**NACADA Reads: Advising Is Advising**

**Jennifer Joslin:** Welcome everyone to our Fall NACADA Reads webinar. This is the second NACADA Reads we are having this year. We had a lovely discussion in May on the novel “Quiet” and participated through Google Docs and all sorts of other tools available on the website. Now that we’re recording this, it will also be available on the website. We’ll have questions for you to use and ways to interact with the material. NACADA Reads is not only meant to be ongoing, but it’s meant to be free professional development for advising offices. So this video will be available on the NACADA website under the videos tab, which will have this link. So if you miss something today or want to follow up on something with your staff, that information will be available for you.

We’re excited today to welcome Janet Schulenberg and Marie Lindhorst from Pennsylvania State University. We’re going to be talking about an article they wrote in 2008 called “*Advising is Advising: Toward Defining the Practice and Scholarship of Academic Advising*”. It’s a wonderful article. There have been articles that have built upon it, but it’s a really neat piece that ties together not only what we were thinking in 2008 but it’s also something that we’re looking forward to and other pieces are going to continue to reference. Without further ado, I wanted to turn it over to Janet and Marie who I’ve asked to start by telling us how this article came into being. Good morning Janet and Marie and how did this article come to be written?

**Janet Schulenberg:** It was really a collaborative effort. I started working in academic advising in 2006 coming from a faculty position in anthropology and part of it was my surprise that we as a field in academic advising was trying to make sense of who we are and what we were doing. I thought it was a strange sort of thing to be happening. Marie and I had a number of conversations about this, so this was a way of trying to make sense of that conversation that was happening in the field and is continuing to happen in so many ways. That’s part of the origins of this article.

**Marie Lindhorst:** So I had hired Janet in 2005 or 2006 and she had a teaching background and we were collecting anthropologists at the time; hiring folks with that background. My own background was actually divinity school and education theory and there was something about our fields that allowed us to talk to each other and make sense to our approach about advising. I remember at the time there were various articles and attempts to define advising. Is it coaching? Is it friendship? And there was something frustrating about that. What we do is what we do. It makes sense to us, but some people must have still been struggling. We saw articles that made us crazy as to why we were still struggling to find this field.

**Jennifer:** It’s an interesting story how you didn’t come from the traditional background that most of the advisors do. So it feels like an established field to us, so why aren’t people talking about this specifically?

**Marie:** It just made sense to both of us. I really stumbled into advising when I was a graduate student at Penn State, and it just made sense. Then I think Janet, you came to advising with your background as a faculty member, what we were doing in the Division of Undergraduate Studies at Penn State made sense to you pretty quickly. That and the fact that I just threw you in.

**Janet:** \*laughs\* Yes there was that! But the fact that we were educators working in a realm of sense-making is what really resonated with me, and then the fact that not all of us who work in advising thought this was something pretty stunning that was worth poking around with. So that’s how we got to *Advising is Advising*. I remember Marie working on that language around how we accomplish what we accomplish and looking how it was all over the place. At the time, our colleague talked about working on a NACADA committee trying to define what advising was and kind of gave up. They couldn’t come to consensus around this. Marie and I thought that was crazy. We ought to be able to describe what this is and the essence of advising. Again, this is the crux of what we’re trying to do.

**Jennifer:** Well let’s put some specifics to what you were responding to. So there’s advising as teaching. Did that one encompass everything, or what other kinds of pieces were you responding to?

**Janet:** In part we were responding to “Advising is Teaching”. I speak for both of us, Marie, when we say we have tremendous respect for Mark Lowenstein and wouldn’t have been talking about this is he hadn’t made that contribution to the field. But. We started playing around with that idea and it doesn’t describe everything we do in the field adequately. It doesn’t represent our full purpose, value, or effect we have on institutions through this work. By the same token, mentoring, encouraging, guiding, coaching; all of those are elements we bring to the practice, but they only describe the practice. They’re only techniques we might use. None of those descriptions were acknowledging what we do. That’s what prompted this discussion between Marie and I.

**Jennifer:** I love the dialogue. We can only benefit the field by having those conversations. I know last year Mark Lowenstein made a terrific advancement towards developing a theory of advising and that’s a part of what was published in “The Mentor”. The conversations of professionalization, the question of “Are we a profession?” are also playing off of this. I’m glad we’re addressing these issues, because that’s how we also move forward.

**Marie:** It does affect what we do and the strategies we choose. If I think advising is counseling, and they’re exactly the same thing, then I might approach interactions with students like that. I might hire different people. There are so many implications of how we define this fundamentally. I thought *Advising as Teaching* was a step on the ladder. We didn’t reject it as a piece. You can over-interpret any allegory. You can get too literal. You can overdo it, and that begins to affect practice. That’s one of the things I’ve seen in the last two years that I’ve been at Penn State’s World Campus; tremendous growth, training advisors nonstop. It matter how we talk about this field and what they understand it to be, because it affects every conversation they have with a student, what strategies they employ, what language they use, what they understand what they’re engaging the student for. So I think this all just maturation in the field. I felt like *Advising is Teaching* got us into that language about being an educator and then you talk about “What do my students know? What do they value? What are they able to do?” as a result of my advising. As educators, we’re walking into people’s lives, we’re mucking around and we’re changing them. We have a responsibility to think of what that is. Advising is a unique setting.

**Jennifer:** Marie, I feel you just gave us a year’s worth of Facebook posts because what you said just had nugget after nugget. I love how you said how we talk to advisors matters completely. That’s the framework for which they will work or create a new framework. I would like to ask a question that works in Mary Chapin Carpenter *The World Series* and your article. If you’ll indulge me. In her song *The Bug*, Mary Chapin Carpenter says “sometimes you’re the Louisville slugger, sometimes you’re the bat, sometimes it all comes together, and sometimes you’re gonna lose it all.” Metaphors can be helpful or hurtful. Are there metaphors academic advisors should avoid?

**Janet:** The way we framed it did not say that metaphor is not useful. We do need to be careful about our language. Sometimes we talk about clerical roles, and we need to be careful of that. Everyone has clerical work to do. Doctors have clerical work to do that doesn’t define what they do. It doesn’t define us either. I don’t know if I would urge us to avoid any metaphor, but I would urge us to be careful about language choice.

**Jennifer:** So talking about advising as a service profession, it doesn’t mean we can’t be servant leaders or focus on our students in an appropriate way, but I would agree as a dominant metaphor, I think we’d be in trouble. Marie?

**Marie:** I think the problem when you’re going out saying “is it mentoring, coaching, is it this, is it that?” you run the risk of that becoming dominant. Bless the person that wrote the article *Advising is Friendship*, but that might have been the article that sent me over the edge, because I don’t understand my professional relationship with my students in that way. But, my word, I’m thinking about training new advisors. What’re some of the ideas and images that I want to suggest to them? Many of them are helpful unless you overuse them. I think if you’re saying it out of this confusion of what we are then that’s an issue.

**Janet:** And I think, Jennifer, that the whole *Advising is Service* conversationis one we haven’t had a last word on yet. Everything in higher education is service. The courses that are taught by faculty members are in the service of students in higher education. So using that as a unique descriptor for academic advising is not helpful at all.

**Jennifer:** We have a question from Laura Pasquini who is on Twitter who is asking “As we define academic advising, is there a risk of limiting the institutional stakeholders to the advising support table?” Do we have to be careful about how to define it in such a way, or can we use it to gather more people up? Is the metaphor helpful in a way?

**Marie:** As long as we keep thinking we need to find a metaphor to sort of explain what we do, then we’re losing a lot. We need to really tell them and teach them what it is we do. If I go to a meeting for resources, and I say “It’s kind of like this and sort of like that” then I’ve already lost that conversation. What our article said these many years ago is to knock it off with these metaphors. If you couldn’t use any of them, how would you describe the role we play, and we were saying not only as students, but also what’s the role you play in the university? What’s your field? What do you contribute? What can you study? Advisors live in this very critical juncture in student lives. The very purpose of our article was to give people the confidence to not seek, for political purposes, to hide under someone else’s umbrella.

**Janet:** If you define academic advising as we did in this article, as “engaging students to think critically about their choices and make effective plans for their education”, then who doing that would be excluded from it? Anyone doing academic advising is an academic advisor regardless of what other responsibility they have to the institution. Maybe you’re teaching courses or an academic administrator. When you’re an advisor somewhere, it’s the same job. You’re accomplishing the same goals, which are to help students think critically about education and make plans to accomplish that. I’m not sure how coming to a clearer description of what we’re doing would exclude stakeholders.

**Jennifer:** Alright, great question Laura. I want to talk about the process of writing this article as well. Research is a huge part of NACADA. It’s going to be a huge piece moving forward and a big part of defining the field. Marie, can you talk a little bit about the Division of Undergraduate Studies at Penn State when you were writing this had created an environment of inquiry.   
Can you describe that? And then how can advising units, cohorts, advising buddies, Facebook groups, and universities create an environment of inquiry so that we’re talking about it?

**Janet:** This is due to Marie’s leadership. They created an environment where people were expected to converse with each other about our work, be critically reflective of our work. Marie formed two committees. One was focused on assessment of student learning. It challenged us to think differently about our work. It also prompted people to start reading more. So the assessment committee grew into the research and assessment committee. We started reading things together. There was one critical moment when our colleague read a book that had nothing to do with advising but thought it had applications we could use and encouraged us all to read that. We did and the innovations that came from that were great. We had administrative approval that one appointment spot per semester would be blocked off so we could come together to discuss what we’ve read. Creating an environment where all those things were enabled made all the difference. This conversation could not have been possible in a different working environment.

**Marie:** It is about leadership. I’m not patting myself on the back at all, but reading together is such a simple thing, whether you do it once a semester or a couple of times a month, it takes leadership to do it. Could you be a reflective practitioner with 800 advisees? I think not. Be a reflective practitioner who enjoys professional development. Could you do anything meaningful with that many advisees? I think 200, 250, or 300 is manageable, but we have to carve out professional development time for reading together. You lay the groundwork for people to start thinking.

One of the things we talked about at National Conference was the next generation of reflection. Take an idea and do the lit review. Janet was more experienced than I was in what it takes to pull a scholarly article together. We need to help people understand that they can do it. Working together is always such a good thing. If a couple people have an idea, give them space and time to work on that.

**Jennifer:** For those of you keeping score at home; vision, leadership, time, a plan or a goal, create boundaries, and workshop an idea to help operationalize it. Thanks so much that was a terrific answer. We have a few different questions coming to us from a few different places. Diane Jones asked you could repeat the definition again, and Janet I think that was how you were going to capture some people and keep engaged.

**Janet:** Yeah so its page 43. We say academic advising is engaging students to think critically about their choices and make effective plans for their education. I don’t know if that’s the end-all-be-all definition, but in 2008 that’s what we thought we were accomplishing through academic advising.

**Jennifer:** Again if folks are interested in following up, that article is on the annual conference homepage under “Common Reading” because that was where it falls. Terrific common reading this year, because, oh my gosh, it was a great article. Marie and Janet were there and it was a dynamic environment. It’s also on the NACADA Reads web page.

Janet, Spence, at the University of Louisville, is asking a follow up about one of the other pieces of the article. At the conclusion it suggested members of the advising profession need to speak specifically about the way advising yields new insights that can transform institutions. Can you talk about that?

**Marie:** There are a number of things. I think that we operate with students in a place that’s unique and we see the process. We’re in the weeds with students in certain ways that people ought to hear about. If Penn State were to ask, I could tell them a lot about the experiences our students have. Advisors should be in department meetings. They can bring insight into student experiences in certain classes and experiences with faculty. We think about students in the classroom, in residence halls and activities, and I always thought advisors bring to light students outside of the classroom but inside their academic experience. How they craft their experience.

**Janet:** Then, there’s another whole realm of asking how students make decisions, what do we understand about people, and about our higher education system. Some of the ways policies have perverse effects on student behavior, academic advisors see this every day. So conduct a system wide audit of how policies play out, and policies get created to counteract negative effects. These could be really fascinating case studies for higher education and other fields who are interested in how things work together. So it’s not just what we can contribute back to the practice, but what we can also contribute to humanity as a whole.

**Jennifer:** One of the things I love from these examples from both of you is you talk about how you see interdisciplinary advising in a very different way. If we’re looking at gap analysis or the law of different disciplines – there’s reading in the college of business, there’s reading in organizational management, there’s reading in psychology for doing work on how we question our approaches to how students make decisions. Understanding student appointments is reading in communication theory and questioning techniques from a variety of fields; sociology, anthropology, social work. Educational case management is another huge area that our TRIO members in large, urban areas are living every day. That’s another contribution to larger fields. It’s cool to think of all the specialists in all those different areas that have so much to contribute to our area, and vice versa; reading up on those fields and applying the theories. There’s a lot of arena instead of a very narrow area.

**Marie:**  As another example, my current job, we are online. Most of our World Campus students are adults. What I saw early on was that adults still needed to be advised on how to navigate the institution, how to navigate the logic of the curriculum, and we were probably over interpreting their ability as adults to make intelligent decisions about their education. As an advisor, we’re talking differently here. We’re talking about cross-training and exploratory advising in a different way, paying attention to adult learners. But I don’t think there has been a lot done in terms of academic risk in adult learners. They all think they need to major in business to be in business. It turns out they’re harboring all kinds of misunderstandings. That’s something an advisor would see. There’s something about what we do that provides insight into the core of who our students are.

**Jennifer:** What do you do if you perceive that you’re the only one on your campus that wants to talk about these things? What advice do you have for colleagues who are feeling isolated when thinking about big picture issues?

**Marie:** I think that’s where NACADA can provide a great bridge to where you can meet other people. So that’s regional meetings which are smaller and you can meet people more easily. Go to sessions and you can connect in that way. I know I’m a joyful warrior in this, and I can find people who don’t agree, but keep preaching that same sermon. You’ll be heard eventually. And isn’t that what we were writing in *Advising is Advising*? We know what we know. Let’s not apologize. Let’s parlay this knowledge we have about students and higher education and share what we know. That’s where we were.

**Janet:** We broke the ice. We know not everyone reads as much as we do in every office, not everyone is talking the same way we are. We shouldn’t expect that. We got some traction when we ran across an article about an issue that people were seeing regularly. That helped us get away with ideas that didn’t seem as readily applicable to practice but talking about them helped shift your mindset a little bit, but helped to affect practice a little bit. For anyone who feels like a one-person show, there are other people around who share similar values, who shares an interest in students and is willing to talk about it.

**Marie:** I spent five years at two of our smaller Penn State campuses, one was just tiny out in God-Bless Pennsylvania, in rural PA, and it was a really diverse group of students. There were faculty there who were teachers, and they got this. Say you were a faculty advisor, and you’re advising engineering students, but a student is stuck in a funk in calculus, you get them to me because there were more faculty than not that understood that. Because there are people out there who get it, particularly in smaller settings, in teaching institutions that get this! They get how to help students have meaningful conversations and they enjoy it. In that particular case, it was all the engineering students who needed to discover that they weren’t necessarily going to build bridges.

**Jennifer:** Absolutely, absolutely. And we don’t want everyone to try to build a bridge. I think that’s a great point that we sometimes bring up, and maybe as a moderator I’ve set up a strawman. If we are inclusive instead of exclusive, there will be many conversations with many colleagues all over campus. We don’t have to say its only full-time, primary advisors in the room. There are many faculty who care about the student experience. Create a dialogue where you can learn from and challenge one another is a lot of what I hear you say.

Coming back to that notion of multidisciplinary studies, there was feature today in *Inside Higher Ed* that showed graduate students who had looked at job ads to think about interdisciplinary work and they found that multidisciplinary studies attached to centers provided the best way for faculty to do interdisciplinary work. It wasn’t “We want interdisciplinary people, come work in English.” It was they advertised interdisciplinary work and you worked attached to an interdisciplinary unit or center. How would an advising center stress interdisciplinarity? We don’t always control where we work. We’re not always in an academic unit, division or college. How do we create an environment that makes for good work and how do we approach the many theories and research areas? We hear about centers all doing one type of approach or one type of framework. How do we carry the flag forward for an interdisciplinary approach?

**Janet:** It’s not necessarily that we’re looking for an interdisciplinary approach. It’s that we’re looking to define academic advising as its own thing. When you take off the caveats of “this is student affairs, or this is developmental psychology” then you can approach this from literally any angle. Then it comes down to who is leading the division? What vision is that person allowing and is creating? We can collaborate with others. We’re not in an academic department, per se. Many of us are beholden to an academic silo, and I think that’s one of the reasons why centers are one of the places where change is happening and not in academic departments. Academic departments’ history is such that they’re defined other than that. We don’t have that. Academic advising has the freedom to study what it thinks is important, what we think is important as advisors. We have the freedom to collaborate with anyone we think might contribute, so we’re not bound my disciplinary, tenure-track obligations of who we coauthor with or who the first author is. That’s not true for some people depending where you’re hired. But as a field, we have a little more freedom to think about what we want, to collaborate with who we want, and to publish what we want. It’s up to the space and the unit leaders to give people direction to do such things.

**Marie:** I think if we hire different people, right? We hired folks with a variety of types of degrees. You come with the language you know in your discipline and you make sense of a common work, and I think that’s very fruitful. Janet, you came as a background in anthropology and a faculty member and I came with this spotty record in theology and education theory and whatnot. A lot of us tried to make sense. Advising is such an interesting field. So many people have just sort of stumbled into it. But the beauty of it is we stumble in with all of our own backgrounds and we can begin to talk about what we know and can contribute. That’s a lot of what we said in the article; look, this really helps us. It’s not that I thought of this and I have a completely different view of what advising is, but you find the commonalities. I think it is a real opportunity. I think that goes back to leadership and who hire, and what degrees, and what your expectations are. My counsel to people is to think broadly about the educational preparation because you want them to bring what they know to enrich the discussion and the practice. But we should all end up recognizing what each other does and what each other says. That’s the struggle.

**Jennifer:** Terrific, lots to unpack there. Now the College Academic Counseling Center at UCLA – Go Bruins – has submitted a lengthy question. It’s really focusing on Alexander Astin’s theory of student involvement, really the effectiveness of educational policy and practice directly related to the policy and practice to increase student involvement. They are thinking of advising as teaching or advising as advising, however you want to answer it. Education is taking place, and how can they increase their involvement? Should this be a metric through which academic advisors should be evaluated? So what they’re asking or arguing is how much we increase student involvement. Can you comment on an advisor’s role in increasing involvement? Let’s just accept Astin as a great postulate going forward, if you want to engage the question that way. It’s up to you.

**Marie:** Here’s what’s coming to me. So when we used to talk about assessment, we don’t just assess one way. We have data about numbers, we record the contact data and advising notes, so there is a numbers element, right? So we’re seeing how many of our students we’re connecting with at least once in a semester. There are some data points as well as other surveys. I think there are a number of ways to assess that. It’s interested, because we tended in the literature about student engagement, it would be interesting to see that in a traditional student affairs context and to mix the element of student affairs advising, research, and all of those other things students do as part of their academic life. So I think it would be interesting for advisors to have real presence in discussions about student involvement and engagement. We don’t have mandatory advising at Penn State, but students come anyway. I think to show that level of engagement in their education and to add that to the broader conversation would be important. I don’t know if that answers that question.

**Janet:** I’m not sure I’m understanding the question correctly, but I think what students are doing inside the classroom and outside the classroom and in between is the realm of academic advising conversations. That’s where we hope to see students make some connections and make some intellectual growth. But if we measure success by how many students the advisor gets involved, I think we’re going down a pretty dangerous path. On the other hand, if what we’re measuring is the kind of meaning students make of their education by encouraging them to get more involved, then we’re putting ourselves in the boat we want to be in. If we stay focused on the learning, then we’re going to end up where we want to be. But if we’re focused on this many students and how involved they are, we’re setting ourselves up for hard times down the road.

**Marie:** It occurred to me that when in a college setting, you might want to partner with other units in terms of looking at student involvement. What came to my mind was education abroad. If a college wants to increase the number of students who study abroad, then advisors ought to be part of that conversation, partnering with people who are working on that, and then you could be looking at how you can increase your numbers. Not that we’re salesmen, but to be a part of that conversation to enable more students to make those decisions.

**Jennifer:** I’m reminded of an experience I have with a great number of medical professions appointments with my kids. If you go to a surgeon, you get a surgical answer. If you go to a GI specialist, you get a GI answer. If you ride a theory exclusively, you risk only eliciting within that tradition. But if you pivot and center on how students learn or what they learn and are open to different lenses of what you can apply, you have a chance of revealing many things. Look and see what you’re looking at. Really let something emerge, rather than bringing only one lens.

That was actually a follow-up that someone had asked earlier in the week. If advisors come from diverse backgrounds, how do we integrate theories and ideas into student affairs programs? I’m wondering if that’s too broad for us here in the last few minutes, but what are your thoughts?

**Janet:** I think you have to be part of this conversation. So if you’ve got other perspectives that bring value, then being part of those conversations and bringing that up. If you’re well-informed on your perspective then you’ll be able to articulate that to others. Just show up and speak up.

**Marie:** I also think – and we’ve talked about this, Janet – that, to me, conjures up us using metaphors and descriptors and letting those descriptors overwhelm us. That whole prescriptive versus developmental thing is a historical artifact in the field. People say “I’m a developmental advisor”. Well, what do you mean by that? Can we talk about that in a way that doesn’t involve developmental psychology? It goes back to engaging students in a meaningful way about the academic choices they make. I think people rely too much on the simple conversation “Who are you, what’re you doing, and where are you going?” They rely too much on descriptors. So coming from other fields or some coming from student affairs programs where you get that background to say “I’m a developmental advisor”. That can really limit you. I would rather you just say “I’m an academic advisor.” Obviously we hire people that come out of student affairs programs and they’re wonderful, but at a certain point you have to be free in this field to define it on its own.

**Jennifer:** Well we are coming to the end of our hour. Janet, I’m going to leave it to you. Are there any key questions you want to leave our audience with? Any urgent, urgent appeals to research? I’ll give you the second to last final word here.

**Janet:** There are two things we didn’t bring up that are important to talk about. One. We are framing academic advising as something distinctive in its own right to talk about, and that has to do with anyone who is an academic advisor or anyone who has anything to do with academic advising. This is a concept that needs to be introduced to new people as we hire them. But it also should be talked about by those who have been in the field for awhile, those of us who have been in an office for 15 years and training and work life are procedural, then this needs to be enabled for that kind of setting.

But the real challenge is to do what we said we should do, which is to write and to reflect. Again, this goes to leadership and how we onboard and train people. Often when we hire new faculty or new advisors, the training is purely procedural, but we should be encouraging people to be scholars as they are practicing. Consume scholarship, apply it to your work, and then contributing back to that scholarship are both things that space needs to be created for.

**Jennifer:** In case anyone missed this, Marie agreed to do this webinar three days before her retirement from Penn State University. I want her to have the final word. We have a minute or two, do you want to summarize your career?

**Marie:** I thought Janet said it all. This field is what we say it is. What we told people to do in this article is to take ownership. What looks simple from the outside – a student creating a course schedule – is not simple for the student or the university. My nephew just started at a university and he went to see his advisor. The good news is he spent an hour there and just talked about his life. The bad news is constructing the schedule only took ten minutes and we spent the rest of the hour talking. To me, it’s that big conversation with students and then what does it mean for the academic choices that you’re making. Just know that this is big stuff, it’s not just procedural. I’m pretty sure he doesn’t know who he is and where the heck he’s going, so having that big conversation is awesome. That’s what’s relevant. We have a ways to go in encouraging advisors, new and old, to think bigger about what this is and who we are and what students need. It is way more fun to do advising and think about it in those terms than to look down on scheduling courses or use labels like clerical. Ugh. No, take that and think big about all of those things and make meaning of it. I’ve been saying to my colleagues here it’s just way more fun to think about this deeply and to make our relationships with students deeper and bigger and broader if we can. To write about the fun you’re having and to take joy in that. At the national conference that had these wonderful ideas and we kept saying “That’s an article! Write about that!” Remember, Janet? We used to just write a bunch of things down, sometimes just a phrase as we went. Be bold. Write your thoughts down. That’s it, that’s my career. I stumbled into it and I thought it was a humane place to be in a university, to be able to engage people in this way. It’s been a real privilege to be able to do this with thousands of students and I hope other people find that. Find that joy. Experience that privilege. Best job in the world.

**Jennifer:** Best job in the world! Thank you so much Janet, Marie. Thank you for your hard work, your environment of inquiry and thank you so much for contributing every single year. And with the common reading this year and with NACADA Reads for fall. Happy trails, Marie! Be safe and have fun. Janet, we’re just going to keep volunteering and asking you do stuff, so good luck retiring! Thank you to everyone who has participated and made this possible. You can access this on NACADA’s website. We had over 60 participants in the room. It will be available for you to use in your office or unit. Go forth, and do good things. We’ll talk to you soon!