, verbal, and tactile). In my methodology and analysis sections, I will provide multiple anonymized examples of these theories and how they fit seamlessly into the advising practice.

Transfer in Action

Case 1: *Interpreting a Curriculum Change*

This past Fall, the Department of Animal Sciences submitted a curriculum change to the University's Curriculum Inventory Management committee for approval. This change was positive in that it made our undergraduate curriculum more in line with the pre-requisites for applying to Auburn University's College of Veterinary Medicine. It also provided more flexibility for our students in their electives. However, this change went into effect months after it was approved due to various campus policies, making the rollout slightly more complicated and adding confusion for current and prospective students.

To help with the confusion and provide clarity on the actual application of the change, our Department Head sent out a memo with information on the reasoning behind the update, what it entailed, and who to reach out to with any questions. In this case, academic advisors were that intended source of information. I have included paraphrased passages from our department memo below:

"As a current animal science undergraduate student, you have two options moving forward:

• Stay Where You Are! - You may continue with your current track and remain in the program until graduation, completing the coursework aligned with your original academic path.

• Take a Look at the New Curriculum and See If It is a Better Fit: If you believe one of the new tracks aligns better with your career goals, you may choose to transition into the new curriculum.

These changes primarily affect the Industries Option, which gives greater flexibility in choosing directed electives as part of your program.

Next Steps

We encourage you to meet with your academic advisor to discuss how these majors fit with your career goals and determine if a change is right for you. Your advisor will help you navigate the transition, if you choose to change."

This memo included clear and concise language that was intended to give students a better understanding of the change and allow them to come to the best decision regarding their major path. We expected to be inundated with emails requesting to change once they viewed the attached curriculum sheets and saw that both updates removed certain pre-requisites that previously barred required courses, adding time to their degree plan. Instead, we received almost no major change requests, finding that students preferred to have their advisor go through the curriculum with them at their planned registration advising appointment.

One student did email me, though, soon after the memo was sent out, asking me to explain the change in further detail and let her know if the update would be beneficial for her:

"Hi Mrs. Herrington!

I hope you are well and had a great break. I was considering transitioning to the new Animal Science Pre-Vet and Animal Biosciences

major. I am just wondering how this will affect the courses I will be required to take? Thank you!”

I saw this email as an opportunity to work with my student on transfer of learning. This student often comes to appointments with degree plans mapped out and productive questions that allow us to use the appointment time more effectively. I knew that she was familiar with our academic software “DegreeWorks” and wanted to challenge her to take on more agency in her learning. Here was my reply:

“Hi, [student]!

Thanks for your email. Technically the plan of study I went over with you at Camp War Eagle is the new curriculum, so it does not impact your timeline to move to the ‘new’ major. You can look at the differences by running a ‘what-if' analysis on DegreeWorks, changing the year to 2024-2025 and choosing ‘Pre-Vet and Animal Biosciences’ from the list of majors.

Some of the biggest changes include removing/ combining nutrition courses and changing some options for directed electives.

Let me know what other questions you have and how I can help clarify!”

In my response, I ask the student to take knowledge from a prior advising session—our initial meeting at Camp War Eagle—and apply it to her current curricular question. I also prompted her to begin independently exploring DegreeWorks by utilizing a tool we had not previously worked with together, the “What-If” function. This moment can be most characterized as “low-road” transfer, the application of prior knowledge to similar tasks (Perkins and Salomon 1992). However, it also begins to guide the student towards “high-road” transfer by inviting her to critically assess different curriculum models and consider how they align with her future career goals.

Implications for Practice and Training

If we view advising as a source of pedagogical and rhetorical instruction, we should consider some implications for the future of practice and training of advisors. First, training should include concepts from learning theory and composition pedagogy. These new advisors can be taught to view their role as instructional, not just supportive or administrative. Lang's work on "small teaching" presents some useful strategies such as frequent check-ins, reflective conversation prompts and clear learning objectives, all of which can enhance advising interactions and advisor-student relationships. His emphasis on "low stakes" interventions is a great model for this kind of work. Having these interactions helps advisors build rapport with students, helping them find chances to take risks where they have a safety net.

Individual advisors can't do this instructional work on their own without support from institutional administration. Managing student caseloads, time-consuming academic software, and rigid scheduling expectations can hinder an advisor's ability to develop meaningful and instructional relationships with their students. If we reimagine the advisor role as a source of pedagogy, it could mean changes in how time, communication, and advisor success are evaluated.

One of the best ways advisors can both improve and foster their pedagogical skills is through professional development sessions. My students can be very "Type-A" and have a one-track mind when it comes to their academic path. It is important for us to find ways to hlelp students see that there can be multiple roads to success, even if it looks different from what they've always imagined.

This kind of instruction is known as parallel planning. My co-advisor held a parallel planning workshop for the Pre-Vet Professional Development Program where we showed students how to reevaluate their goals and work towards more than one future at a time. This workshop was especially beneficial in helping our students start developing rhetorical flexibility.

Conclusion

Academic advising, when approached intentionally, can serve as an appropriate and convenient source of extra-curricular instruction for undergraduate students. This space is often under-utilized, unrealized, and unappreciated on the part of the students, administrators, and even the advisors themselves who don't understand their potential in the higher education hierarchy. Academic advisors are not merely "guidance counselors for the college student"; they are valuable resources that can serve as a mediary between the institution and the individual.

This reflective inquiry was limited to my own experience, and for that reason I recognize that it could be lacking in objectivity or structured in-depth research and student responses. However, I feel that this draft presents a strong argument for why advising should be seen as a pedagogical process and not only administrative.

The use of emails, appointment summaries, academic plans, and examples of student conversations help me highlight the different opportunities for academic meaning-making. In the future, I plan to expand my research to include more students across departments and ask my colleagues to contribute their own perspectives and strategies for assisting students in their academic paths.

Once I gather that data, along with feedback on this draft, I plan to submit it to the appropriate academic journals for publication. My hope is that this article will encourage students, higher education administrators, and faculty to view advising as a resource to be tapped, not merely a stop on the way to registration. Viewed through the right lens, it can serve as a site of meaningful educational dialogue, development, and support.

Reflection on ENGL 7870

Throughout this course, I have developed my work on advising as a site of pedagogical instruction. While my paper was mostly developed in my time in ENGL 7040: Composition Theory, this course has given me the opportunity to refine my argument, audience, problem and response. It has also helped me develop my skills in providing more practical,

useful, and actionable feedback to my fellow classmates. I am impressed with the level of research and writing my classmates have crafted in such a short time span, and it is indicative of the level of passion each of us has for our respective topics.

My project feels like the natural culmination of the past few semesters of balancing graduate coursework and my professional role. I wrote the paper the way I did because I wanted it to resonate with multiple audiences: professional advisors, composition scholars, and those interested in the blurred line between instruction and student support. In short, I wanted to craft an argument that shows how what is done in advising, when utilized effectively, can be as pedagogically impactful as classroom teaching.

From the beginning, I was intentional about keeping my audience in mind. My imagined reader was familiar with student support discourse, but not necessarily fluent in rhetorical theory or pedagogical transfer. Because of that, I prioritized clarity and used accessible examples from my own advising practice. I include anonymized student cases, descriptions of curriculum change evaluations and conversations, and real-world advising examples to ground the theory in practical moments. At the same time, I wanted the paper to be academically rigorous, so I cited foundational texts from educational scholars like Shipka, Yancey, and Lowenstein, all of which shaped my own thinking and provided scaffolding for my arguments.

The purpose of this project was to make a scholarly intervention: to argue that academic advising, often overlooked in pedagogical conversations, is deeply instructional. I wanted to show that advising is not only administrative, but rhetorical, and that advisors constantly renegotiate their audience, purpose, and context just as writing instructors do. I also wanted to expand the conversation beyond prescriptive “advising as teaching” models (like Lowenstein’s), which focus heavily on curriculum, and instead position advising as a site of meaning-making, literacy development, and learning transfer. To do this, I chose to structure the paper around both theoretical frameworks and real-world case studies, which I hoped has balanced scholarly rigor and practical resonance.

In terms of context, I am writing this paper and completing this course in the thick of one of the busiest summers of my life. I am currently juggling my full-time job as an advisor (we still have Camp War Eagle over the summer, so I am still very much working), two graduate level classes, and a freelance editing job. I am so proud to have all these opportunities, and I definitely do not want this to come across as a complaint, just as an establishment of what led this most recent draft to become what it is. The real-world overlap between my scholarship and professional life provided a lot of grounding for my paper, and I see it as a strength; I have been able to apply what I was writing about in real time and see how it changed my students' perceptions about advising. I recognize that it is a rare opportunity.

One of the most valuable aspects of this course has been the opportunity to receive and provide detailed, constructive, and thoughtful feedback. My peers helped challenge me to consider how my ideas and arguments might be received by my audience. I appreciate the time they took to place themselves in the shoes of my imagined reader and find ways to improve my writing and argument. Their comments helped me step back and view my project more objectively, finding areas for improvement.

In the same way, engaging with my classmates' work helped me develop more generous and attentive reading practice. Rather than just saying "this is great" or "you could improve that argument," I challenged myself to add comments that allowed classmates to find ways they could strengthen their own work.

This course also helped me clarify my long-term goals as both a practitioner and scholar. I now feel much more confident in pursuing publication of my paper and conducting further research into my colleagues' advising practices, now that I have done some internal research. I'm especially interested in exploring how rhetorical and pedagogical frameworks can be more intentionally integrated into advisor training and development. Looking ahead, I hope to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that positions advising as a meaningful site of instruction and student development—whether through conference presentations, practitioner guides, or collaborative research across departments.

One of the more difficult moments in developing this project was narrowing the scope of inquiry. With so many theoretical frameworks and personal experiences to choose from, I had a difficult time choosing where to take the paper. Should I focus on the students' perceptions of advising and how that can be improved? Would the paper be more impactful if I wrote directly to fellow advisors? And of course, when I started writing the paper in my Composition Theory course, I felt obligated to find ways to incorporate composition theory as one of the main functions of my argument, rather than a supporting role. I still have some work to do on this point, but I feel that this five-week course has been helpful in that regard.

Self-Evaluation: Grading

Below is a breakdown of our five major assignments and my self-assigned grades based on the assignment goals, feedback, and reflection on my effort throughout the course:

Assignment 1: Pitch Your Passion (15%)

Proposed Grade- 15/15

The first assignment allowed me to articulate my topic, goals, and initial approach to my final project. I outlined my interest in advising as pedagogy, identified the relevant scholarship I planned to engage with, and demonstrated how the project connected to both my academic and professional work. I met the given expectations for length, clarity, and specificity, and I used the pitch to establish a strong foundation for the rest of the course. For this reason, I think I should receive full credit for Assignment 1.

Assignment 2: Audience Analysis (15%)

Proposed Grade- 14/15

I have worked for a while to establish my imagined reader and ideal audience for this paper. I have narrowed that audience down by a lot, but as pointed out in my feedback for this assignment, even having a trifold audience can make a project feel disorganized or unfocused. I plan to continue working on this paper and fully realize exactly who I want this to reach while keeping the secondary and tertiary audience members in mind. So, I feel that a grade of **14/15** is fair.

Assignment 3: Annotated Bibliography (15%)

Proposed Grade: 13/15

I think this was my first assigned annotated bibliography of my master's program. I am mostly unfamiliar with the format, purpose, and structure of this kind of work. However, I also did not take the time to fully understand and learn what was expected of me in this assignment using the resources provided by Purdue Owl. Due to this, I feel my bibliography was not as useful or "correct" as it could have been.

My original submission also neglected to include the requested introduction which would have oriented the reader to how these sources would be used and how they fit into the greater arguments of my paper. I did correct that mistake, and resubmitted the bibliography to include that contextual information, but as Dr. Ross pointed out, my annotations could still be improved in their detail and quotes. Therefore, I feel my grade for Assignment 3 should be **13/15** points.

Assignment 4: Presentation (15%)

Proposed Grade: 14/15

The presentation portion of this course was a bit different, considering we are participating in a virtual course. I also had trouble determining how best to showcase a PowerPoint presentation while reading my paper when I did not have access to a second monitor. I think reading from physical papers and having to flip back and forth made the professionalism of my presentation slightly diminished.

However, I still feel confident in the presentation I was able to give, and in my current draft of the advising as a pedagogy paper. My argument is thought out, the paper follows a natural argumentative path, and my PowerPoint included visual touchpoints that allowed my classmates to remain mentally involved in my paper. For those reasons, I think my presentation assignment should receive **14/15** points.

Assignment 5: Final Paper (15%)

Proposed Grade: 15/15

I realize it is bold to say that I should receive full marks for my final project when I haven't yet received feedback from an instructor on its content. However, I feel that I earned that grade due to the effort and thought dedicated to the work. While I recognize there is still work to be done before the paper would be ready for publication, my initial goal for this course was to make it usable for the scholarly presentation CFP that my professional

organization (NACADA) sends out. I do feel that I have accomplished that goal and therefore am eligible to receive full credit.

Semi-Synchronous Participation (25%)

Proposed Grade: 24/25

This may be the most subjective of the assignments in this course. It is difficult to participate to your fullest extent when you're not sitting in the same room as the author you're critiquing. However, I do feel that we all made the most of the course and found ways to connect on scholarly levels without having to occupy the same space. While I do feel that my participation was largely on the same level as my classmates, I did have to miss a day of our semi-synchronous sessions due to a professional obligation. Because of that, I worry that my comments from that day, or my reception of the comments that were left on my own assignment draft, were not as insightful as they could have been. So, I propose a grade of **24/25.**