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dissertation entitled

Learning to Advise: Academic Advisers
and Organizational Communities of Practice

presented by

Lance Brian Lewis

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Educational Administration

Kathryn M. Moore
Major professor

Date 24 April 00

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LEARNING TO ADVISE: ACADEMIC ADVISERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

By

Lance Brian Lewis

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

2000

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING TO ADVISE: ACADEMIC ADVISERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

By

Lance Brian Lewis

Despite the growing body of research on academic advising, little is known about how academic advisers learn to perform their role. This study examined how advisers at one university learned their role, and whether or not they formed organizational communities of practice to facilitate that learning.

Twenty-one academic advisers, and assistant deans or directors of student affairs representing nine undergraduate colleges were interviewed. Documents pertaining to academic advising were reviewed. Following review of the initial interviews, additional interviews and participant observation were conducted within one undergraduate college.

The findings were analyzed by reviewing interview transcripts, field notes and documents to define the role of advisers, describe their learning, and to find patterns of interaction and learning that might indicate the presence of a community of practice. The results led to a definition of a general role for advisers, but did not indicate the presence of an institutional community of practice. However the results did indicate the presence of a community of practice within the individual college.

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The role of advisers was found to encompass seven major behaviors – information resource/adviser, referral agent, administrator, career advising, affective/counselor, student advocate, and "other". Many advisers worked on special projects that were not necessarily related to their primary role as an adviser. Advisers learned their role primarily through three ways of learning: individualized reading and review, mentorship/apprenticeship, and social learning. There was evidence that a community of practice existed among academic advisers within the college where participant observation and additional interviews took place. The community of practice had a positive impact on academic advisers' learning and practice. Advisers developed a similar identity through their ongoing membership within this community of practice.

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who make life wonderful.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the combined efforts of a number of people. My profound thanks to everyone who contributed.

To my wife Beth, and my children, Vada and James, whose love has sustained me over the past five years, and who have tolerated my early mornings, late nights, self-doubts, frustrations, occasional ranting and ravings, and who have always lifted me up when I so desperately needed it. To Beth, who transcribed more interviews and did more proofreading and photocopying than she cares to remember, and who never complained.

To my parents, Walter and Kathleen Lewis, and to my mother and father-in-law, Peter and Barbara Carras, for their love, and for giving me the power to realize my own dreams. To Dan, Jill, Emma, and Elsie Koop Liechty, who supported and encouraged me as they also struggled to finish a dissertation. To the academic advisers of MSU, who truly care about students, for the important work that they do.

To my dissertation committee: Ann Austin, Rob Rhoads, and Douglas Campbell, for their excellent advice and guidance, and especially to my dissertation chair, Kathryn "Kay" Moore, who kept on prodding and pushing, and who has become not only a mentor but also a valued friend.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Being a successful college student can be overwhelming and confusing. Along with the emotional and maturational changes associated with attending college, students must satisfy an array of admission requirements and degree requirements, plan course schedules, choose from a variety of elective courses, and make decisions about career planning or future educational plans. Every student who enters a college or university, at various points in his or her educational career, is likely to seek advice and counsel about such topics as what courses to take, what he or she will major in, and how he or she plans to complete graduation requirements. The student might also seek advice on career planning, achieving educational and personal goals, and might even establish a close personal relationship with a faculty member or academic adviser during the course of seeking advice. At many colleges and universities, students seek out an academic adviser for this kind of advice.

The heart of academic advising is a sharing between student and adviser of information and advice about how the student can ultimately complete a course of study, make sound academic, personal and career decisions, and plan to engage in a satisfying career or further education following graduation. Seppanen (1981) characterizes advising as a series of dialogues between adviser and student that result in the student receiving information about planning an educatio

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planning an educational program consistent with personal abilities, interests, and goals. Viewed from this perspective, the academic adviser must provide a variety of information and engage in multiple behaviors that are critically important to a student's ultimate success in an institution of higher education.

Yet in spite of the importance of advising vis-à-vis student success, little is known about how advisers actually learn to perform their role. How do advisers actually learn to advise? This study is about academic advisers in a major land-grant university, and how they learn about and perform their role within the organizational environment of the institution of higher education. Based on organizational theory and social learning theory, this study specifically focused on describing how advisers learned to perform the role of adviser, and whether or not professional academic advisers formed and utilized "communities of practice" (e.g., informal organizational networks) to facilitate the learning and performance of their role within their institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the following overarching research questions:

1. How do academic advisers engage in ongoing learning about their role within the organizational context of a university?
2. Do academic advisers form communities of practice? , and if so,

   2a. What contribution do communities of practice make to the learning and performance of the advising role?

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This study seeks to provide a better understanding of how advisers learn the role and practice of advising (how advisers learn to *be* advisers), and what role, if any, communities of practices play in the learning and performance of that role. Such understanding offers an opportunity for the continuing and systematic improvement of advising.

Definition of Major Terms

The major terms used in this study are defined as follows:

> Professional Academic Adviser: a full-time university employee whose role is primarily to provide academic advising to undergraduate students, and who does not concurrently have a faculty appointment.
>
> Role: Behaviors consistent with the performance of a specific office or position.
>
> Community of Practice: An informal group of organizational members who interact on a regular basis to negotiate meanings and actions, create mutual accountability, and create shared meanings, practices, ideas, artifacts and language.

Theoretical Framework

Academic advisers must learn their multifaceted role within an organizational context that encompasses academic and student services boundaries – albeit boundaries that may be artificial or transparent. To this end, there is some limited research which specifies *what* advisers ought to learn, or how institutions should facilitate and administer this learning (e.g., Bostaph and Moore, 1980; Grites, 1978, 1986; Gordon, 1984; Habley, 1995; Keller, 1988; Vener and Krupka, 1980), but little work that actually examines *how* advisers learn and perform their role within their organization. Advisers may turn to

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external student-affairs oriented professional development activities (e.g., national and regional conferences, seminars, etc.), but advisers spend the vast majority of their time within their own institutions, working with students and faculty. A central question is therefore: how do they learn their role within this organizational context, and what mechanisms do advisers use to learn about their profession and role on their own campuses? Organizational theory and social learning theory may provide a context in which to better understand this process.

In contrast to views of learning as a relatively individualized cognitive process of acquiring abstract knowledge and skills, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other researchers have argued instead that learning is, in part, a social and participatory process situated within context, and learning within an organizational context is, by definition, a social process. A number of theoretical and epistemological models construe learning as a social process. Cultural models of learning have focused on the creation of shared meanings and understandings among members of an organization (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Morgan, 1986; Schein, 1992). Related to the idea of the unifying theme of organizational culture is the concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), wherein organizational members modify overarching cultures by enacting their individual reality according to their differing perspectives and experiences. From this perspective organizational members create an individual framework for understanding what goes on in the organization. Others, including Senge, (1990), Argyris and Schön (1978), and Cohen and Sproull (1996), have argued for the existence

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for the existence of learning organizations where, as Senge notes, "people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire…" (p. 3). Implicit in the idea of the learning organization is the need for systems thinking, which involves individuals shifting their epistemological views from organizationally localized to more global perspectives, and taking an active role in shaping their own reality and the reality of the organization.

The research literature on academic advising rarely mentions the concept of organizational learning. However, Tukey (1996) argues that using a systems thinking approach is a useful framework for understanding and improving academic advising. The formation of multi-disciplinary networks, according to Tukey, serves to improve the flow of information and the "dynamics of the advising system" (p. 10). Such networks serve to "…formalize existing informal, campus-wide connections that advisers readily make in practice" (p. 10).

All of these theoretical models and ideas are interrelated in that they posit a central idea that individuals as organizational members learn (and work) by making sense of their participation and place within an organization. More recently, Brown and Duguid (1991), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998) have also argued that learning is social and is primarily an act of social participation within informal communities inside of an organization; and that understanding the connections between learning and working comes from a focus on how work communities are formed and how they change. Learning is seen as the social construction of knowledge, where knowledge emerges from the contexts in which it has meaning (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989; Lave and

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Wenger, 1990, 1991). The central issue in workplace learning, according to Brown and Duguid, is "...*becoming* a practitioner not learning *about* practice" (authors' italics) (p. 69). Similarly, Lave and Wenger have argued that the *conditions* (my italics) of learning are central to understanding what is learned by an individual within an organization. Learning, in these views, consists of individuals engaging in the social process of becoming "insiders." The unit of analysis becomes, as Putnam and Borko (2000) argue, not the individual, but rather the interactive system to which the individual belongs.

One theoretical construct emerging from this work is that of "communities of practice". The concept of "communities of practice" is a research phenomenon that comes from the fields of organizational psychology and organizational management (Wenger, June/July,1998). Wenger describes the concept of communities of practice as such:

> We frequently say that people are an organization's most important resource. Yet we seldom understand this truism in terms of the communities through which individuals develop and share the capacity to create and use knowledge. Even when people work for large organizations, they learn through their participation in more specific communities made up of people with whom they interact on a regular basis. These "communities of practice" are mostly informal and distinct from organizational units. (p. 1-2).

Senge (1996) similarly describes the formation of internal networks "whereby information flows and stories flow and innovative practices naturally diffuse within organizations" (p. 54). Senge also argues that leaders in building learning organizations should become "community builders," by forming a group of persons who, because they are not part of a formal organizational unit, can more freely prop

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more freely propose change and experimentation regarding new ideas and practices within an organization (see also Brown and Duguid, 1991, and Wenger, 1998).

Baer and Carr (1985) also allude to the presence of informal networks in their study defining a model of academic advisers as catalysts for achieving institutional and student goals. One facet of this model is the ability of advisers to "inform students continuously":

> Informing continuously involves more than communication between advisers and students. The adviser should also establish and maintain communication channels with other groups within the educational institution....An exchange of information within this network can...help the adviser be better prepared to meet the various needs of students (p. 42).

Tukey (1996) also refers to the presence of informal, campus-wide networks that promote the exchange of information needed to improve academic advising.

If learning within an organizational context is construed as a social process of the individual learning to make sense of their place and participation in a community of practice, then a related theoretical concept is that of how the individual learns a role. Sarbin and Allen (1968) define a role as behaviors consistent with the performance of a specific office or position. There are certain expectations for behaviors associated with a role. Academic advisers engage in multiple behaviors when they provide academic advising to students, particularly when they engage the developmental model of advising.

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Katz and Kahn (1966) have argued that role expectations are shaped by the contexts in which individuals learn about and perform their roles. For example, the role expectations for a physician would be shaped by the physician's educational environment, the work environment, the medical profession and field of specialization, and interactions with the patient. This argument suggests that advisers would also define their role and experience their role expectations within the context of their organization and their profession or discipline (see Clark, 1983). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has attempted to describe the professional role of advisers (NACADA, 1987), but concluded that the field was so diverse as to preclude an overarching definition of role[1]. Since the literature notes that advisers have had difficulty defining their role and their status as a profession (see NACADA, 1987; Trombly, 1984), it is possible that organizational contexts might have more impact on role definition for advisers than the profession of advising. Perhaps the informal communication that exists within organizational communities of practice helps advisers to better define and operationalize their roles.

Academic advisers must learn and perform their roles through social participation within an organization. Intuitively, it seems that a perspective that integrates parts of organizational theory and social learning theory would be a useful way to examine how advisers learn about and perform their role within an

[1] Though NACADA has published a "Statement of Core Values" (NACADA Journal, 15, (1), Spring, 1995) that it suggests should serve as "...reference points for professionals to use" (p. 5).

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Using this theoretical perspective, I studied how professional advisers engaged in continuous learning about their role performance, whether or not academic advisers formed communities of practice within their university, and the contribution such (a) community(ies) might make to an individual's performance as an academic adviser.

Setting

Michigan State University is a public, land-grant institution with over 40,000 students, (of which 30,000 are undergraduate students) making it one of the largest universities in the United States. The university is located in East Lansing, Michigan, which is part of the Lansing metropolitan area of approximately 250,000 residents. The university is a research-intensive institution (the Carnegie classification is Research I), and a member of the Association of American Universities. The university is organized into fourteen academic colleges, including the professional colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, Human Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine. There is also the Michigan State University Detroit College of Law, which is a private institution located on the campus, and loosely affiliated with the university.

Each college and the Undergraduate University Division provide some form of academic advising at Michigan State University. Advising programs vary from college to college, with some colleges utilizing faculty advisers, and others utilizing professional academic advisers in centralized advising centers, or professional

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The administration of advising also varies from college to college, although most colleges have either an associate or assistant dean who oversees academic programs and/or student affairs. In some colleges, there is also a director of student affairs and advising or a director of undergraduate student affairs who directly oversees the advising function.

Informants

The informants in this study were professional academic advisers who advised undergraduate students at Michigan State University. Using data on length of service as an adviser, membership in NACADA, and full-time appointment status, I identified advisers from each college and the Undergraduate University Division, sent letters inviting their participation, and selected those who were willing to participate in this study. This study focused on individuals who had been in an advising role from one to fifteen years, had a full-time appointment as academic advisers, and who did not concurrently hold faculty appointments. These criteria helped to insure that informants included

[2] It should be noted that, with limited exceptions, freshman and sophomores are enrolled in the Undergraduate University Division (UUD), regardless of whether they have selected a major or not. Students who declare a major preference are advised within a college; those students who have not declared a major preference are advised in the UUD. Once students have accumulated sufficient credits hours, they apply for admission to a degree-granting college.

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both novices who were still in the basic process of mastering the intricacies of advising and veterans of many years who might be well-connected and very knowledgeable about the advising role and the organization. Advisers who had a full-time appointment and did not have a faculty appointment presumably would not have to shift between the role of adviser and faculty member.

Data from the Michigan State University faculty and staff directory showed that there were approximately 75 individuals who had the title of "adviser," "undergraduate adviser," or "adviser-specialist." Personnel records were used to identify those who met the criteria of being full-time advisers, having between one and fifteen years of service as an academic adviser, and not having a faculty appointment. The NACADA executive office also provided a listing of which advisers were members of their organization. From this group of 75 individuals, 41 potential informants were identified and queried as to their participation in the study. Those who agreed to participate constituted the informants. I had 21 informants in the study.

This study focused only on professional undergraduate academic advisers, not faculty who also provide academic advising[3]. My reason for doing this was that including faculty who also advise would include persons whose primary responsibility was not advising. This might have necessitated looking at the culture of a variety of academic disciplines that would potentially impact how faculty view their advising and how they learn to provide effective advising.

[3] Professional academic advisers at Michigan State University usually have the rank of "specialist", which is a non-tenure track and non-faculty appointment. There are a few advisers with the rank of "instructor".

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Faculty might define their roles and/or belong to communities of practice based primarily on an academic discipline or group of disciplines, not on advising. Professional advisers, whose responsibility is entirely or at least primarily centered on advising would presumably form their own networks on a campus and would seek to define their role from within a more limited number of professional organizations and disciplines. Their communities of practice, if they exist, would presumably focus on the task of advising.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative design that incorporated interviews, document analysis and participant observation as the primary methods of data collection. More detailed information on methodology will be presented in Chapter Three.

Creswell (1994) argues that qualitative studies are generally inquiries that seek understanding of a social problem "based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p. 1-2). The qualitative study usually requires that a researcher immerse him or herself into the everyday setting of the informant and that the researcher, through ongoing interaction, seeks to understand the perspectives of the informant(s) (Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

There are several basic assumptions that underlie qualitative research. The research assumes that the social world should be studied in its natural state, undisturbed by the researcher, and that it is necessary for the researcher to gain access to meanings that guide behavior (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

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Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to isolate or eliminate the biases and values of the researcher, qualitative research openly acknowledges the values and biases of the researcher, and makes these explicit within the context of the individual study (Creswell, 1994).

One of the assumptions inherent in qualitative research is that the researcher openly states his or her biases and values. My own experience and perspectives come from my student and professional experiences at Kansas State University and Michigan State University. As an undergraduate student, my advising was almost entirely prescriptive and consisted of my faculty adviser "signing off" on my course schedule each semester. I was expected to formulate my course schedule, based on the requirements of my academic major. In retrospect, I would have liked a closer relationship with my adviser, particularly on issues related to potential careers in my major. I did have a much closer relationship with my adviser while in graduate school at Kansas State University, and often found myself asking for his advice and counsel on matters outside of my academic curriculum, and I was glad to have such a resource. I also had such a relationship with my adviser at Michigan State University. I believe that academic advising is an important part of the undergraduate experience, and that effective developmental advising is very difficult to adequately provide for students. I also believe that there is probably no formal educational program that adequately prepares one to be an academic adviser.

In my experience at both Kansas State University and Michigan State University, I did not encounter a diverse racial or ethnic population of academic advisers. All tho

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When I worked in the Division of Continuing Education at Kansas State University, I found myself in the position of advising potential students and current students about off-campus academic programs, and the academic policies and procedures of the university, the division, and the academic department. I was struck by the difficulty of knowing about all of the institution's policies and procedures and keeping up with any changes. I spent a significant amount of time trying to learn about academic policies and procedures, and was constantly asking questions of colleagues and others on campus. I was also struck by how often potential students would ask me about how certain degree programs would provide additional opportunities for them, or if their career goals were consistent with the courses offered in the degree programs. These were questions I found difficult to address, and I often referred students to academic departments to talk with faculty members. Based on my quasi-advising experience at Kansas State University, I believe it is difficult for advisers to master the enormous amount of curricular and developmental information necessary to provide effective developmental advising. I believe their role is complex and difficult to fulfill. I also see a high level of role mastery as requiring frequent interaction with other advisers as well as faculty and academic administrators in order to share information, ideas, and "best practices," and to solve problems. I undertook this study with the basic perspective that the role of academic advising is multifaceted, difficult and complex, and that academic

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Ethical Procedures

Researchers have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights and desires of informants, particularly since qualitative research is often quite invasive. In order to help safeguard the rights of informants, the following steps were taken:

1. The research was reviewed and approved by the Michigan State University University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) prior to the study taking place (see Appendix A).
2. The purposes and objectives of the research, including methods of gathering data and potential uses of the data, were verbally communicated to each informant prior to his or her participation in the study.
3. Informed consent was obtained from each informant prior to his/her participation in the study. Each informant was notified in writing and verbally that he or she had the right to discontinue participation in the study at any time (see Appendix A).
4. Pseudonyms were used during and after the study to protect the identity of informants, or anyone else identified during the course of the study.

Data Analysis

Data was collected in the spring, summer and fall of 1999. Data was collected through interviews with each informant, interviews with associate and

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assistant deans and directors, observation of meetings and college or university professional development activities, and analysis of documents (e.g., electronic mail, letters, memos, planning documents, information from web sites, and organizational and professional publications, etc.). Interview protocols were constructed prior to the interviewing process and utilized for the initial interview with each informant, and with the associate deans and directors. I also kept field notes to record my own thoughts, perceptions and experiences throughout the study.

The data from this study consisted of field notes, observation notes, interview transcripts and copies of documents. The analysis of ethnographic data usually entails the coding of data into categories in order to identify and describe patterns or themes that the researcher then attempts to explain and understand (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I reviewed the data several times to organize it categorically and record major themes or patterns.

The focus of this study was to describe and interpret the behaviors, experiences and perceptions that academic advisers exhibit relative to their ongoing learning about their role within the organization. I have attempted to provide a detailed description of the role of the adviser, and describe how advisers learn to perform that role. I have also tried to interpret whether or not academic advisers at Michigan State University form communities of practice, and to describe the impact that these communities might have on how advisers learn about and perform their roles.

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Validity and Reliability

Although validity has always been an issue in the legitimacy of qualitative research (Maxwell, 1992), there is no single stance that characterizes how validity should be addressed. Some researchers have suggested that traditional notions of quantitative validity should be applied to qualitative research (e.g, Goetz and LeCompte, 1984), while others have argued for establishing differing criteria such as "trustworthiness" or "authenticity" (e.g., Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

There are several strategies for insuring the validity of a qualitative study. Creswell (1994, 1998) suggests several ways to help address these issues (see also Merriam, 1988), including triangulation, "member checks" and the involvement of informants in many phases of the study.

This study employed the following strategies to help insure validity:

1. Triangulation – multiple data sources and collection procedures were employed.
2. Member checks – informants were asked to periodically review interpretations and findings to clarify details and discuss the meaning and perspective that I described.
3. Researcher bias – the known biases and presupposed values of the researcher and its potential impact on the research have been described in the study.

The reliability of qualitative research is also a concern, though the unique nature and context of each study makes it virtually impossible to replicate (Creswell, 1994). However, there are strategies to provide for reliability. Yin

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(1989) suggests that researchers include a detailed description of data collection so that this procedure can be replicated, and Creswell (1994, 1998) argues that the researcher should describe the process of selecting informants and the biases and values of the researcher(s) in order to provide as much information about the study as possible. In this study, I have provided detailed information about my personal biases and beliefs, methodology, informant selection, data collection and data analysis.

Generalizability

Firestone (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) have argued that the researcher has a general obligation to provide a very detailed description of the qualitative study so that others have enough information to decide whether the findings are generalizable to another case. In that I espouse my belief that communities of practice should exist and are likely to have a positive impact on learning to advise, this study may generalize to theory in providing evidence that supports Wenger's (1998) notions, or as Yin (1989) notes, differs from an initial theory but contextualizes it in a more complex theoretical framework. However, Firestone, in discussing information necessary to make case to case transfer, notes that "The investigator's responsibility ends with providing sufficient descriptive data to make similar judgments possible" (p. 18). The findings of this qualitative study have been written in a descriptive, narrative format such that a detailed picture emerges of the experiences and perspectives that academic advisers have of their learning about their role and the performance of their role.

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Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study, unlike a quantitative study in the positivist tradition, does not seek to provide outcomes that are readily generalizable from a sample to a larger population. Rather than providing predictive capacity, this study has, as Creswell (1994) has argued, attempted to provide a "...complex, holistic, picture..." necessary for the depth of understanding that allows others to develop their own conclusions about the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the study outcomes.

Any study that focuses on learning within an organizational context is limited in its ability to examine the current state vis-à-vis past history. Thus, this study may have been conducted at a point in time where communities of practice were just being formed, or where communities of practice had been in existence for quite some time, or at a point in time where communities of practice did not yet exist.

If advising communities of practice did previously exist, it is impossible within the scope of this study to trace the entire history of the communities of practice, or of all the other communities of practice to which advisers might belong (e.g., other communities in their personal lives, or other tasks or roles outside of their role as an adviser). This study focused on the potential existence of communities of practice within advising within one institution of higher education. This study only looked at one institution to gain a deeper understanding of how advisers learn their roles and whether or not advisers formed and participated in communities of practice. The focus of this study ended up being on

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ended up being on *both* individual perceptions and attitudes and on a community's behaviors and activities; thus the outcomes are limited to the individual's time and place, the community's time and place, the organizational time and place, and the particular historical context in which the study took place.

Organization of the Study

This report of this study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides a statement of the problem, a theoretical framework, and background information on the study. Chapter Two is a review of the literature, which is divided into the following sections: 1) Historical development of academic advising and organizational delivery systems, 2) the purpose and functions of academic advising, and 3) learning within an organizational context. Chapter Three describes in detail the qualitative methodology and procedures utilized in the study, including the informants, selection of the informants, development of interview protocols, and data collection and analysis. Chapter Four reports in detail the findings of the study, and Chapter Five summarizes the study, describes the major findings, and discusses implications and recommendations for further research.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature will present information on the following topics that are relevant to this study: 1) Historical development of academic advising and organizational delivery systems, 2) the purpose and functions of academic advising, and 3) social learning within an organizational context.

Historical Development of Academic Advising and Organizational Delivery Systems

In the colonial and post-colonial period American college curriculums were rigid, with little opportunity for students to pursue alternate courses of study. There was little need for academic guidance or advising as students adhered to a prescribed course of study. However, as Rudolph (1962) notes, the curriculum began to expand in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as many colleges began to offer an increasing number of elective courses (see also Brubacher and Rudy, 1968). Some form of guidance for students as they navigated the more complex curriculum became necessary. Rudolph states:

> The creation of a system of faculty advisers at Johns Hopkins University in 1877 and the appointment of a board of freshman advisers at Harvard in 1889 were apparently the first formal recognition that size and the elective curriculum required some closer attention to undergraduate guidance than was possible with an increasingly professionally oriented faculty. (p. 460).

By 1940, virtually every college and university had established a formal system of faculty academic advising (Grites, 1979). Tremendous enrollment growth after World War II fueled the continued development and refinement of

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student services, including academic guidance and counseling, and also increased advising loads on faculty members (Delisle, 1965). The growth of enrollments, coupled with student demands in the unrest of the 1960's for increased curricular relevance and participation in curricular decision-making, forced faculty to spend more individual time learning about the curriculum and advising students. The faculty began to voice concerns over their ability to effectively advise students, particularly when advising was not seen as being adequately rewarded or was seen as a distraction from teaching and research (Delisle,1965; Grites, 1979). This growing level of concern, coupled with concerns in the 1960's and 1970's for a more holistic education of the student also led to the emergence of the "developmental academic advising" model (Ender, Winston, and Miller, 1982, 1984; Winston, Miller, Ender and Grites and Associates, 1984), and the emergence of advising centers staffed by professional advisers (Baxter, 1970; Crockett and Levitz, 1984; O' Banion, 1972; Spencer, Peterson & Kramer, 1982) to supplement faculty advising.

The rapid rise in enrollments and the call for an increased level of student services created the demand for a more elaborate and complex advising role, and some colleges and universities began to shift advising responsibilities away from the faculty. However, despite this shift, several studies suggest that the majority of academic advising appears to be done by faculty (Cartenson and Silberhorn, 1979; Crockett and Levitz, 1984), though the shift from faculty advising to professional advising seems to be continuing (Habley and Morales, 1998; NACADA, 1987).

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Academic advising has itself evolved from an informal, relatively unstructured, administrative function of the faculty to a complex system involving students, faculty, and professional academic advisers (Bellamy, 1988; Goetz, 1988; Grites, 1979). The role of the adviser has also changed from that of prescriptively providing curricular and academic advice to students in order to meet graduation requirements to that of a multifaceted developmentally-oriented role that encompasses a variety of functions, including providing curricular and academic advice, and acting on personal development issues related to the holistic education of the person (Ender, Winston and Miller, 1982; Grites, 1979; Goetz, 1988; Walsh, 1979; Winston, 1989). The evolving, increasingly complex nature of academic advising has stimulated research activity and the formation of several professional forums for academic advising within professional organizations, including the National Association of Academic Affairs Administrators, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and the American College Personnel Association. In the late 1970's an organizational devoted solely to academic advising, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), was formed.

Another factor related to the historical development of academic advising is the recognition that advising could have a positive impact on increasing student retention (Astin, 1977; Beal and Noel, 1985; Boyer, 1987; Grites, 1979; Habley, 1981; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Trombley, 1984). Campuses began to focus more efforts in the 1970's and 1980's on recruiting and retaining students, as demographic evidence pointed to a decline in the number

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in the number of high school students. Winston (1989) argues that this led to renewed attention to academic advising on campuses, particularly with regard to the capability of advising systems to address institutional goals regarding student retention.

Organizational delivery systems for academic advising have also evolved over time. Grites (1979) notes that although the first formal system of faculty advising was not organized until 1876 at Johns Hopkins University (Rudolph states that it was 1877), by 1940 virtually every institution of higher education had some formal system of academic advising. The first delivery systems were based on simple faculty-student interaction to decide on curricular matters and course selection. As enrollments grew and academic advising evolved into a more holistic, developmentally oriented activity, centralized advising centers staffed by professional advisers and pioneered by community colleges, began to emerge in the late 1960's alongside faculty advising (Crockett and Levitz, 1984; Grites, 1979). Baxter (1970) argues that a decline in faculty interest in advising also spurred the growth of advising centers. Advising centers are usually staffed by professional advisers, who often have some background in student affairs or counseling, and often provide academic advising to undecided, or lower level undergraduate students (Baxter, 1970; Crockett and Levitz, 1984; Grites, 1979; Habley, 1979; Spencer, Peterson and Kramer, 1982).

There is currently a mix of organizational delivery systems for academic advising at most colleges and universities (Grites, 1979; Habley, 1997; King, 1988, Scott, 1999). Habley (1997) lists seven organizational models of advising.

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Grites (1979) and Trombley (1984) list faculty advising, staff advising (typically through advisement centers), and peer/paraprofessional advising as the prevalent models for the delivery of advising, though the majority of academic advising is still done by faculty (Cartenson and Silberhorn, 1979; Crockett and Levitz, 1984; Kramer, Arrington, & Chynoweth, 1985). Faculty advising in some form has existed for over a century (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968; Grites, 1979; Rudolph, 1962), but the emergence of centralized advising centers and peer or paraprofessional advising has been relatively recent, and related to enrollment growth, the emphasis on student retention, and the emergence of a developmental model of advising. The growth of peer and paraprofessional advising is also related to relieving or reducing advising loads for both faculty and professional staff advisers (Bellamy, 1988). As Grites (1979) points out, most institutions use some combination of delivery systems, but the majority of institutions of higher education utilize a combination of two systems - faculty who also serve as advisers, and professional advisers who staff institutional, college-level, or departmental advising centers or offices (see also Habley and Morales, 1998).

Though there are still faculty who advise, undergraduate academic advising at Michigan State University is done primarily by professional advisers who work within three basic types of organizational structures: 1) centralized - advisers grouped within centralized advising centers; 2) decentralized – advisers situated within academic departments, and 3) mixed – groups of advisers within centralized centers and advisers situated within departments (Scott, 1999).

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Thus, academic advising has historically developed from a routine, prescriptive task into a complex, systematic process commonly known as developmental advising (Ender, Winston and Miller, 1982, 1984; Winston, 1989; Winston, Miller, Ender and Grites and Associates, 1984), and delivery systems for academic advising have developed into a mix of faculty advising, advising centers staffed by professional academic advisers, and a small number of other miscellaneous delivery methods (Grites, 1979; Habley, 1997; King, 1988)[4]. Though the majority of academic advising is still done by faculty (Carstenson and Silberhorn, 1979; Crockett and Levitz, 1984), the growth of professional advisers continues (see Habley and Morales, 1998; NACADA, 1987). Cook (1999) presents a timeline that illustrates the evolution of academic advising in the United States, and traces the historical development of advising from the Colonial period through the 1990's.

Purpose and Functions of Academic Advising

At first glance, the purpose of academic advising seems straightforward. Despite the changes that have occurred over the past one hundred years, the core component of academic advising is still rooted in the academic curriculum (Goetz, 1988; Grites, 1979), and much of academic advising is still prescriptive in nature – it consists of the administrative tasks of helping students select and enroll in courses and plan programs of study, and the maintenance of student records. However, the concept of academic advising has been expanded in

[4] Which would include: peer and paraprofessional advising, computer-assisted advising, self-advisement, group advising and the use of advising contracts. Grites (1979) and King (1988) provide a thorough explanation of delivery techniques.

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recent years to a much broader vision of a student/adviser relationship that has an impact far beyond curricular decisions.

Numerous definitions of academic advising exist, and most of the more recent definitions represent academic advising as a broadly based activity that encompasses a good deal more than curricular guidance. Delisle (1965) describes academic advising as "...a dynamic, continuing process and a relationship. Thereby, a student and an interested, capable member of the staff and faculty are engaged in common pursuit of the existing resources of the educational institution to the end that the student may realize his educational and career goals according to his unique capabilities" (p. 168). Grites (1979) defines academic advising as "...a decision-making process during which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an adviser" (p. 1). Habley (1981) argues that academic advising is a systematic process of aiding students in achieving educational and personal goals, and one that is based on a relatively close student/adviser relationship. The Michigan State University *Academic Programs* announcement (1995) describes academic advising in the following manner:

> Academic advising in all colleges is a continuous process in which a student and adviser discuss possible options, first, in the student's total educational program; second in specific fields of study; and third, in potential careers, in order that the student may make intelligent choices. Academic advising also includes interpretation of the MSU catalog and printed guidance materials provided by the student's college and department or school and referral to other University resources for academic, vocational, and personal assistance as needed. (p. 11).

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The previous definitions and descriptions are all formed on the basis of developmental advising. In the 1970's, the notion of "developmental advising" formally came into being. Advising was now beginning to be seen as having an effect on the educational and personal development of the student, and having a positive impact on student retention (Crockett, 1978b; Habley, 1981). Institutions were concerned about the demographic predictions of enrollment declines in the 1980's and the need to develop and maintain student and academic services that would enhance student recruitment and particularly retention (Bellamy, 1988). Adopting a developmental model of advising may have been seen as one way of enhancing student retention. Ender, Winston and Miller (1984) define developmental advising as:

> ...a systematic process based on a close student-adviser relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of instructional and community resources....Developmental advising relationships focus on identifying and accomplishing life goals, acquiring skills and attitudes that promote intellectual and personal growth, and sharing concerns for each other and for the academic community. (pp. 18-19).

Similarly, Bellamy (1988) has summarized the goals of academic advising as follows: 1) Academic advising is a continuous process which promotes adviser contact with students; 2) advising must be concerned with quality of life issues; 3) advising is goal related. These goals should encompass academic, career, and personal areas; 4) advising requires the establishment of a caring human relationship for which the adviser must take initial responsibility; 5) advisers should be models for students to emulate, specifically demonstrating behaviors that lead

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behaviors that lead to self-responsibility and self-directiveness; 6) advising should seek to integrate both academic and student affairs personnel, and 7) advisers should seek to utilize as many campus and community resources as possible (pp. 16-17).

It seems clear that academic advising has evolved into a complex, ongoing, multifaceted process whose function is to develop and nurture a collaborative effort between student and adviser to join curricular and developmentally based activities together. This complex process is increasingly carried out by professional academic advisers. As academic advising centers began to appear at institutions of higher education, the role of the professional adviser began to emerge. The professional adviser typically has some background or training in an area of student affairs or counseling, and works in some type of advising center or within an academic unit that provides advising support for a department, college or school, and has a primary role exclusively in advising (Bellamy, 1988; Goetz, 1988; King, 1988). Professional academic advisers also tend to identify themselves as providing primarily a student service rather than an academic service (Goetz, 1988; Winston, 1989), though their role clearly includes providing both types of services to students.

The role of an academic adviser has been characterized as that of serving as information disseminator, teacher, career counselor, referral agent, counselor, change agent, and administrator (Creamer and Creamer, 1994; Crookston, 1972; Fiddler & Alicea, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1981; Kitrell-Mikell, 1998; Strommer, 1994; Teitelbaum, 1994). The literature also suggests that academic advisers may be poised o

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poised on the boundaries of two subcultures on the campus –academic affairs and student affairs (Fitzgerald, 1981; Looney, 1988)[5]. The core component of academic advising is still guided by the academic curriculum (Goetz, 1988; Grites, 1979), yet the notion of developmental academic advising (Ender, Winston, and Miller, 1982; Walsh, 1979; Winston, Miller, Ender, and Grites and Associates, 1984) suggests a strong student-centered educational and personal development component. In fact, Winston (1989) argues that "the goals of developmental academic advising are indistinguishable from the goals of most progressive student affairs divisions" (p. 391), and Looney (1988) also suggests that advisers need to become boundary spanners to most effectively integrate academic advising with other functions on a college or university campus.

Professional academic advisers have struggled to define their complex role and identity within institutions of higher education, and have also struggled to legitimize their professional status (Trombley and Holmes, 1980; NACADA, 1987). As Fenske (1989) argues, "The central problem of professional identity in student services is that professionals in the field have always performed a wide variety of distinct, uncoordinated, and quite specific roles" (p. 28) (see also Stamatakos, 1981). More recently, Wade and Yoder (1995) have argued that the professional identity and legitimacy of academic advising is derived from two basic sources: the relationship of academic advising to student retention, and the

[5] Moore (1976) states that the *faculty* advising system stands "...at the intersection between the needs and goals of the students and the aims and missions of this particular college" (p. 374). Intuitively, this would also seem to apply to professional academic advisers.

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Social Learning within an Organizational Context

Learning has traditionally been construed as the acquisition of knowledge and skills useful in a wide variety of settings through individual cognitive exercise (Greeno, et al., 1996) wherein knowing and doing are separated, and knowledge is seen as self-sufficient, and independent of its use and application. As Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) argue, "The activity and context in which learning takes place are thus regarded as merely ancillary to learning – pedagogically useful of course, but fundamentally distinct and even neutral with respect to what is learned." (p. 32).

This is in contrast to more recent research that has challenged this view by arguing that there is a relationship between context and intent, and human understanding. Within this more recent view, learning is not separated from context and intention, but rather, is situated in physical and social contexts that provide a framework for the acquisition of knowledge and skills through engagement in authentic activity, which Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) define as "...ordinary practices of a culture" (p. 34). Learning and activity are inseparable. This argument was elaborated by other theorists who argue that situated learning is inherently social, and requires the individual learner to take on a highly participatory and interactive role (Lave and Wenger, 1991) within particular groups or communities. Since communities (and their "parent" organi:

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organizations) are by definition social entities, such learning must take place within organizational environments[6].

Yet learning within organizations is a complex process, and concentrated research efforts and numerous theories have emerged over the years in an attempt to explain it. Researchers have proposed various theories that portray learning as social in nature, and dependent on the learner engaging in some kind of relationship with others. Such theories have described how learners become participating members of organizations, how organizational cultures and subcultures are formed, or how organizations themselves learn through the actions of their members (see, for example, Argyris and Schön, 1978; Bandura, 1977; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1990; Senge, 1992; Van Maanen, 1976, 1983; Weick, 1995; Wenger, 1998).

Psychologist Albert Bandura was one of the first proponents of social learning theory. Bandura (1977) argues that learning comes in part from observing and modeling, such that "...modeling influences produce learning principally through their informative functions. During exposure observers acquire mainly symbolic representations of the modeled activities which serve as guides for appropriate performances." (p. 24). Related to social learning theory is socialization theory. Anthropologists have characterized socialization as ritualized social situations where "rites of passage" signify the movement of an individual from one stage of membership within a society to the next higher stage

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[6] Putnam and Borko (2000) and Greeno et al. (1996) provide an overview of these theoretical arguments.

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(usually from adolescence into adulthood) (Turner, 1977; Van Gennep 1960). Organizational socialization has been described as those social experiences that prepare an individual for membership in a group and that help prepare a novice organizational member in shaping his or her understandings and responses to the demands and requirements of membership in the organization (Tierney and Rhoads, 1993; Van Maanen, 1976, 1983). In both of these theoretical frameworks, learning cannot be defined apart from its social context.

A large body of research has also focused on defining the culture of organizations and on how persons within an organization, in order to thrive as productive organizational members, must "learn" and/or manage culture to desirable ends (e.g., Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Senge, 1990; Schein, 1990, 1992). Various definitions of organizational culture seem to share one common aspect – that organizational members share certain ideas and beliefs in common. Research results suggest that organizational members need to focus efforts on creating shared meanings and understandings among themselves so that organizational behaviors will make sense to everyone within the organization, a process Morgan (1986) refers to as "creating organizational reality". Weick (1995), however, argues that individual reality (within the context of organizational reality) is only achieved through sense-making wherein individuals create a frame of reference based on individual perspectives and experiences.

Others have even suggested that organizations themselves can learn through the initiative of their members or through cybernetic self-regulation and that organizations and their members can use such processes as the systems thinking a

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thinking approach, cybernetics, and the theory of action perspective to develop organizational structures and individual mental processes that will allow an organization to flourish by learning – recognizing and dealing effectively with environmental threats and capitalizing on new opportunities (see Argyris and Schön, 1978; Birnbuam, 1988; Morgan, 1986; Senge, 1990).

A unifying concept of all of these theoretical frameworks is the individual making sense of his/her place and participation as a social being within the organization. Learning is seen not as an individual enterprise that takes place in an environment separate from its application, but rather, learning is seen as social engagement within the context of its present and future application. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learners are not acquiring abstract knowledge that will be applied later, but rather are acquiring skills by engaging in a process which they refer to as "legitimate peripheral participation". This concept suggests that the novice learner begins to participate in practice only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility until they have become accepted members of a social community. Their learning is situated within their participation in authentic activities. As Lave and Wenger argue:

> Learning is a process that takes place within a participation framework, not in an individual mind. This means, among other things, that it is mediated by the differences of perspective among the co-participants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who "learn" under this definition. Learning is, as it were, distributed among the co-participants, not a one-person act. (p. 15).

Out of this concept has emerged what Wenger (1998) later refers to again as a theoretical perspective based on "...learning as social participation [within

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an organization]" (p. 4). According to this perspective, learning takes place within informal groups and networks that span boundaries within an organization. Similarly, Brown and Duguid (1991) argue that learning consists of becoming an "insider" who is able to function within a community, and that "workplace learning is best understood, then, in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed." (p. 69). The dominant issue in learning is thus how individuals become practitioners within the context of the community in which the practice is undertaken (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1990, 1991; Wenger, 1998). As Putnam and Borko (2000) suggest, "...scholars have conceptualized learning as coming to know how to participate in the discourse and practices of a particular community." (p. 5) (see also Lave and Wenger, 1990, 1991). Though most of the research has centered on business organizations, some similar research has taken place in other fields, including education. Wilson and Berne (1999), in their review of research on teacher's professional development, describe several attempts to form professional communities (albeit not informal) to foster the social construction of teacher's professional knowledge (and see Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Putnam and Borko, 2000). Cochran-Smith and Lytle argue for:

> ...teachers and other group members constructing knowledge by conjoining their understandings in face-to-face interaction with one another over time. In fact, the knowledge-*of*-practice relationships depends on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed by teachers who work together and also by teachers and students as they mingle their previous experiences, their prior knowledge, their cultural and linguistic resources, and the textual resources and materials of the classroom. (p. 280).

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Implicit in this argument is the conception of learning as a product of participation in some type of community of teachers and students.

Learning by participating in an organization is characterized by Wenger (1998) as having four integral components: belonging to a community, developing an identity, negotiating meaning through experience, and engaging in practice. Wenger (1998) defines these four components as such:

> 1) Meaning: a way of talking about our ability – individually and collectively - experiencing our life and our world as meaningful. 2) Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action. 3) Community: a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence. 4) Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities. (p. 5).

Wenger (1998) goes on to further elaborates the meaning of participation:

> Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities. Participation...is both a kind of action and a form of belonging. Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do. (author's italics) (p. 4).

Defined this way, participation encompasses both learning and identity within an organization, and as Wenger (1998) argues, the learning and identity formation takes place within a particular subset of an organization - a community of practice (see also Lave and Wenger, 1990, 1991).

Simply defined, communities of practice are informal groups of people within an organization who interact on a regular basis with fellow practitioners for the purpose of im

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the purpose of improving their practice. A community of practice exists and defines itself along three dimensions: 1) mutual engagement; 2) joint enterprise; and 3) shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998)[7]. Mutual engagement signifies that participants in the community take individual and collective actions and that the meanings of those actions are negotiated within the community. A joint enterprise exists because the processes of participation and negotiation are collective, and because a sense of mutual accountability within the community is created. A shared repertoire suggests that members of the community negotiate over time certain meanings, practices, ideas, artifacts, and language that are shared within the community.

In his book, *Communities of Practice: Learning Meaning and Identity* (1998), Wenger studied a group of insurance claims processors as they went about their daily work. He concluded that, "As a community of practice, claims processors make the job possible by inventing and maintaining ways of squaring institutional demands with the shifting reality of actual situations" (p. 46). Claims processors, faced with institutional rules and regulations that often did not directly address individual situations, constructed ways of dealing with individual situations through their interactions with fellow claims processors and others in the organization who worked closely with the claims processors. Members of the community of practice became resources for other members as they exchanged

[7] Which is not to suggest that communities of practice exist only within professional practice. Wenger (1998) argues that communities of practice exist within other diverse arenas as families, schools, neighborhoods, etc.

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information, engaged in situational sensemaking, and shared new ideas and strategies for coping with the demands of their jobs.

Intimately tied to membership within a community of practice is the formation of identity. Identity is not considered as monolithic, in that members of a community of practice develop an identity that is based on the meaning of experience within the community. Wenger (1998) states that "building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (p. 145), and argues that identity concurrently exists within and shares the three dimensions of a community of practice (i.e., mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire). Mutual engagement suggests that identity is formed by an individual with respect to and with input from a community. Mutual accountability comes from the joint enterprise in that an individual's tendency to engage in certain actions and make certain choices or interpretations is based on the behavior that others in the community have previously shown (see also Eckert, 1989). A shared repertoire comes from the individual's personal history that has been developed in concert with the existing histories of the membership in a community of practice.

Brown and Duguid's (1991), Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) overarching argument is that a community of practice provides a context for social learning within an organization. Individual members of the community, learn by engaging in practice, and negotiating individual meanings in relation to membership in the community, and they also develop an identity that exists in relation to the community. Wenger (June/July, 1998) also argues that communiti

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communities of practice can exist across organizational boundaries (see also Brown and Duguid, 1991), and that they fulfill several important functions in regards to the creation, accumulation and diffusion of knowledge within an organization.

Role Theory and Socialization

Related to the theoretical construct of situated and social learning is role theory and socialization theory. As individuals engage in practice, they begin to form a professional identity. Identity within a community of practice exists partly within the context of an individual's professional role (as the individual can occupy various roles within an individual identity). Role theory has grown out of psychological and sociological studies that examined how shared perceptions develop regarding the positions occupied by individual members within a group structure (Secord and Backman, 1974). There is, according to Secord and Backman, a situation wherein "...group members agree in holding certain expectations for the behavior of persons who occupy particular positions in the group structure" (p. 401). Sarbin and Allen (1968) argue that a social role is simply defined as behaviors that are associated with an office or position.

The concept of a role is not a singular or monolithic entity, as Katz and Kahn (1966) argue. An individual can perform multiple roles within a position or office. For example, Colbert (1998) states that faculty have three traditional roles: teaching, research and service. The performance of such multiple roles can lead to role strain, which arises when individuals are faced with uncertain or conflicting role expectations, leading to periodic attempts by role players to clarify their ro

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their roles (Secord and Backman, 1974). Related to role strain is the concept of role competition, which occurs when a role player cannot meet multiple expectations due to time constraints (Secord and Backman) though others have argued that fulfilling multiple roles does not necessarily lead to role competition, as individuals fulfill multiple roles by merging roles, or engaging in behaviors that satisfy multiple role expectations (see Clark, 1997; Colbert, 1998; Marks, 1977). Colbert (1998), in her study of how faculty members blend teaching and research, argues that faculty members often engage in activities that "...simultaneously satisfied expectations for two roles" (p. 664).

Advisers are expected to perform multiple functions and exhibit multiple behaviors as they advise students, particularly within the framework of the developmental model of advising (Creamer and Creamer, 1994; Crookston, 1972; Fiddler & Alicea, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1981; Kitrell-Mikell, 1998; Strommer, 1994; Teitelbaum, 1994). The way in which these work roles are defined is impacted by the context within which the roles are performed (Katz and Kahn, 1966). For example, Clark (1983) notes in his study of higher education systems that faculty members tend to find expectations for their role within two contexts: the organizational context of the institution, and the professional context of the discipline. Since the literature suggests that advisers have difficulty defining their role and their status as a profession (NACADA, 1987; Trombley and Holmes, 1980), and since colleges and universities utilize a variety of advising delivery systems, it is possible that organizational contexts might have more impact than professional contexts on professional roles for advisers. This argument is supported by a n

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supported by a national survey conducted by NACADA (1987) that concluded that personnel who provide the advising function are a very diverse group in terms of their academic orientations, backgrounds and job responsibilities, though a majority of respondents considered advising to be a profession. The survey report notes that, "...one obvious statement can be made: advising reflects the uniqueness of the campus on which it is practiced. Advisers become part of that unique system with its policies, procedures and administrative philosophy and emphasis regarding the advising function" (p. 56). Accordingly, academic advisers might be more likely identified as "locals", who according to Gouldner (1957a), are "...high on loyalty to the employing organization, low on commitment to specialized role skills, and likely to use an inner reference group orientation" (p. 290).

But how do individuals engage in social learning about their roles? As Secord and Backman (1974) note, the learning of roles focuses on the relations of the individual learning a role to other persons, a process also known as socialization. Merton (1957) defines the process of socialization more broadly as a means of achieving membership in an organization through the internalization of shared values. Secord and Backman characterize socialization as:

> ...learning to behave, feel, and see the world in a manner similar to that of other actors occupying the same role....Role learning also includes acquiring an understanding of the attitudes of fellow actors and role partners, and learning certain skills and techniques associated with the role. (p. 486).

More recently, the concept of socialization has emerged within a cultural framework as organizational socialization, or the processes that involve the transmission of cul

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transmission of culture within a group (Schein, 1968; Tierney and Rhoads, 1993; Van Maanen, 1976, 1983). Organizational socialization has been characterized as a "...mutually adaptive process between the organization and the individual" (Tierney and Rhoads, 1993, p. 6). The individual learns how to function and behave according to the cultural expectations of those in similar professional roles. Within this characterization, Tierney and Rhoads argue that socialization occurs through both implicit and explicit actions. Implicit actions are those spontaneous, informal activities that allow interaction between the individual and others currently in the role group (e.g., informal lunches, conversation over coffee, etc.). Explicit actions are clearly organized and delineated socialization events such as a formal training program or sanctioned professional development activities. Wenger (1998) acknowledges that socialization is a part of the education that brings about one's initial introduction into a culture, but argues that such education is fundamentally more (than socialization alone) in that it is a series of exercises by which communities of practice, and individual members of these communities, continually renew themselves. The implicit and explicit actions of organizational socialization are only a part of these continual exercises.

The relationship of situated and social learning, role theory and socialization theory is that they all define learning as situated within a social context. Social learning theory, role theory and socialization theory are all part of the complex interactions that take place within a community of practice.

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Summary

Academic advising grew out of the need for students to have assistance in navigating increasingly complex academic curricula, and has developed into a complex developmental process that ideally involves a close relationship between adviser and student to address both educational and personal goals and objectives. Recent research has also found that academic advising has a positive impact on student retention. Numerous delivery systems for academic advising exist, including faculty advising and professional advising units, and most campuses utilize a variety of delivery systems. Academic advising is increasingly delivered by professional advisers within departments and within centralized advising offices in colleges, schools, and departments, though faculty members still provide a majority of academic advising. Because of the diverse nature of how colleges and organizations carry out the advising function, advisers as a profession have had difficulty in defining their role and establishing their identity. Thus, despite the growing body of research on academic advising, little research has focused on how advisers learn and perform their role. The interrelatedness of social learning theory, socialization and role theory, and organizational theory in terms of the individual as a social participant in an organization provides a theoretical framework from which to investigate how advisers engage in learning their role within an organizational context, and the concept of "communities of practice" provides a more focused perspective for studying the process of how advisers learn their role and develop their professional identity.

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CHAPTER THREE

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study explored how professional advisers engaged in learning about and performing their role, and whether academic advisers formed communities of practice that contributed to that learning. Data was collected using informant interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. As with many qualitative studies, the design of the study was developed in the initial dissertation proposal, but evolved over the course of data collection. This chapter will outline the qualitative methodology of the study, methods of data collection, and the data analysis.

Qualitative research is not a single, monolithic tradition or method. Qualitative research has been termed "constructivist", "naturalistic", "interpretive", and "postpositivist" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and there are a number of distinct qualitative research paradigms that have emerged from various disciplines such as anthropology and sociology (Creswell, 1998; Jacobs, 1987). Creswell (1998) cautions that each qualitative research paradigm has a relatively distinct methodology and that there are differing assumptions underlying each paradigm, though there are a small number of different basic assumptions that are common to each paradigm. Qualitative research paradigms generally assume that the social world should be studied in its natural state, and that it is necessary for the researcher to gain access to meanings that guide behavior (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Qualitative research usually requires that the researcher immerse him or he

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immerse him or herself into the everyday setting of the informant and that the researcher, through ongoing interaction, seeks to understand the perspectives and understandings of the informants (Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

Unlike research in quantitative paradigms, which seek to isolate or eliminate the biases and values of the researcher, research in the qualitative paradigms should openly acknowledge the values and biases of the researcher, and make these explicit within the context of the individual study (Creswell, 1994).

Merriam (1988) also describes six basic assumptions of qualitative paradigms: 1) a concern with the *process*, rather than product; 2) the nature of *meaning* – how people make sense of their experiences; 3) the *researcher is the primary data collection instrument*; 4) the research involves *fieldwork*; 5) the research is *descriptive*, and 6) qualitative research is *inductive* – the researcher constructs theories and hypotheses from the data (pp. 19-20).

Methodology

The following section outlines several aspects of the methodology of the study, including the research questions, setting, informants, and methods of data collection. Before data collection began, this study was submitted to and approved by the Michigan State University University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) (see Appendix A).

This study was guided by the following overarching questions:

1. How do academic advisers engage in ongoing learning about their role within the organizational context of a university?

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2. Do academic advisers form communities of practice? , and if so,

   2a. What contribution do communities of practice make to the learning and performance of the advising role?

Setting

Michigan State University (MSU) is a public, land-grant institution with over 40,000 students, and is one of the ten largest universities in the United States. The university enrolls approximately 30,000 undergraduate students. The university is organized into fifteen colleges[8], including the professional colleges of Human Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine. The MSU Detroit College of Law is an affiliated private institution located on the MSU campus. This study was conducted within those colleges within the University that provide undergraduate instruction.

All incoming freshman at the university must participate in the annual Academic Orientation Program, which provides students with their first contact with academic advisers. At the undergraduate level, freshman and sophomore students are enrolled in the Undergraduate University Division (with the exception of students enrolled in James Madison College, Honors College, and the Lyman Briggs School[9]). Students may declare a field of study as a preference and be advised within the college housing their major field of study, but the academic records and academic responsibility for the student rests within

[8] Agriculture and Natural Resources, Arts and Letters, Broad College of Business, Communication Arts and Sciences, Education, Engineering, Honors College, Human Ecology, Human Medicine, James Madison College, Natural Science, Nursing, Osteopathic Medicine, Social Science, Veterinary Medicine.

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the Undergraduate University Division until the student becomes a junior and is formally accepted into a degree program. At that time, their academic records are transferred to their respective college.

Academic advising at Michigan State University is organized and administered by each college. Each college or unit has an individual who is primarily responsible for student affairs and advising. These individuals are often at the rank of associate dean, though there are several at the director rank. A list of these individuals and their titles is given in Table 1 (and see Scott, 1999). Each college has a unique organizational structure for academic advising, as shown in Table 2. Scott provides a more thorough explanation of the organizational structures of the colleges at MSU.

Each college also works with other units on campus that provide support or resources to the work of academic advising, but are not administratively within the academic colleges. These units would include the Registrar's Office, Office of Financial Aid, Academic Orientation Office, Career Services and Placement, University Counseling Center, Office of Study Abroad, and other units affiliated with the Undergraduate University Division (College Achievement Admissions Program, Learning Resource Center, Office of Supportive Services, Disability Resource Center, etc.).

The choice of Michigan State University as the setting for this study was based largely on its utilization of a large number of professional academic

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[9] James Madison and Lyman Briggs are a residential college and residential school, respectively. Lyman Briggs is located within the College of Natural Science.

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advisers in a variety of colleges and units. At least one undergraduate college at MSU began utilizing professional advisers in the mid 1960's, and currently, of the colleges and units[10] that are primarily responsible for undergraduate student affairs and advising, only one college (Arts and Letters) does not currently utilize any professional academic advisers[11] (Scott, 1999). Based on this historical pattern, I felt that professional advising had, to some extent, become accepted as part of the academic culture at the University.

Informants

The informants were professional academic advisers at Michigan State University. A professional academic adviser (often referred to as advisers in this study) was defined as a full-time university employee whose role was primarily to provide academic advising to undergraduate students, and who did not concurrently have a faculty appointment. My aim was to identify academic advisers who had been in their role for a period of less than one to fifteen years, and who represented a variety of undergraduate colleges (and thus a variety of organizational models). I felt that this range of years of service would insure that I interviewed both novices and experienced "veteran" advisers.

When I attempted to identify professional academic advisers at Michigan State University, I discovered that there is no central listing of academic advisers on campus, and that there are a number of professional advisers whose titles do

[10] This number includes the Lyman Briggs School, which is administered by the College of Natural Science, and the University Undergraduate Division.
[11] Often referred to as "specialist-advisers" because they hold the rank of specialist at the university. Arts and Letters does utilize graduate students to advise interdisciplinary majors.

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Table 1: Administrators Primarily Responsible for Undergraduate Academic Advising

College:	Title of Responsible Administrator:
Agriculture and Natural Resources	*Associate Dean and Director of Academic Programs
Arts and Letters	*Director of Student Affairs and Advising
Broad College of Business	*Director of Undergraduate Programs
Communication Arts and Sciences	*Director of Advising
Education	Associate Dean for External Relations And Student Affairs
Engineering	*Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies
Honors College	Assistant Director
Human Ecology	*Director of Student Affairs
James Madison College	Director of Academic and Student Affairs
Natural Science	*Director of Student Affairs
Nursing	Director of Student Affairs
Social Science	*Director of Student Affairs
Undergraduate University Division	*Associate Director
Veterinary Medicine	Coordinator of Preprofessional Programs
	*Interviewed for the study.

Table 2 : Advising Organizational Structure by College

College:	Primary Organizational Structure:	Type of advisers:
Agriculture and Natural Resources	Decentralized	Professional advisers located in academic departments. Some departments use faculty as advisers.
Arts and Letters	Decentralized	Faculty advisers within department. Graduate student advisers in Dean's Office for Interdisciplinary Studies.
Broad College of Business	Centralized	Professional advisers. Juniors and senior students also assigned to faculty advisers. One department uses professional adviser within department.
Communication Arts and Sciences	Centralized	Professional advisers assigned to academic majors.
Education	Centralized	Professional advisers. Two professional departmental advisers within specific academic departments.
Engineering	Mixed	Centralized freshman – sophomore professional advisers. Decentralized upper-level professional advisers located within academic departments.
Honors College	Mixed	Professional advisers in Director's office and faculty advisers in students' department.
Human Ecology	Decentralized	Professional advisers within academic departments.
James Madison College	Centralized	Professional advisers for lower level and undeclared students; faculty advisers for upper level and declared students.
Natural Science	Mixed	Professional pre-professional advisers in Deans' office and faculty advisers in academic departments; two department employ professional advisers.

Table 2, (cont'd).

College:	Primary Organizational Structure:	Type of advisers:
Nursing	Centralized	Professional advisers within Dean's Office.
Social Science	Decentralized	Professional advisers in academic departments.
Undergraduate University Division	Centralized	Professional advisers in four central offices around campus.
Veterinary Medicine	Centralized	Professional advisers for pre-veterinary programs only. Faculty advisers for veterinary students.

not necessarily include the word "adviser." Therefore, I first requested a listing from the Academic Human Resources office of all academic specialists at the university who used the title "adviser," and their years of appointment in that position, and also reviewed the departmental listings in the university faculty-staff directory to come up with a list of professional advisers on campus. I then requested a list of members of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) at Michigan State University. This list of NACADA members was relatively small, but I tried to identify some advisers who both fit the criteria for appointment and years of service and were members of NACADA.

These lists were compiled into one database containing approximately 75 individuals. A purposeful selection was done of those professional advisers who met the criteria of being full-time employees and who had tenure between less than one and fifteen years of service. As Creswell (1994) argues, informants should be selected that will best answer the research question(s). Miles and Huberman (1994) provide a typology of sampling methods appropriate for qualitative research, and list one type of sampling as "criterion" – that of selecting cases that meet some criteria. I used a criterion sampling method. Based on my assumption that advisers might form communities of practice across the institution or within various locations in the institution, I felt that selecting a sample of advisers across Michigan State University would yield data that would contribute to an emerging picture of whether or not communities of practice, did, in fact, exist.

Based on available data, 41 advisers were identified as specifically meeting the criteria listed above. A letter that explained the nature and purpose of the study was sent to these individuals inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix B). A consent form enclosed with the letter (see Appendix A) asked potential informants to agree to voluntarily participate in informant interviews and participant observation, and to provide documents for analysis. A total of 41 letters were issued, and 21 advisers agreed to participate in the study. These 21 advisers represented a range of years of service from less than one year to fourteen years, and though the distribution was unequal among colleges, represented nine undergraduate colleges and units (Agriculture and Natural Resources, Broad College of Business, Communication Arts and Sciences, Education, Engineering, Human Ecology, Natural Science, Social Science, and the Undergraduate University Division) that utilized various organizational models and delivery methods. The gender was unevenly distributed, with eighteen females and three males. Though I did not specifically ask about the informants' race and ethnicity, I observed that the overwhelming majority of informants appeared to be Caucasian. All informants except one had a Master's degree and all held the rank of academic specialist, or, in a few cases, instructor. All informants had as their primary responsibility academic advising of undergraduate students, though some informants had additional appointments (such as instructor). Table 3 lists the attributes of these informants.

Table 3: Attributes of Informants

Gender	Tenure	Organizational Structure	Highest Degree	Rank	Member of NACADA
18 females 3 males	Range: <1 – 14 years Average tenure: 6.5 years	8 - centralized 7 - mixed 6 – decentraliz-ed	All informants had a Master's level degree (except one with BA only)	All held rank of academic specialist or instructor	10 members 11 non-members

(n = 21)

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the following sources:

1. Informal interviews of associate deans and directors representing each college represented by informants (see Interview Protocol in Appendix C).

2. In-depth interviews of all informants (see Interview Protocol in Appendix D).
3. Documents requested and collected from associate deans and directors, informants, and other sources.
4. Observation of staff meetings and additional interviews with informants and Associate Dean within one undergraduate college for a period of five weeks (see Interview Protocols in Appendix E and F).
5. Field notes and notes on participant observation (see examples in Appendix G).

My plan for conducting this study was to begin by collecting and reviewing documents pertinent to academic advising. I would then concurrently begin interviewing associate deans and directors, and informants, and request documents from them during the course of the interviews. After transcribing these interviews and collecting documents, I would review these data and make a decision about whether to request a second round of interviews, or spend additional time with an individual unit. Based on the review of the interview data, I concluded that there was probably not an institutional community of practice, as the informants did not seem to interact on a regular informal basis across the institution, but that there might well be a community of practice that resided mainly within a college or smaller unit because of issues of physical proximity and level of personal comfort and familiarity that led to regular informal interaction. With the concurrence of my dissertation committee, I therefore requested permission from the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the College of Engineering to spend approximately five weeks observing the weekly

Undergraduate Studies staff meetings, and conducting additional interviews with individual advisers and administrators in the college. This permission was obtained. Finally, I recorded field notes throughout the study and took detailed notes during participant observation. Data collection for the study took place from mid April to December, 1999.

Informal Interviews with Associate Deans and Directors

I first identified the individual in each college who was primarily responsible for overseeing academic advising, and then requested an informal interview with all these Associate Deans and Directors (who represented those colleges represented by informants) (see Table 1). All but one individual agreed to an interview. I interviewed nine Associate Deans and Directors. These interviews were conducted concurrently with the initial informant interviews. The interviews consisted of my meeting with the individual to discuss three general topics: a) a general overview of the organization and administration of academic advising with the college, b) a description of training for academic advisers within the college, and c) opportunities for professional development for academic advisers. Most interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes. Though the interviews were not audio-recorded, I took notes during each interview and later transcribed these notes. I ended each interview with a request for any documents or additional information in the college pertaining to advising. All individuals furnished documents to me or referred me to documents or other sources. Several individuals also gave me tours of their central offices and introduced me to professional advisers and support staff within their college. Table 2 shows a general overview and description of the organization of academic advising in these colleges.

Informant Interviews

An interview protocol was developed for an in-depth interview with informants. My intent was to ask advisers several open-ended questions that would provide data about how they defined and perceived their role, about how they learned to perform their role, and about how their social interaction with other advisers contributed to the learning and performance of their role. A draft protocol was developed and went through several review drafts with my dissertation committee before I piloted the protocol with two professional advisers. Based on feedback from those pilot interviews, additional modifications were made to the final protocol. This protocol (see Appendix D) was used to guide the initial interviews with all informants.

After the study had received approval from the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), I began inviting professional advisers to participate in the study. I then contacted those who agreed to participate to set up times for the interview. All informants agreed to have their interviews audio-recorded. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and ten minutes. Although I generally followed the interview protocol, each interview was unique in terms of follow-up questions that I posed based on comments made by the adviser during the interview. During each interview, I also requested copies of documents that the adviser felt were pertinent to his or her role and learning. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis, and the

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original audiotapes were retained. I personally transcribed many of the interview tapes, and reviewed all interview transcripts that were transcribed by another person to ensure that she had accurately transcribed the interview.

Based on the initial review of the data in the transcripts from the first interview, I did not request a second round of interviews with all informants, but did interview informants within the College of Engineering a second time. It was apparent from the initial review of the transcripts and field notes that advisers did not interact on a regular basis across the institution, but that there was an enormous amount of interaction with centralized and mixed advising structures, such as existed in the College of Engineering (the college has a "mixed" model - see Table 2). An interview protocol that focused on indicators of a community of practice was developed, and is shown in Appendix E. I also conducted an in-depth interview with the former and current Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies (see protocol in Appendix F) for the college while completing my participant observation and informant interviews. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Documents

Throughout this study, I collected documents related to academic advising in general and specifically at Michigan State University. I first reviewed the university web site and general university publications for information related to academic advising. I then reviewed each college's web site for information related to academic advising within that college. Additional documents were requested and obtained during my informal interviews with associate deans and directors, and I also requested documents from each adviser during my in-depth interviews. Documents reviewed for this study included research literature, general university publications, college publications, web sites, university surveys, college reports and internal documents, job descriptions, and electronic mail.

Participant Observation

Based on my initial review of the data from the informant interview and fieldnotes, I concluded (with the concurrence of my dissertation committee) that I would instead spend additional time within an individual college instead of scheduling a second round of interviews with all of the informants. I decided to spend additional time in the College of Engineering based on several reasons: 1) I had interviewed the most informants within that college; 2) the informants had indicated a high degree of interaction and communication among academic advisers, and 3) the college utilizes a mixed model of centralized "pre-professional" advisers and departmental "major" advisers, which created two distinct groups of adviser types within the college. Based on my initial interviews, I also felt that the informants and Associate Dean would welcome my presence. My dissertation committee agreed with this decision.

I contacted the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the College of Engineering to request permission to attend staff meetings for a period of five weeks. The Undergraduate Studies staff members usually meet on a weekly basis, and all professional advisers in the college are expected to attend these meetings. The associate dean agreed to my presence at these meetings. I then developed a second consent form that dealt only with participant observation, and following UCRIHS approval, distributed it to all those who would be attending staff meetings before attending myself. All those attending staff meetings consented to being observed. At the first staff meeting, I gave an informal overview of my study and my reason for attending staff meetings. I then attended five staff meetings and recorded observation notes on both the content of the meeting and the social and professional interaction among the participants prior to the meetings, during the meetings, and after the meetings. An example of these notes is shown in Appendix G.

Field Notes

Throughout the study, I recorded field notes to document my own feelings, thoughts and perceptions about how the study was proceeding, my relationship with the informants, their reaction to the interview and request for documents, the process of transcribing and then reviewing interviews, etc. These are distinguished from the notes I recorded during participant observation. I reviewed these notes after each interview, and then periodically throughout the study. A sample of these field notes can be seen in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

The data from this study consisted of field notes, notes from participant observation, interview transcripts and copies of documents. The analysis of ethnographic data usually entails the coding of data into categories in order to identify and describe patterns or themes that the researcher then attempts to explain and understand (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Wolcott (1994b) characterizes this as data transformation, and argues that it consists of three aspects - description, analysis, and interpretation of the culture-sharing group. I reviewed the data from this study several times in order to organize it categorically and thematically as necessary. Lists of major points, ideas or patterns were recorded or modified during each review of the data, and three overarching thematic modules emerged (the role of advisers, ways of learning to advise, and the presence of a community of practice) that incorporated these major points, ideas and patterns. I periodically reviewed these modules with my dissertation chair and a number of informants to provide member-checks on my analysis of the data.

Informant interviews were transcribed, and I reviewed the transcripts several times. Each time, I identified major points and ideas related to the role of an adviser, how the informant learned to be an adviser and how they continued learning to be an adviser, the resources that they used to perform their roles, and how they interacted with other advisors at Michigan State University – across the institution, within their college, and within their department or unit. I also reviewed documents and identified text within the documents that addressed the role of advisers. These major points and ideas were compiled on notecards, and incorporated into the three overarching thematic modules. These findings are described in detail in the next chapter of this study.

In reviewing documents, I also looked for evidence that the document was used by advisers in learning to perform their role. Several documents were explicitly mentioned by a number of informants as vital to their performance as an adviser, while others were seen as a form of communication of new ideas, innovations and advising procedures. Other documents contained information that I highlighted as being used by advisers. For example, the electronic adviser listserv[12] at Michigan State University was heavily utilized to make announcements and provide information to academic advisers and administrators responsible for academic advising. Again, major points and ideas were recorded on notecards and incorporated into the three overarching thematic modules.

Notes from participant observation were transcribed, and included both skeletal minutes of the meetings as well as my notes and analysis of what I believed was happening during the meeting and among the meeting participants. These transcriptions and the original notes were reviewed several times throughout the course of the study. I again identified the major points and ideas in my notes and analysis, and recorded these on notecards so as to identify those that were consistent with Wenger's (1998) indicators of a community of practice. This information was also incorporated into the three overarching thematic modules.

The proposed focus of this study was to describe and interpret the behaviors, experiences and perceptions that academic advisers exhibited relative to their ongoing learning about their role within the organization and whether or not they utilized communities of practice to facilitate this learning. However, the

[12] A listserv is an electronic forum wherein all subscribers receive each individual e-mail message.

unit of analysis in the study shifted from an initial focus on the individual adviser to a later focus on the community of practice. I also described and interpreted the actions and impacts of the community of practice upon the role and learning of advisers who were members of the community.

I have attempted to provide a detailed description of the role of the adviser, and describe how advisers learn about their role. I have also tried to interpret whether or not academic advisers at Michigan State University formed communities of practice, and, if these existed, describe how these might help advisers engage in ongoing social learning about their roles.

Describing the role of the adviser came from several sources: the formal roles and responsibilities which are explicitly or implicitly outlined in the research literature, and in documents such as the Michigan State University *Academic Programs* (1995) booklet and *Academic Adviser Manual* (1999), formal job descriptions, and personnel evaluation documents; and those roles which informants described during the course of interviews and during participant observation. Interview transcripts, notes on observations, field notes, and documents were analyzed to determine what roles were repeatedly identified as present in advising. I also reviewed previous research literature that described the role(s) of advisers as a guide from which to compare my observations and interpretations.

Describing ongoing learning about the role of adviser came from a review of the research literature, analysis of interview transcripts, field notes, notes from participant observation, and documents. I looked for evidence that advisers were engaging in activities such as reading current publications, periodicals and journals; attending professional development activities such as workshops, conferences and other meetings; participating in informal and formal networks on the campus; and engaging in scholarly activity regarding academic advising.

Interpreting whether or not communities of practice exist came from analyzing interview transcripts, records of observations, and documents to see whether or not informants consistently described their informal participation in groups that meet the criteria of a community of practice. These criteria were 1) the group must have been informally organized (not a formalized or institutionally recognized group); and 2) must have consisted of members who interacted on a regular, informal basis; negotiated meanings and actions; created mutual accountability; and created shared meanings, practices, ideas, artifacts and language. Interaction on a regular basis was construed to mean that participants interacted at least several times each week, with regular contact occurring throughout a given semester or academic year. Examples of the negotiation and creation of shared meanings, practices, ideas, artifacts and language included using common terms and acronyms that all members of the community recognized and understood; informally sharing ideas and opinions about procedures for any facet of advising; interacting informally with others to discuss and interpret academic policies, procedures and regulations; discussing the use of and/or sharing new computer software or other existing management tools; sharing paper forms that facilitated the advising process; and comparing and contrasting procedures used in different colleges and academic units to arrive at commonly accepted procedures being utilized across the department, college or institution. It is important to note that these actions were not limited to interactions among advisers, but also included personnel from the Registrar's Office, Office of Study Abroad, Career Services and Placement, and various other units within the University. Describing and interpreting the impact of communities of practice on the practice of academic advising came from describing how participation within a community of practice impacted the daily lives of academic advisers.

Wenger (1998) also lists several indicators that a community of practice has been formed (see Figure 1). These indicators provided a guide for my analysis and interpretation of the data. I looked for evidence in transcripts, participant observation, documents and field notes that these indicators existed within the College of Engineering.

Summary

This was a qualitative study that explored how professional advisers learned about their role, and whether or not advisers formed communities of practice that contributed to that learning. The study was conducted over a period of approximately one calendar year at Michigan State University (MSU), a large public land-grant institution with over 40,000 students. MSU utilizes professional academic advisers for undergraduate advising in a majority of its undergraduate colleges and units, and at least one college has utilized professional advisers since the mid 1960's.

Figure 1: Indicators of a Community of Practice

- sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
- shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- very quick setup of the problem to be discussed
- substantial overlap in participants' description of who belongs
- knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- mutually defining identities
- the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- specific tools, representations, and other artifacts
- local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.

From: Wenger, Etienne. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. New York: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 125-26).

The informants for the study were professional academic advisers in undergraduate colleges and units at MSU. Professional academic advisers were defined as full-time university employees whose role was primarily to advise undergraduate students, and who did not concurrently have a faculty appointment. Twenty-one advisers having between less than one and fourteen years of experience as an adviser at MSU agreed to participate in the study. The informants represented nine undergraduate colleges and units, and the majority of them were female. The informants did not appear to be racially or ethnically diverse. All of the informants held the rank of academic specialist or instructor, and all but one informant held at least a Master's degree.

Data was collected for the study from informal interviews with associate deans and directors who represented colleges represented by informants, interviews with the informants, documents, participant observation and additional informant interviews within one college, and field notes recorded throughout the study. Protocols were developed for all of the interviews, and all informant interviews were transcribed verbatim. Observation notes and field notes were recorded during the study. The data were analyzed by reviewing interview transcriptions, documents, observation notes and field notes. Lists of major ideas or patterns were recorded and modified during each review of the data and three overarching thematic modules were developed that incorporated these ideas and patterns.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPORT OF FINDINGS

This chapter will present a report of findings from this study. The chapter is organized by sections as follows: Vignettes, the Role of Advisers, Learning to Advise, and A Community of Practice at Michigan State University. A final section will provide a brief summary of the findings.

Analysis of the interview transcripts, field notes, participant observation notes, and documents revealed that advisers have a complex and multifaceted role that they learn over time through a process of individualized study, mentorship and apprenticeship, and social learning. Though there does not seem to be an institutional community of practice due to a lack of regular interaction among advisers, further analysis of participation observation notes, fieldnotes, interview transcripts and documents suggests that a community of practice does exist within one college that has a mixed model of advising delivery. There may be other communities of practice within those colleges that have centralized or mixed advising delivery models where advisers are in relatively close physical proximity and have a high level of trust and comfort with each other.

In each section of this chapter, direct quotations from informants (denoted by the use of single-spaced text and indentations) are used to illustrate major points. These quotations are taken from interview transcripts or personal communication between me and the informants, and are used verbatim, with any breaks in the text being separated by an ellipsis (...), and any added explanatory text contained in brackets [ ].

Vignettes

This section will describe the professional lives and environments of two professional academic advisers at Michigan State University to provide a detailed general description of a typical day in the life of two very different types of professional academic advisers - one a relatively new adviser in a centralized advising unit and one a more experienced adviser in a decentralized departmental setting. The vignettes do not represent any one individual, but are a composite of several individuals that fit into each category. I wrote these vignettes to reflect a composite of several individuals so as not to compromise any one individual's identity. Wenger's (1998) vignettes describing a working day in the life of an insurance claims processor and Lave and Wenger's (1991) descriptions of studies of various apprenticeships provided a guide for these vignettes.

In writing vignettes that represented a composite of individuals, it was important to have a group of informants review the vignettes. For the following vignettes, I had six informants who represented a variety of years of experience and organizational models review the narrative and comment on its accuracy and authenticity. For the most part, the informants agreed that these vignettes generally represented their daily lives, but the informants did comment about how their personal situations varied from what I had initially described. For example, one informant indicated that contrary to the narrative, she had no support staff to assist her in basic administrative duties. Another informant pointed out that it was often impossible to cover a wide range of topics within a thirty minute advising appointment. Informants also commented on the variations in projects that they performed in addition to the actual act of advising students. I have attempted to take these comments and variances into account by making changes to the vignettes so as to reflect differences based on differing personal environments.

Vignette I: Samuel

Samuel is a professional academic adviser in his first year of advising at Michigan State University (MSU). He has a Master's degree, and has previously worked for several years in another area on campus before accepting the advising position. Samuel has a term[13] appointment as an academic specialist, but his role is as an academic adviser for his college. Samuel's college has a centralized advising system, and he has a private office in an area where there are also a director and other advisers, and support staff who serve as receptionists and secretaries and provide administrative assistance to the professional advisers. There is a small waiting area where students wait to see an adviser. The rest of the reception area is filled with filing cabinets and desks. Samuel's office, down the hall, is neatly organized, with the phone, personal computer and what he deems the "necessary" resources close at hand – these include his computer, the university faculty-staff phone directory, the *Academic*

[13] An appointment for a fixed period, requiring reappointment to additional fixed periods. A continuing appointment is for an indefinite period. Not surprisingly, advisers covet continuing appointment status.

Programs booklet, the current *Schedule of Courses*, the university's *Academic Adviser Manual*, and various curriculum guides and forms that he needs to regularly consult while advising students, and when appropriate, to share with students or give to students. His desk faces the door to his office, and there are chairs for students to sit in and face him when they come into the office. Besides the desk and chairs, the office has several small built-in bookshelves, room for two filing cabinets, and a window that looks out onto another building across the street. Samuel keeps his office door open, except when a student asks that it be closed, or when Samuel feels that the student is very uncomfortable with having an open door.

The computer is an indispensable tool for Samuel. He uses it constantly during the day for a number of functions – sending and receiving electronic mail, retrieving and reviewing student records, writing correspondence, accessing information via the Internet, and writing notes on advising sessions with students. The use of electronic mail continues to escalate, and like other advisers on campus, Samuel spends more and more time reading and responding to electronic mail messages. There is no typical message, but an assortment of announcements, requests, questions, clarifications and responses from students, other advisers, colleagues and friends on campus, listservs, and faculty members. Since many of the written resources that Samuel uses are also available on the university and college web sites, Samuel often accesses these on the computer rather than read through the books, though he must be careful about the accuracy of the resources on the web sites. Even though the sites are constantly being changed and updated, some of the information is out of date, and advisers must be careful to recognize and know what information is currently accurate. Samuel admits that he prefers to use the computer to access information, but often finds himself looking at written materials, as these are sometimes better organized, and physically easier to show a student.

Samuel also uses the phone constantly, as there are times when asking a question or sharing information is easier to do when talking with another person and engaging in conversation rather than sending electronic mail messages back and forth. He also goes out of his office and down the hall to talk with his director or other advisers in the building to ask questions, get information, or clarify a policy or procedure. Since Samuel advises students in several majors, there is an enormous amount of information that he must know about university, college and departmental policies and procedures, the different curricula for majors, elective courses, internships, career paths, and Study Abroad opportunities. Students also come to him with unique personal and academic situations, and he must often help students in creatively solving problems. In these situations, Samuel is usually able to ask a more experienced adviser for help or advice, and the other advisers and the director are more than willing to share information. The ability to interact with other, more experienced advisers is important to Samuel, and he asks many questions. The advising staff also meets on a weekly basis, and Samuel often finds that he can gather information at the meetings, or ask questions of everyone else in the more relaxed social atmosphere of these meetings.

When he first came to this job, Samuel spent a lot of time by himself reading and reviewing the university's academic rules and regulations, and the college's academic rules and regulations. He read and reviewed the course descriptions and degree programs and requirements. He also read the Adviser's Manual, and still refers to it fairly often. Samuel has to be familiar with all this material when he advises students, and he admits that the amount of information is overwhelming at times. As he was reading through all the written materials, Samuel was also observing other more experienced advisers to see how they interacted with students, how they answered questions or dealt with different situations, and how they asked questions of students[14]. Samuel then started advising students on his own, and admits he is still developing his own style of interacting with students. When asked about his training when he arrived, Samuel admits that much of it was informal and individualized because new advisers have to absorb so much information in a short period of time. Though he often interacts with the other advisers in his office, he does not really know or talk to other advisers around campus. Samuel thinks this is because he is new and does not know other advisers, because he thinks the problems are often unique to a college or major, and because the other advisers in his unit, or other offices on campus (e.g., Registrar's Office, Office of Study Abroad, Learning Resource Center, etc) can provide him with answers to questions or needed information.

[14] Several advisers referred to this process as "probing" - asking questions designed to make students articulate their thoughts and feelings in the advisers' presence.

Samuel's morning typically starts with a review of his scheduled appointments for the day. Students make advising appointments through a web-based scheduling system, or by contacting the support staff. Students are asked to describe the reason for their appointment, though Samuel often finds that students have multiple questions or needs that they bring to the appointment. Advising appointments are scheduled for thirty minutes, but the length depends on the issues that Samuel and the student need to discuss. If a student needs more than a thirty minute appointment, Samuel usually suggests to the student that he or she make a future appointment, but he does not end an appointment if he senses that a student is in distress or needs additional information or advice immediately. Woven into his daily advising appointments are other activities like staff meetings, committee meetings, or university-wide adviser in-service training.

After reviewing his daily schedule, Samuel next checks his voice mail and reads any e-mail messages that have come in overnight. During peak advising periods (which tend to correspond with the start of each semester and the spring pre-enrollment period), Samuel might have twenty-five or more messages per day from students. He goes through the e-mail, answering the questions, or in some cases, suggesting that the student make an appointment. Electronic mail is seen as useful but time consuming by Samuel. Samuel can often answer an e-mail with a straightforward answer, or by simply giving the student the information and telling the student to follow up. Other e-mail messages, however, require Samuel to do some research in order to find the information or the answer to a question. Often, students pose multiple questions via e-mail, or ask for information that Samuel cannot provide without talking further with the student. Samuel admits that he spends more and more time dealing with e-mail messages, and that communicating with students via e-mail does not allow for him to meet the student and clarify information during a real-time conversation, or look at non-verbal cues from a student. However, using e-mail often saves time in that students receive an immediate answer to their questions without having to make an appointment or trying to call Samuel. Because Samuel is a relatively inexperienced adviser, he admits to spending a lot of time talking with other advisers or offices, or looking up information in order to answer students' questions.

After Samuel finishes answering his e-mail, and if he has any time before student appointments begin (or between appointments), he catches up on paperwork, or works on any current projects. In addition to advising students, all of the advisers in the college are expected to work on projects related to academic advising or student affairs in the college. Projects might include preparing or revising materials for new student orientation, developing advising or career development materials, planning summer activities for high school students, or working on web sites. Projects are ongoing and provide a needed break from working with students.

Samuel's student appointments typically start at about 10:00 am and run through the rest of the day. Before each appointment, he tries to pull the student's file and review any information that might help him anticipate the student's needs or questions – things like: how is the student doing academically, is their plan of study up to date, or, have they discussed career and personal goals with him previously? When students come in for their appointment, Samuel asks them how they are doing, and refers to the reasons they listed when they made the appointment. He answers any questions, or provides the resources that the students needs to get their own answers, or refers them to another office, and makes sure that the student is up-to-date on things like being pre-enrolled and having a plan of study. With every student, Samuel tries to share information about things like Study Abroad opportunities and internships, or career fairs and activities in the college or at the university. Samuel sees his role as more than just telling students what courses to take in order to graduate. It is important to him that students also talk with him about their personal and career goals, as he believes that students should think carefully about how their courses and their experiences will fit with their goals. Students may also bring up personal problems during appointments. Though Samuel is not a licensed counselor, he knows it is important that he listen to the student and be sympathetic, and he is willing to offer academic advice to the student, but if he feels a student needs more help, he refers him or her to the university counseling center. If Samuel needs to retrieve information during an appointment, he consults the Web or written materials, or uses the phone, or sometimes excuses himself and sticks his head into a colleague's office to ask a question or clarify information. Throughout the appointment, Samuel is writing notes in the students' files, and after a student has left his office, Samuel reviews the notes and adds any information that he wants to put in the file. If a student asks to see

Samuel's notes, he shares this with the student – after all, it is information about the student.

Samuel's appointments often go through to the end of the day. After his last appointment (which is often at the very end of the day), he rechecks and answers any e-mail and voice mail that has come in during the day. Any answers that will require some research are noted and put aside for the next morning. He also works on projects, finishes paperwork, and prints out and reviews his schedule for the next day, and then leaves the office, but it is often well after 5:00 p.m. when he is able to go home.

Vignette II: Shelby

Shelby is a professional adviser in an academic department, and has worked at Michigan State University as an adviser for over ten years now. She received her degrees at another institution, and worked at several other jobs before coming here as an academic adviser. Shelby considers herself lucky to have a continuing appointment as an academic specialist, and her annual evaluations are always very good, so she considers herself to be very safe in her position. Shelby has a private office within the academic department, and shares a suite with two other people who are also in the department. She and the other two persons in her suite have a secretary and receptionist who assists with answering the telephone and general office duties. Shelby is grateful to have secretarial help, because she knows from experience that many advisers have no or very little administrative support in their department. The outer office has several chairs for students and also has the secretary's desk and filing cabinets, as well as noteboards for various announcements about graduate study, jobs, and academic policies. The suite often has students coming and going, and the secretary's phone rings throughout the day.

Like Samuel, Shelby has many of the same materials readily available in her office – her computer, the *Academic Adviser's Manual*, descriptions of courses, the *Academic Programs* book, curriculum guides, and the university faculty-staff directory. Unlike Samuel, her office is filled with plants and stacks of paper and books, and Shelby admits that she needs to clean, but though it looks like a mess, Shelby insists she is meticulously organized with student files and her immediate work area is clear and free of clutter. Her desk faces one wall, and she, like Samuel, keeps her door open unless a student requests that it be closed or she senses the student feels uncomfortable with having an open door.

Unlike Samuel, Shelby is not constantly at her computer, but she is spending more and more time on the Internet, and sending and responding to e-mail. Since she has a smaller number of advisees than Samuel, her volume of e-mail from students is not yet overwhelming, but it does take up to an hour or so each morning and evening. Shelby is more comfortable using the phone, or just going into another person's office to get information. She increasingly relies on the Internet for information, but like Samuel, is wary of how up to date information is, and prefers to be able to verify the accuracy of information using multiple sources. Since she is not physically close to any other academic advisers, Shelby often calls the Department Chair or Associate Dean, or just walks to the chairperson's office down the hall when she has questions about an individual student, or about a policy or procedure. Like Samuel, she does not interact regularly with other advisers around campus, though she knows a lot of advisers in her college by virtue of having been at the university for over a decade in the same department now. Shelby does talk with other advisers in her college, but this is rarely in person, as the advisers are scattered in several buildings throughout campus. She is experienced enough to often know exactly where to go or who to call with questions and to get information, though Shelby admits that she still gets "stumped" fairly often by students' questions or problems, and must consult with her chair or the Associate Dean.

When asked how she learned to be an adviser, Shelby laughs and says that she'll have to dig back a few years to remember, but she quickly acknowledges that she initially spent (and still spends) a lot of time reading and becoming familiar with university and departmental information. She thinks the university's adviser manual is very helpful because it puts a lot of information together in one place, and wishes it had been around when she started advising. However, most of her learning has come from working with her predecessor early on and then interacting with faculty, students, and administrators in her department and college. Shelby tries to attend all university adviser in-services and Study Abroad meetings because she thinks she needs to keep up to date on all the "stuff" that is going on in such a large institution.

Shelby's day is somewhat different than Samuel's because she does not see nearly as many students from day to day. When she first comes into the office, she does review her schedule and answer her e-mail and return phone messages. She often has several student appointments in the afternoon, but most of the time her day is not completely filled with student appointments. This is not to suggest she is not busy. Shelby describes her job as requiring the ability to multi-task and be very flexible. As the only academic adviser in the department, she often gets phone calls or has students and faculty who drop in with one question (which often develops into several questions). She is the department's main resource for questions regarding academic policies and procedures. She handles most of the department's academic paperwork for items such as graduation certification, and ASUS decisions and actions (student recesses, probation, and dismissal), and evaluating transfer credit. Shelby also works on other departmental projects. She sits on the department's curriculum committee, and spends a great deal of time reviewing the curriculum. She has a very good working relationship with the departmental faculty, and they often refer students to her for a variety of problems and situations. She plans and oversees commencement activities for the department, and plans the annual departmental Honors Banquet. Shelby also spends a great deal of time helping students with pursuing career goals – she reviews and critiques student resumes, helps students arrange internships and summer employment, and maintains contact with a large number of employers. She points out that she is considered the departmental "expert" on internships and resumes and that this is a role she did not expect to take on when she first came to the department over ten years ago, but that she enjoys it and finds that students appreciate her help and expertise.

Shelby's approach to advising students is similar to Samuel's. She spends time helping the students plan their course of study, but she also helps students find information that they need and refers them to other resources and helps them articulate their personal and professional goals, and works with them to, as she puts it, "get though this institution in the most beneficial way for them." Students make appointments to see her by seeing or calling the secretary in her suite. Advising appointments are scheduled for thirty minutes, but like Samuel, she will not end an appointment if she senses a student is in some distress or needs some information immediately. Shelby has some experience and training as a counselor, and she says these skills help her in listening to students and helping them work through both personal and academic problems, but she, like Samuel, will refer a student to the university counseling center if she feels a student needs additional help. During an appointment, Shelby is writing notes in the student's file, and she reviews these notes and adds any information that is needed after the student's appointment is over.

At the end of the day, Shelby catches up on paperwork, works on departmental projects, rechecks her e-mail and returns phone calls, and reviews her schedule for the next day. Like Samuel, it is often after 5:00 p.m. when she is finally able to leave the office.

Summary

These vignettes illustrate a day in the life of two professional advisers in very different settings. Samuel is a very new adviser in a centralized advising unit, and has other advisers and support staff in very close proximity, and he often talks with the other advisers in his unit for advice, or to ask questions, or seek clarification. Samuel works on other projects that relate to his office, like helping organize the summer academic orientation program for the college. Shelby is more experienced, and in an academic department where she is the only adviser. She does not have other academic advisers nearby, and usually seeks advice from the department chair or the associate dean, though she does occasionally talk with other advisers in the college by phone and e-mail. Shelby often works on projects specific to her department, like overseeing commencement activities. In spite of these differences, both Samuel and Shelby consider their role as much more than just telling students what courses they need to take to graduate. They also both see themselves as helping students understand academic policies and procedures, connecting students with other resources on campus, helping them clarify their academic and professional goals and objectives, providing career information and advice, and generally helping students to gain the most from their undergraduate years.

The Role of Advisers

In trying to study how advisers learned to perform their roles, I felt it was necessary for me to first arrive at a definition of the role of the academic adviser. The previous vignettes help to illustrate the multi-faceted role of an academic adviser. The research literature lists various behaviors for an academic adviser - information disseminator, teacher, career counselor, referral agent, counselor, change agent, and administrator. The literature also suggests that academic advisers may be in a position to span the boundaries of two subcultures on the campus –academic affairs and student affairs.

The data that contributed to formulating the role of advisers came from interview transcripts, field notes and documents. I reviewed a number of documents that referred to the role of an academic adviser at Michigan State University, and asked several questions during the in-depth interviews with informants that were designed to help create a composite picture of an adviser's role. It is clear from these data that the role of an adviser is multi-faceted, and that advisers place varying degrees of emphasis on parts of the composite role, depending on their personal philosophies and beliefs and the unique requirements and expectations of their college, department or unit, and the expectations and needs of students. The boundaries between behaviors that make up the role are not clear-cut, and advisers often engage in activities that simultaneously fulfill the expectations for each behavior or function (see Colbert, 1998; Marks, 1977). Many advisers also have other duties and expectations that are not specifically involved in advising individual students, but that require a significant amount of time and energy.

These findings are consistent with the literature that describes the role of advisers, except for that of adviser as "change agent". No adviser that I interviewed talked about having an impact on change or perceived that they exerted significant influence within their college, department or unit.

There are several university-wide documents that specifically address the role of an academic adviser. Both the MSU *Academic Programs* book (1995) and the MSU *Academic Adviser Manual* (1997) provide a description of the role of an academic adviser. The manual defines the role of an adviser as such:

> An adviser provides critical information about academic programs, degree requirements, career options, course selection, secondary fields of study and extracurricular activities. In addition, advisers make non-academic referrals, share campus resources, trouble shoot and solve problems on behalf of individual students, know policies and procedures, certify students for graduation, write letters of recommendation and take a personal interest in each student's success....An academic adviser's goal is to provide academic assistance and career guidance for the student throughout his or her undergraduate education. Each student makes the ultimate decisions during his or her undergraduate career, but the adviser is an educator who can share knowledge, experience and insight which can be incorporated into those decisions to the benefit of the student. (p. 1.2).

The manual also lists typical functions of an adviser as: to provide information on academic programs, advise on enrollment, explain academic policies and procedures, make academic referrals, assist with career planning, and make non-academic referrals.

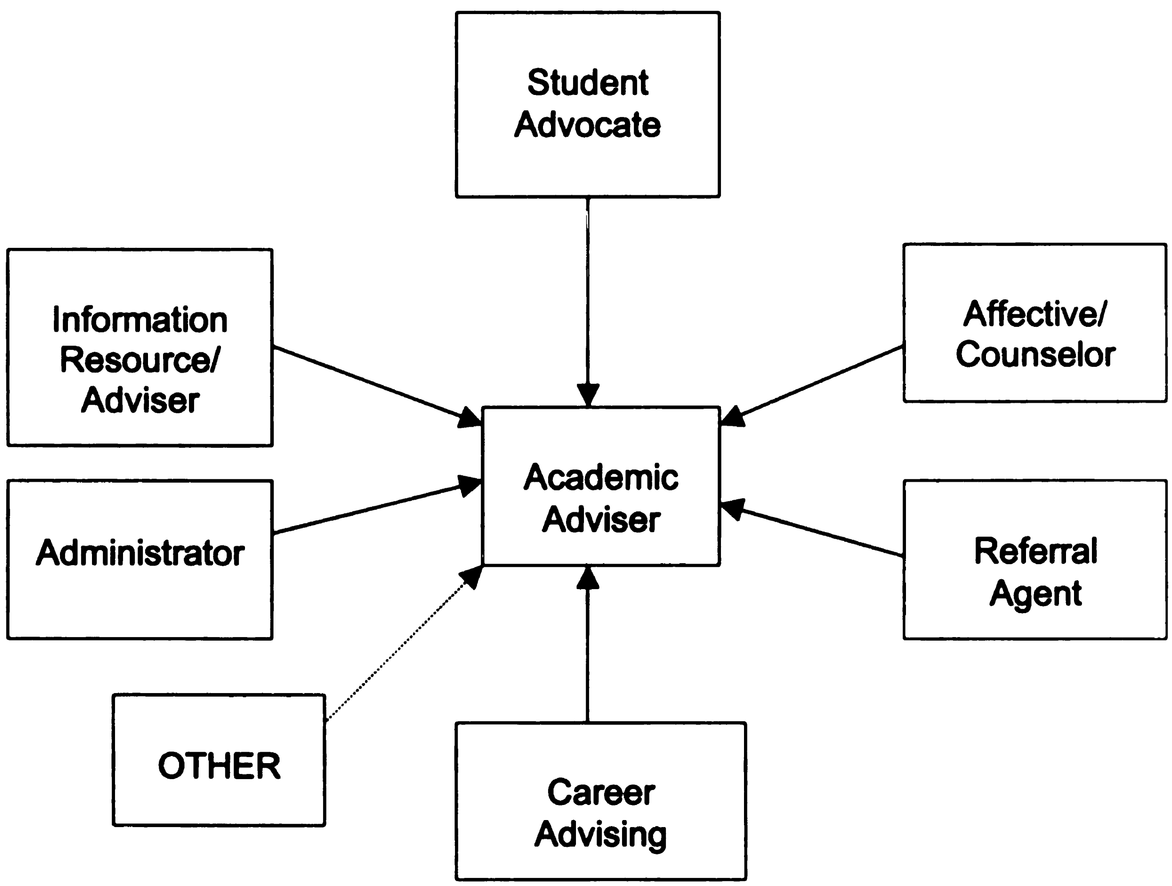
In addition, various web sites at Michigan State University contain information about academic advising. Virtually every college that provides undergraduate instruction has some web-based information for undergraduate students that typically includes a description of the various functions of academic advisers, resources for students and advisers, and university, college, and departmental requirements. These web sites were constantly being updated, and I reviewed them several times throughout this study in order to access the most recent information.

Informants also furnished job descriptions and position announcements for analysis. These descriptions and announcements all mention the role of academic advising and some type of career advising, but there is divergence in terms of other duties such as participation in new student orientation programs, advising transfer students, teaching freshman seminars or other introductory courses, making ASUS decisions, and the adviser's role and function as it relates to student recruitment and retention. Placement announcements and job descriptions for departmental (usually in decentralized models) advisers generally give the adviser a more prominent role in career advising, recruitment, retention and advising transfer students, while announcements and descriptions for advisers in centralized or mixed delivery models generally give the adviser a more prominent role in teaching undergraduate seminars and in new student orientation.

In addition to the behaviors that emerged from analysis of documents were the behaviors mentioned in informant interviews. I asked several questions relating to how advisers defined their role, and a more comprehensive role emerges from this data. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of this comprehensive role. Informants often mentioned various functions or their perception of various functions that they performed during the course of their interviews, and these served to help refine and further elaborate the overall role of an adviser.

This comprehensive role is also defined by the expectations and needs of students. During the course of an advising appointment, advisers may implicitly or explicitly perform multiple functions depending on how they perceive the needs of the student, and depending on the information and advice that the student perceives he or she needs from the adviser, or explicitly requests from the adviser.

Figure 2: The Role of an Academic Adviser



During the interview, I asked informants about how they believe others perceived them at Michigan State University. Though there were clearly differences among informants, there was a general feeling among advisers that students, faculty and administrators all saw their work as important, though many informants were philosophical about their relatively low perceived value on campus (particularly in terms of salary or rank), the respect shown them by faculty members, or their influence on the university in general. Virtually all the informants agreed that neither students, faculty nor administrators really understood the comprehensive dimensions of the role of an academic adviser.

The following sections describe each of the roles shown in Figure 2.

Information Resource/Adviser

An obvious role for an academic adviser is to furnish information and advice to students about a variety of subjects, including programs of study, planning semester schedules, elective courses, academic policies and procedures, university, college and departmental requirements, internships, scholarships, and Study Abroad opportunities. Some advisers also saw their role in terms of giving students practical advice on how to be academically successful. Advisers are constantly sharing information through face-to-face appointments, and via phone calls, written correspondence and electronic mail. Many advisers referred to themselves as information resource persons for students:

> ...I look at myself as an enabler and an information giver...you give them the information so they can make a decision [on what] they need to do....You are here to answer questions and to direct them and if I don't know who or what the answer to the question would be, I direct them to somebody that knows.

> I see myself as a crucial information piece in that I dialogue with students...[and] I get to direct them and tell them what they can expect and what types of tips they should look for when they are

dealing with [being in] class, and how to work with professors and teaching assistants. I see myself as a huge resource link between the department and the students because all too often the faculty members don't get a lot of interaction with students outside the classroom....and for some students, I'm the intermediate person who talks about these are the types of things you need to be doing [to succeed academically].

Advisers also spend time with students talking about their academic and curricular goals and how they can design a program of study that is consistent with these goals. This is distinguished from career advising, in that advisers are helping the student make sure that their academic major is appropriate for them and consistent with what the student enjoys and hopes to accomplish with the degree before the student actually seeks a professional career. As one adviser noted:

> So, an awful lot of the work I do...is helping people set their goals, in terms of what kind of majors they're looking for, why they want to be here, what they want to do when they leave Michigan State University, so that separates for them the difference between a major and a career.

Advisers also have to help students who are struggling with their presence in a certain curriculum or major, or who, because of their academic performance, may not be admitted into a certain college and degree program. This was particularly important for those advisers in colleges where students could not be admitted into a degree program unless they met more stringent academic requirements. One adviser described dealing with this situation:

> I like to try and feel them out...in terms of what do they really want – do they really want [to be in] engineering? I try to pose some possibilities for them so its not engineering or nothing, [and tell them] that there are other possibilities at Michigan State, there are possibilities at other engineering colleges, you know, at other

> universities. I try and find out whether engineering is something that they want, or [whether] its just something they happened into, or somebody suggested engineering because you could make a lot of money, or because they were good in science and math, and don't know what else to do.

Another adviser described a kind of partnership between herself and the student in terms of helping them make informed decisions about academic goals and objectives:

> I see [myself] as...partner's not quite the right word...with the student...I want the student to come to their own decisions, and I help them figure out what the viable options are. [I] try to probe and find out more about them [to help the student].

Several advisers talked about developing and refining over time the skill of "probing" students by asking questions and seeking information to help the student explore their own values and beliefs in relation to their choice of major or academic and professional goals, elective courses, internships, Study Abroad opportunities, etc.

Because of the vast amount of information that advisers need to know or at least be familiar with, advisers use a variety of written and web-based resources to consult and share with students. Every adviser utilized these resources, and in many cases, individual advisers had constructed over time their own personalized list of resources or list of contacts around campus. One adviser referred to her list of resources and contacts as a "cheat sheet," but this is a misnomer in that the resource is honestly intended to help the adviser perform her role and assist students. Such lists were often extensive and very detailed.

Administrator

Academic advisers must be administrators in the sense that they are responsible for overseeing student academic and advising records, and often responsible for initiating academic actions (e.g., admissions decisions, student academic probation, recess, or dismissal, athletic certification, graduation certification, etc), administering college or departmental programs, or in some cases, providing administration for courses they teach within their college or department. There is often an enormous amount of paperwork and recordkeeping associated with academic advising, and enormous variation in how much assistance advisers receive with administrative tasks. Some advisers, particularly in centralized advising centers, have a support staff who assist them, while other advisers must perform these duties by themselves, or with very little assistance. Advisers spend a significant amount of time recording notes about advising appointments, and keeping documentation about students and academic actions. Several advisers talked during the course of their interview about being an administrator. One adviser talked about "...paperwork, just stacks of paperwork" that had to be done. Another adviser described the administrative nature of the position:

> ...[in terms of] the administrative piece – you have to have an understanding of ASUS[15] [and] the policies and procedures of the institution. [You have to] be familiar with things such as transfer

[15] Academic Standing of Undergraduate Students – university system of monitoring academic standing, and warning students about academic difficulty, and the basis for placing students on academic probation, recess or dismissal.

> policies and credit evaluation... [and] have some technological skills in terms of [being able to use] SIS[16].

Another adviser talked about administrative duties and the amount of time that it often takes to perform administrative duties:

> Most of us have our share of paperwork – as far as we have progress sheets, senior [graduation] reviews, academic planning worksheets, advising records...admission applications, graduation applications. [I do] a lot of record keeping, graduation clearances, athletic eligibility certification, filing, lots of filing...and it takes a lot of my time.

Documentation of contact with students and information given to students within an advising file is particularly important to advisers. In a practical sense, it provides advisers with a level of protection against students who claim to have been given incorrect information, or not given information at all. On another level, documentation provides a written record for advisers to review periodically, or to review prior to an appointment in order to better understand a student's perspective or progress in a given curriculum or time period. Electronic mail plays an increasingly important part in such documentation. Advisers often printed out e-mail messages and saved them in a student's file as proof that they responded to a student's questions or provided information to students. Several advisers mentioned that electronic mail provided a better means of documenting interaction with students than notes written during or after a telephone call, and that they often follow up a phone call with an e-mail to a student, to reinforce the message and provide more incontestable written documentation.

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[16] Student Information System – university database containing academic information on students.

Student Advocate

Academic advisers primarily work with students, and often help students solve problems or overcome obstacles to the successful completion of an academic program. As such, advisers serve as student advocates, and work cooperatively with students, sometimes intervening on their behalf with other units or departments on campus. There are, however, differences in how advisers see their role as a student advocate. Some advisers indicated that they would "go to the mat" for a student, and make phone calls, send e-mails, or personally talk to other individuals on their behalf, while other advisers saw their role as limited to making sure they gave the student sufficient information to help them in solving their problem or overcoming an obstacle. Advisers struggle with the dilemma of enabling students to solve their own problems versus doing too much for students (as one adviser said, "...how much customer service is too much?"). Many advisers noted that their advocacy on behalf of a student was dependent on the circumstances of the case, and that, in some cases, it was inappropriate to serve as an advocate for the student when to do so would violate academic policy or otherwise compromise the academic integrity of a program, or violate professional or ethical standards[17]. Despite these differences, advisers clearly felt that they had a responsibility to serve as an advocate for students. One adviser seemed to summarize the dilemma advisers often face about serving as a student advocate:

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[17] For example, if a student's parent – without the student's consent or knowledge - called the adviser and asked him or her to intervene with a faculty member on behalf of the student's

> I am an advocate in the sense of trying to fix students' [problems] by cutting through red tape when it is unnecessary or [help them to overcome] an obstacle that really should be appropriately removed. I'm [also] sort of an overseer, an enforcer of college and university policy and we need to uphold and protect the integrity of our program. So I have to walk a tight line between advocating for students but also holding them to standards.

Another adviser also described her role as a student advocate:

> I see myself in some cases as an advocate for students, but not in other cases. I mean, when we're making recommendations, you know, for [academic] recess and they come in and say, can I be reinstated, and we say, no. I don't think they would see that as [being] an advocate for students, but, even in those kinds of decisions where I'm denying something, I will always put it in a positive way.

The dilemma of student advocacy is also illustrated when students come to advisers with problems that they are having in the classroom, whether it be poor academic performance, or a personal conflict with an instructor. Advisers usually deal with this kind of situation by giving the student advice on how to deal with the problem or referring them to other university resources, but they very rarely intervene personally with a faculty member, instead suggesting that the student talk directly to a faculty member, instructor or teaching assistant, or in other cases, to a department chair. Some advisers also talked about referring students to the University Ombudsman for help in resolving problems with faculty members or teaching assistants. As one adviser commented:

> It depends [on the problem]. If its an academic or classroom type issue, the first suggestion I will always make to my students is that they spend time talking with their professor – if it's the professor that they have an issue with, or a teaching assistant. I always ask

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performance in a class, the adviser cannot legally or ethically divulge academic information about the student, or take any action without the student's consent.

> about the situation and take notes on it, so that I know to put that in a student's file...in other instances, if it's a learning type issue, I'll [recommend the student] use the Learning Resource Center.

The role of student advocate is a difficult one for advisers, and they often struggle with knowing how and when to advocate for students and whether or not such advocacy is appropriate. However, it is a crucial role, as one adviser noted: "...because this is a big university, and it may seem [to the student] like no one cares, [and] some things are very simple to accomplish without all the red tape."

Affective/Counselor

Though they serve as academic advisers, advisers must often deal with students' personal issues and dilemmas. Advisers recognize that students' academic and personal issues are often intertwined, as one is part of the cause or consequence of the other. During the course of the informant interviews, I asked advisers to define the word counselor as it related to being an academic adviser. Based on their answers, it is clear that advisers have different perspectives on seeing themselves as a counselor. As with serving as a student advocate, being put in the role of a psychological or emotional counselor presents a dilemma for advisers – how should they appropriately respond to students who come to them with personal or emotional problems and issues? Some advisers have degrees in counseling or a closely related field, and others do not. Some advisers have had previous experience counseling students and others have not. Some advisers feel comfortable with listening to such problems, and giving advice while others are unsure of how to deal with this type of situation. Advisers cannot legally engage in therapeutic counseling with students, or even use the title "counselor" without being a licensed professional counselor in the state of Michigan[18]. Most advisers are uncomfortable with the term counselor, and do not present themselves as counselors, or even as having advanced counseling skills. Many advisers view their obligation as generally needing to be supportive of students and willing to help students identify resources that might be of help to a student. An adviser described this obligation as such:

> I'm...[long pause]...I do not view myself as a counselor. To me, a counselor is someone who has specific training in being able to deal with a person's emotional and psychological needs. I view myself as being sometimes that bridge between a student in distress and the right services, so there will be times when I have students in here, and they'll be in tears, and we'll be talking, and they'll be very distressed for one reason or another. I listen to them, I let them verbalize...and I'm just here to support them...and help them find the guidance that they need, or the counseling that they need, and I'm no way, shape or form, any kind of a counselor. I'm just here to be their friend and help them find the resources they need to solve whatever problem they're facing.

Advisers do feel an obligation to assist students. Many advisers mentioned that it was important to listen to students, and to be sympathetic and empathetic with their problems. Some advisers tried to separate academic from personal issues and give students advice on dealing with the academic problem, while referring them for the personal problems. Other advisers, who feel more comfortable with the role of being a counselor because of training and experience, describe their response to students' personal problems somewhat differently. One adviser who was a licensed professional counselor noted:

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[18] Though several advisers I interviewed were either licensed counselors or in the process of

I have a degree in counseling, and I'm a licensed professional counselor [but] I have never been a therapist....I don't have clients that I do therapy with. [However,] I bring those counseling skills into this office when I'm just talking to these students. And so, they may not hear therapy coming out, but they know when they walk in that they may be confused, and when they walk out, they should be satisfied with what they got, and ....part of that is counseling – its just sitting here talking to you, and listening to you...

Though most of them are not counselors, advisers recognize that they have an obligation to help students, and the informants unanimously talked about referring students to professional counselors if they felt the student needed professional help, and about the importance of listening openly and sympathetically to students. Many advisers mentioned that they paid closer attention to those students who had talked with them previously about personal issues and inquired more often about their personal as well as academic status.

Referral Agent

Advisers view themselves as information resources for students, but they also realize that they cannot possibly answer every question or provide every resource directly to students. Thus, advisers must often refer students to other resources or units on campus. Advisers view being knowledgeable about what resources are available and appropriate for students as very important, and knowledge that is acquired only through learning and experience in advising. One adviser described it as "figuring out who does what on campus." It is ultimately, viewed as an obligation to help students find answers:

I really view it as my responsibility to, when students ask questions, to make sure they get an answer. Not necessarily that I'm willing to

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becoming licensed counselors.

> give them an answer right then and there, but I can certainly tell them where an answer is, so a lot of it is referrals, or [telling them about] the kind of resources, and knowing and being familiar with the resources available, and where exactly they should go.

Referrals are not merely a matter of making the referral, but more importantly, of judging and measuring the degree of "fit" between the students' needs and a resource's capability to meet that need. Advisers differed on their obligation to follow up on a referral, with some advisers closely monitoring the student to see what the result of their referrals were, and others who felt that providing the student with sufficient information about a resource was enough.

Referrals are not always simply to other campus units. Advisers often refer students to faculty and staff within their own college, department or unit for further information about a specific area of research or a discipline or various career paths within a major. Several advisers viewed knowing about these types of "internal" resources as very important. One adviser noted that "[You need] to visit with faculty members, to learn what each faculty member's area of research is, so that you can more readily refer a student within the discipline to the right person."

Career Advising

Advisers want to see students succeed after they graduate. An important role is helping students think about their academic and professional goals in the context of a future career or future education. Some advisers have experience and training in career counseling and advising, and consider it a central role, while other see their role primarily as giving students general information about career paths and options within disciplines, but then referring them to the Career Services and Placement office, or referring them to (a) faculty member(s) for more specific information and guidance. As one adviser said: "...I'm able to point them in the direction of a suitable faculty member to talk to for their particular career goals if I'm not able to give them sufficient career guidance." Some advisers actually teach career seminars within their departments or units, and maintain close relationships with employers. Advisers also help students with putting together resumes, evaluating resumes, and identifying internships or summer employment or Study Abroad opportunities. Advisers also serve as references, furnish information about graduate study, and help students think about what they need to do in order to be accepted into graduate programs of study, or professional areas like law or medicine.

Regardless of how in-depth their expertise was, all my informants mentioned that they engage students in some level of career advising. Many advisers first start out by helping a student define their academic goals, and the degree of "fit" between those goals and a student's major, as several advisers described during their interviews:

> An awful lot of the work I do is helping people set their goals, in terms of what kind of majors they're looking for, why they want to be there, [and] what they want do when they leave Michigan State University.
>
> I'm talking to students not only about just courses and how they can finish this program, but I'm also talking to them about [future plans like] what are they going to do this summer? How are they going to get the jobs? Where are the jobs? Gee, they ought to start getting involved in some student organizations....

One adviser viewed career advising as her primary role:

> I'll tell my students that my role is to help prepare them for the world after college, and that may be by helping them – and this is small, but it will give you a good example – something very minor, but I even tell my students that when they make an appointment with me, I expect them to come, that type of thing. And they realize that if they don't show, I keep track of that. And the next time they show [for an appointment], I'll ask them why they didn't show up [before], and they'll say, gosh, you keep track of that? And I'll say, in the real world, you can't do that! So that's one example, but also I view my job as to guide them. They tell me where it is they want to go, and oftentimes they've got a goal, and its way out there, and they can't quite reach it, and my job is to help them break it down into smaller steps to help them get there. And those may be academic, they may be academic [and] personal development steps they might need, but really [my role is] just to guide them.

Clearly, advisers feel an obligation to help students think about their careers, and think about what courses or experiences (like elective courses or internships or summer employment or Study Abroad) will help students to better accomplish their career goals.

OTHER

Just as every college or unit at Michigan State University has a unique advising model, virtually every adviser has unique roles that I have grouped into a category called "other". Other roles that were mentioned are shown in Figure 3. In some cases, these roles are related to academic advising, and in other cases, the role is seemingly unrelated to academic advising. In some cases the adviser shared responsibility for the role with others in their unit, but in other cases, the adviser was entirely responsible for carrying out the additional roles.

Many of these roles took a significant amount of time, and some of the roles were primarily carried out during the summer, while other roles continued year-round. Several advisers mentioned that their twelve-month appointment was based on having additional responsibilities that were primarily carried out during the summer. These other roles are often a formal part of an adviser's job description, but just as often seem to be done informally, or by "default" in that no one else is willing or able to perform the role. Advisers also talked about "inheriting" some roles from their predecessors, or being assigned other roles when persons left the unit.

Figure 3: Other Roles Identified by Advisers

- Primary responsibility for recruitment and retention within their college, department or unit.
- Teaching courses such as career development seminars or freshman seminars.
- Overseeing Study Abroad programs for specific majors.
- Administering living/learning programs[19].
- Organizing summer academic orientation programs.
- Organizing transfer student orientation.
- Advising Honors Study students.
- Advising student organizations.
- Organizing and administering summer high school institutes.
- Serving on departmental, college, and university committees and task forces.
- Organizing commencement and/or honors activities for the department or unit.

Summary

It is clear that the role of an adviser is a multi-faceted one, and that there is no one overriding behavior or function that takes precedence over another.

[19] Programs that group students in residential programs where they live and work with students in the same or similar types of academic programs. Referred to as "living/learning" programs at MSU.

The boundaries between functions are often not clear-cut, and advisers' actions often incorporate the performance of several functions. All these behaviors are considered important to the comprehensive role, and all the informants find themselves performing these functions in a multi-tasking environment. Advisers act as student advocates, information resources, referral agents, career advisers, counselors, and administrators, and many advisers also have other significant roles that may or may not be closely related to academic advising.

Learning to Advise

Having defined the role of an adviser, this next section deals with how advisers learn within an organizational context how to perform their role – how to be an adviser. Advising is not a typical career path. Many advisers mentioned that they were doing some kind of work with students before going into advising but that they "fell" into advising at some point during their career and found that they enjoyed it, and decided to stay in the field. Only one informant mentioned that she wanted to be an academic adviser from the time she was an undergraduate student. What was perhaps most significant to me was that most of the informants talked about the lack of any significant formal or informal training for their position and in learning to perform their role. Several advisers told me that there was no way to really learn how to be an adviser except to start "doing it. Advisers do not so much seem to be trained to be advisers as they are simply in the process of becoming advisers. An adviser described how difficult it was starting out:

> As a new adviser, the most important thing, I thought, was to know what the requirements were....I didn't realize when I took this on that I'd be clearing people to graduate, that I'd be certifying athletes, that I'd be making recommendations for the loss of financial aid because of lack of academic progress, and those decisions were extremely awesome to me, and very, very critical, and I didn't do anything without help for a long, long time.

The organizational context for learning how to become an adviser is often quite different for individual advisers. Advisers in centralized units may be surrounded by more experienced advisers who serve as immediate resources and mentors, while departmental or decentralized advisers may be isolated from other advisers, and work only briefly with a predecessor, or work primarily with a department chair, or other administrator.

In Vignette I, Samuel, as a relatively new adviser, was not only having to learn all of the information he needed to be an effective adviser, but he also had to learn about *being* an adviser – about what he must *do* to be an effective adviser. Learning about information is something that Sam has done in a fairly individual manner – by reading and studying documents and texts that give him information he needs to know. But there are other dimensions to Sam's learning, or to any other adviser's learning. Sam is learning about how to be an adviser by identifying other advisers as mentors and by serving in a kind of apprenticeship to more experienced advisers (or supervisors). Before he started advising students on his own, he spent time observing more experienced advisers, and he often interacts with the other advisers (or other units on campus) to ask questions, get information and advice, "bounce" ideas off of them, talk about their styles and approaches to advising, and share information. This is relatively easy to do in a centralized unit where other advisers are in the same area, but often more difficult when advisers are by themselves within a department. Over time, perhaps Sam will begin to spend much less time in individualized learning and much more time engaged in social learning by interacting with the other advisers as he grows more comfortable in his role as an adviser, and feels more a part of the unit.

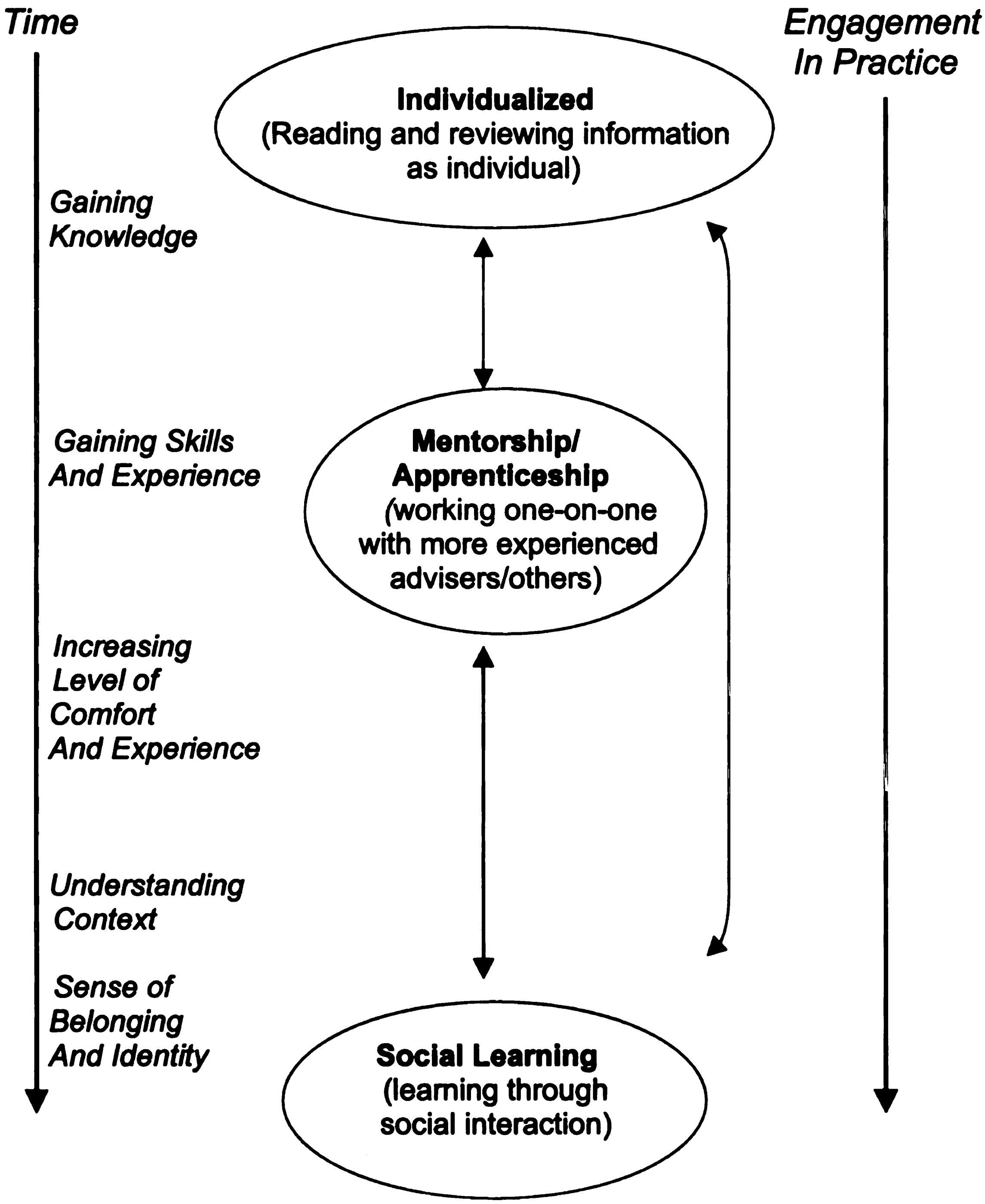
In Vignette II, Shelby also spent significant time reading and studying documents and texts to gain information, but she may have had very little time with a more experienced adviser in a mentoring relationship. As the only adviser in her department, her interaction is primarily with the department chair and associate dean, and not with other academic advisers, though she does talk with other advisers in her college.

In addition to training and organizational context, advisers also learn through their interactions with students. Students pose questions and bring problems and situations to advisers that continually present them with new challenges that require different knowledge or skills. Advisers develop skills and experience over time based on their social interaction with students.

Ways of Learning

During the in-depth interviews with informants, I asked several questions that addressed the issue of learning how to be an adviser in an attempt to try and describe how advisers learn to advise. Figure 4 depicts this process. Advisers gradually move from individualized learning to learning that is more social in nature. Advisers talked about how when they first started, they often received

Figure 4: Ways of Learning – Academic Advising



some information from a supervisor about general university, college and unit structures and rules, and then spent a great deal of time alone, reading and reviewing the materials associated with various curricula, course offerings, academic policies and procedures, etc. There is an enormous amount of information to absorb. This attention to acquisition of content is consistent with what Dreyfus, Dreyfus and Athanasiou (1986) describe as the early acquisition of skills and information through recognizing objective facts and features relevant to the performance of a job. The novice needs general structures and rules to guide their skill acquisition. Cranton (1994) describes this as "subject-oriented adult learning", where the individual concentrates on the "...acquisition of content, whether that is facts, concepts, problem-solving strategies, or technical or practical skills." (p. 10). This self-absorption is also consistent with what Morano (1999) found when he surveyed advisers about the challenges they faced as new advisers - the number one concern was learning about all of the details and new information an adviser needed to know. Some advisers then began (or continued) a formal mentoring process, where a more experienced adviser would help guide them and answer questions or share information.

Advisers moved from individualized learning into a situation where they were like apprentices in that they spent time with a supervisor or more experienced advisers – talking about advising, observing them in advising sessions, and taking notes on their techniques and advising style, and then debriefing with the experienced adviser after the session. This mentoring or apprentice-like period is also consistent with Cranton's (1994) "subject –oriented adult learning". She notes,

> ...examples of subject oriented learning come easily to mind. An apprentice mechanic, welder, electrician or carpenter is learning the skills of the trade. The student of nursing, physiotherapy, dentistry or medicine is focused on the subject of the profession. The management trainee is most likely acquiring knowledge about the organization and the skills specific to a managerial position in that organization. (p. 11).

This initial period of subject-oriented learning seems more consistent with cognitive theories which treat learning and knowing as the acquisition of knowledge and skills thought to be useful in a wide variety of environments (see Greeno, et al., 1996) than it does to learning by social participation within authentic activity. This may be due to several reasons – a lack of confidence, a lack of familiarity and comfort with other advisers or colleagues within a department, a initial sense of not really "being" an adviser, a lack of professional status accorded by acceptable performance over time, or a lack of understanding of the context in which to apply skills or knowledge. However, as advisers completed this period of basic knowledge acquisition and informal apprenticeship, gained more skill and experience, and felt more comfortable in their role as an adviser, they moved to advising students on their own. Advisers at this point often felt that they learned a great deal from listening to the students. When they began to advise on their own, several informants spoke of feeling "like an adviser," of belonging to the profession. Their comfort level as an adviser increased as they gained more experience and confidence in their role. They better understood the context in which they applied knowledge and skills. This sense of belonging to a group of advisers, and of being an adviser, made their learning more social in that they would more often interact with other advisers (or other offices) to ask questions, share ideas, innovations, etc. The amount of social interaction among advisers seems to vary greatly, but all of the informants spoke of social interaction with other advisers as an important part of their ongoing learning. As Figure 4 shows, however, there is a cyclical nature to the learning, as advisers constantly shift between these ways of learning in a constant cycle. Advisers continue to engage in social learning. They continue to spend time reading and reviewing new and changing information. They continue to interact with mentors or begin to serve as mentors to other advisers.

However, the literature on academic advising focuses on training, not learning. It is important to differentiate between learning (and hence, education) and training. As Wenger (1998) notes, "Whereas training aims to create an inbound trajectory targeted at competence in a specific practice, education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of the self" (p. 263). Though training may focus both on conceptual elements (what advisers ought to do and how they should behave) and content elements (what advisers ought to know), (see Bostaph and Moore, 1980; Gordon, 1984; Grites, 1978, 1986; Habley, 1995; Keller, 1988) training that takes place either prior to, or early within an advising career, may occur before the adviser gains an adequate understanding and appreciation of the context in which these elements should be applied. Training also may or may not be continuous. Training that occurs before an adviser begins seeing students on his or her own also occurs outside of the context of the practice of advising (though in-service training often occurs throughout an advising career). This is not to suggest that training is not useful, but rather that it is often disconnected from the actual context of practice, or disconnected from the ability of the adviser to understand the context in which the training should be applied. Wenger (1998) refers to this as *extractive* training:

> By this I mean schemes that "extract" requirements, descriptions, artifacts, and other elements out of practice, transform them into institutional artifacts (courses, manuals, procedures, and the like), and then redeploy them in reified form, as if they could be uprooted from the specificities and meaningfulness of practice. This kind of extractive training ignores an organization's most valuable learning resource: practice itself. (p. 249)

Thus training is often disconnected from practice. Learning, on the other hand, seems to be shift from a primarily self-directed acquisition and understanding of knowledge to the development and refinement of skills and knowledge within the social context of advising practice - learning from and within experience, not from being trained. This shift from individual to social learning is in contrast to training in that it is continuous, places the acquisition of knowledge and skills within the social context of the ongoing practice of advising and at least partly takes place after the adviser has hopefully developed a higher level of comfort and experience as an adviser and a better understanding of what it means to be an adviser. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1991) describe this relationship of learning and context though an analogy of learning how to use tools:

> People who use tools actively rather than just acquire them...build an increasingly rich implicit understanding of the world in which they use the tools and of the tools themselves. The understanding,

> both of the world and of the tool, continually changes as a result of their interaction. Learning and acting are interestingly indistinct...(p. 33).

Notwithstanding the differences between training and learning, advisers often talked about the lack of a formal training program and described the "trial and error" of starting out as an adviser. As Morano (1999) notes, "...the reality of a job is rarely understood until one faces the job as a new professional". This lack of training is also consistent with Keller's (1988) assertion that a majority of institutions either have no training program in their advising offices or did not mandate participation in institutional programs (and see Habley, 1995). Keller notes that "It has been difficult for the concept of advisor training to gain much acceptance on college campuses because advisors often hold the view that they don't need training. This premise is quite simple – either you can advise or you can't..." (p. 152). Given this absence of training, the focus on learning becomes even more important.

Several advisers discussed the lack of training in the context of their early experience as an adviser:

> Most of mine [training] was informal. I haven't come across a program that teaches you how to be an adviser...I don't believe there's really a formal training process. I personally fell into it as a result of being hired [in another college] as their admissions person and part of that admissions job would be to act as an academic adviser for pre-professionals.

> My training was pretty informal in that it consisted of me training myself to a large extent, because we have the [sarcastically] lovely academic advising manual.

> [Learning]...I think by trial and error, seeing what works best with students, you know I hate to say this, but sometimes you have to

size up a student very quickly and them make some assumptions of how they best learn, et cetera.

> ... mainly informal, trial and error, asking questions, anywhere from these two advisers [who served as mentors] that I mentioned, or call[ing] the MSU Help Line, [and I] went to the Registrar's Office, [and] sometimes people couldn't understand why I was calling...

> Its always been when I'm an academic adviser, I have never had any formal training. It is always by the seat of your pants....and also because I've moved around so much, [in this job] you've got to be able to learn and learn quickly.

This is not to suggest that there were not advisers who participated in formal training programs, or that advisers were simply turned loose to advise on their own. Several advisers mentioned a brief period of training, usually conducted by a supervisor or another adviser who had extensive experience in advising, and usually in a centralized or mixed advising model. The training consisted mostly of talking about content elements – about information that advisers needed to know. Departmental advisers were more likely to have had to essentially train themselves, or to have worked only briefly with their department chair, or with a predecessor before he or she left the department. Other advisers talked about how their previous experience in working with students had helped them in learning how to be an adviser. In any event, training seems to have been a small part of learning how to advise.

Individualized Learning

In the absence of any lengthy formal training process, most advisers started out learning how to be an adviser by engaging in individual activities in terms of becoming familiar with and acquiring the information they felt was necessary to carry out the role of adviser, particularly the role of being an information resource and referral agent. Advisers often spoke of doing a great deal of reading and reviewing of materials when they first began advising. These materials included university, college and departmental publications such as the MSU *Academic Programs* book, the university description of courses, the schedule of courses, the MSU *Adviser's Manual*, curriculum guides, university, college and departmental web sites, recruiting materials, financial aid publications, etc. An adviser in her first year talked about this type of individual reading and review:

> [When I first became an adviser, I] read the academic programs, read through the [university course] catalog, read through the description of courses, so I did a lot of reading...so I would have a framework for my learning, because I thought it was important to have a framework versus jumping right into it. So I actually read just about everything I could find to read so that I was familiar with that first.

Another, more experienced adviser recalled when he first started as an academic adviser:

> ...I was asked to be an adviser after the previous adviser was medically unable to continue. I had never done academic advising before in my life, except for planning my schedule...My preparation was to read the Academic Programs book, the schedule of courses, the description of courses, and to try and figure out who we had in our major...and, as a new adviser, the most important thing, I thought, was to know what the [major's] requirements were, and I figured that was all I needed to know – what the requirements were and how to plan for prerequisite courses, the sequencing and [to] give them an idea of when they can graduate...

The justification for initial individual learning appears to be the acquisition of basic knowledge that beginning advisers felt was necessary to advise students. There was, however, no consistent process that advisers identified as guiding their acquisition of knowledge (e.g., to first gain an intimate knowledge of curricula, then academic policies and procedures, then student development, etc). Even after they have gained experience and confidence, advisers still return to the individualized way of learning or turn to mentors or more experienced advisers on a continuing basis when they are faced with questions from students that they cannot answer, when they read or review new information that becomes available to them, or when policies and procedures change, and they must review the changes. As Figure 4 shows, there is a continual cycle between these ways of learning.

Mentorship/Apprenticeship

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that mastering a skill and body of knowledge requires a newcomer to move toward full participation in the practice of a community. However, there is a period during which a person, as a legitimate peripheral participant who is trying to acquire and master these skills, serves in a period of apprenticeship with those more experienced in the field of practice. This period is often concurrent with, or occurs very quickly following the period of individualized learning. Similarly, many advisers spoke of a period of apprenticeship where they worked closely with their supervisor or another more experienced adviser, or they spoke of mentors who helped them learn the role and practice of advising. This period of apprenticeship often included as its centerpiece the new adviser observing the more experienced adviser interacting with students, followed by a debriefing about what went on during the session. Several advisers commented on this:

> At the time, the Acting Director of Student Affairs spent a great deal of time working with me and showing me what happens with programs like these majors. I then spent time with each adviser, not only looking at their advising style, but looking at how their programs differed from mine, and having discussions and being able to ask questions about university requirements, collegiate requirements, stuff that they knew about my major that they thought would be a good thing for me to know...
>
> And then my [formal] training, I suppose, consisted of observation of advisers, and so when they would finish with the session, I would take notes about what kinds of questions they [the student] would have....I did a lot of observation, and then I was supposed to move just from observation into advising, but what I wanted to do was, I wanted to move from observation to being observed with an adviser so they could jump in and fill in the gaps and make corrections...

Departmental advisers often spent time with their department chair, or in some cases, their predecessor if they were available for training and observation. One adviser saw this as her primary method of learning her role:

> I'm an observer. I like to watch other people and that's really the way I was trained. The individual that was in this position before, the first session or two that she met with students I kind of sat in and just observed of course with the permission of the individual [student], and so I was able to pick up on her techniques.

Advisers also talked about mentors, either in their previous position, or within their unit, who helped them with advice or as an information resource:

> [When I first started], I had a woman on campus who was an exceptionally good resource, and I used her a lot. She's since retired, but I called her the MSU encyclopedia. She had been here a long time, and really knew a lot....she wasn't an adviser, but she knew the ins and outs.
>
> For the [first] formal advising job, I had a good mentor....She's been around for years, knew a lot about advising, and she really did

> a good job of training me, getting me experienced slowly....she gave me a lot of material to read, [and] let me attend a lot of different workshops for advisers around campus so I could learn as much as I could....she's a great resource person.

Related to mentorship and apprenticeship was listening to students in individual sessions and figuring out how to respond. Advisers talked about how they learned a great deal from students' expectations and questions about what was important for them to know and to do:

> I started out in this position just listening a lot. Because I didn't know all the answers, and students would pose questions. I've learned what to do, I think, and have gotten better at listening and better at responding, but I think I started out with the attitude that I don't know the answer, [and] this student needs an answer...
>
> The students have been my best teacher. Their feedback...and other reports that were developed [using student feedback] or also e-mail or cards or letters [with] a student responding in such a way that I knew I hadn't heard that perspective [before] and it meant something, and okay, that's something I should incorporate [into my advising]. The students were actually my best teachers.

It is clear that many advisers learned about information resources, gained new confidence and began to develop an advising "style" by observing more experienced advisers or working with mentors, and by working with students. These advisers began to move from what Lave and Wenger (1991) call "legitimate peripheral participation" into full participation in a community of advisers. In doing so, they learn to function within a community, and learn to speak its language. In short, they become "insiders" (see also Brown and Duguid, 1991). But even as advisers become insiders they continually seek out mentors who they likely identified early in their career and still consider valuable resources.

Social Learning

Wenger (1998) has elaborated a theoretical perspective based on "...learning as social participation [within an organization]" (p. 4). According to this perspective, learning takes place within informal groups and networks that span boundaries within an organization. Learning consists of becoming an "insider" who is able to function within a community, and "workplace learning is best understood, then, in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed" (p. 69) Brown and Duguid (1991). The dominant issue in learning is thus how individuals become social practitioners within the context of a community within the organization. However, the community may be different for advisers in different organizational models. Advisers in centralized models or mixed models where groups of advisers were in close proximity or interacted on a regular basis seem to identify themselves primarily as belonging to a community of advisers, while advisers in departmental settings seemed to identify themselves primarily as being a member of their department or unit, though they may feel loosely connected to a larger community of advisers at the institution. Regardless of their environment, as advisers became more experienced, they felt a greater sense of belongingness to some kind of community and began to move into a mode of learning that was both individual and social. Advisers still needed to spend time reading and reviewing materials by themselves, but they become more confident in their ability to ask questions or contribute information in social settings with other advisers (or those in their department or unit or other offices on campus), whether those be in meetings, workshops, or in sharing information, talking about situations, bouncing ideas off one another, talking about innovations, or making phone calls or sending e-mails asking for advice. As one adviser said, "I'm definitely more willing to speak up than when I first started ten years ago." Perhaps more important than the confidence in their ability to ask questions or contribute information was that advisers, as they gained confidence and developed advising skills, better understood the information that needed to be acquired, the questions that needed to be asked, the problems that had to be solved, and the context in which knowledge and skills could appropriately be used.

During my in-depth interviews with informants, I asked several questions about how and why advisers interacted with other advisers. Although it was clear that there was a limited amount of interaction among advisers across the institution or even across some colleges, advisers still spend time talking and learning from one another, though this interaction increased notably within centralized or mixed advising units. Several advisers within centralized or mixed units commented on the level of interaction within their units:

> Being centralized, we have the luxury that we literally run into each other all day long. We do…somehow I've been here the longest, so people tend to come to me with a question, but it is reciprocal [and] I go to them as well to bounce ideas off of or [if] I'm not sure of a certain situation. So yes, we do that, many, many times a day.

> …we share a lot with, amongst the other advisers here - you've probably heard this already if you've talked to advisers here [in the college], but we have weekly staff meetings, but [with] all the professional advisers. It's a great help to get a lot of information about what's going on, and [not only] requirements and guidelines

wise, but also any kind of trends that we're noticing....and policies on campus...and even policies that we've set up....And then also, both my former associate dean and the current [associate] dean are great about sharing what they get from the associate deans' meeting.

We do an awful lot of talking and hanging out in each other's doors, and you know, [my colleagues] and I in particular, we collaborate a lot on the things that we do.... So that's how we learn things is that we collaborate....and that's very helpful, because one person will have an idea and we just build on that.

Definitely weekly [interaction with other advisers], because we meet for a weekly meeting within the college....We do a lot of talking and problem-solving during the summertime, during AOP [Academic Orientation Program], because we're all sort of sequestered in the same room, and so we do share a lot of ideas and things there, both collegially and from an advising standpoint.

This is not to suggest that departmental advisers do not talk or interact with other advisers, but this amount of interaction seems more a function of the advisers' personality, tenure and experience, or unique set of skills or experiences. Two departmental advisers commented on this:

...I do a lot of e-mail consulting here in the college as well as [to] university advisers [because] I've been around for a number of years, and I think I do know seventy-five percent of the advisers...in general I don't think most advisers would say that but they [other advisers] know who I am and I have to know who they are with most other units.

Yep [in answer to the question: Do you have a lot of contact and interactions with other academic advisers?] ...I would feel too isolated if I didn't. For a while, when I was new, I didn't know anybody who was advising and I really did feel lonely and isolated, and oftentimes I would have something I wish that I knew I could call somebody about. So I tried really early on to get those networks going as fast as I could...

Though this study did not specifically address issues of race, ethnicity, and gender it is possible that these factors also impacted the amount of interaction. For the most part, the regular interaction seems to be due to proximity and the comfort level that is associated with the centralized and mixed advising units. The informal interaction between departmental advisers is typically not face-to-face as it is in the centralized units. Departmental advisers are often not in close proximity, and communicate via phone calls and e-mails.

Interaction is also with students. Advisers spend a significant portion of their time with students, and several advisers mentioned the importance of their social interaction with students in learning to perform their role. Advisers commented on how they used feedback from students to assess how they performed the role of adviser, or how student expectations or questions that students asked or problems and situations that advisers encountered with students helped advisers in learning how to deal with unique problems or led them to discover new information or skills useful in advising.

In addition to the face-to-face meetings, phone calls and e-mail messages, there is a university-wide adviser listserv (an electronic mail list) to which most advisers subscribed. I subscribed to this listserv for the Fall, 1999 semester, and monitored and read all outgoing messages. Based on my observations, the listserv is used almost exclusively to distribute information and post announcements about items like new course offerings, adviser job openings, study abroad information sessions and opportunities, and space availability in courses, to virtually all the advisers on campus. During the fall 1999 semester, advisers and others in offices across campus distributed over 100 messages over the listserv.

Despite its active use, I never observed the listserv being used as a forum for asking questions, or seeking advice from other advisers on campus, or to discuss common problems or obstacles facing academic advisers. Several advisers commented on this lack of a virtual institutional forum for advisers by pointing out that the listserv was a very public list that theoretically anyone on campus could subscribe to, and that in sending messages you were identified by your e-mail address, which might be recognized by other advisers and list subscribers. They also pointed out that submitting questions to the list might be akin to a public confession of ignorance, or that submitting multiple questions might cause list subscribers to question the sender's competence. For these reasons, advisers rarely use the listserve for anything other than the purpose of announcements that are of general interest to advisers. However, the listserv is a valuable resource for advisers, and several advisers mentioned that they appreciate and utilize the information made available over the list.

In spite of the amount of social interaction within centralized and mixed advising units, there does not seem to be a closely knit community of advisers that engage in a great deal of social interaction and learning throughout campus. Advisers did not typically interact with other advisers on an institutional basis. Interaction, when it occurs, seems to be only on a "need to know" basis. There were a few advisers who regularly interacted with other advisers across campus, but this was often a function of their tenure or unique experience (e.g., unique knowledge about a topic), or a function of their personality. Several advisers that I interviewed mentioned that they either did not or only rarely interacted with advisers outside of their department or unit, and when asked about this lack of contact, several commented about how this affected their advising:

> It [interaction] depends on what the difficulty is, and no, [interaction is] not very often, and that's because I'm the only one in this department....I miss that interaction because sometimes problems are little and you make it bigger just because you didn't have that conversation [with another adviser] that could have come up with another point of view or another way of looking at it that would simplify it.

> We don't interact with other advisers outside of the department. People that I work with I interact with on a day-to-day basis. Other departments, even the college, no, and I wish I did interact more. I think it would be [long pause]...its helpful. I know that because when I worked for [another unit] we talked a lot, and it helped all of us.

> In terms of other advisers outside [the unit], its very infrequent, it'll be an adviser talking to me about a student we may have in common...we should probably have more outside [interaction], but I think our lives are all so similar in the timeframe that we see students [in] that it makes it really difficult to have more of an opportunity to have a networking situation sometimes...

When I asked advisers why they did not interact more often with other advisers, I got general responses about a lack of time, lack of familiarity with other advisers, the size and complexity of the institution, and the uniqueness of problems within units, departments or colleges. But clearly, there is a feeling among many advisers that they should be talking to each other more often outside of needing specific answers to questions or at all-university adviser or academic specialist in-services. As one adviser said to me: "...we have many of the same concerns, and we should be getting together, and we should be listening to all of the people who deal with all of us...".

There also appears to be little interaction with advisers outside of the institution. Advisers reported that they rarely interact with other advisers outside Michigan State University, except in the context of attendance at professional development activities or collaborative professional presentations. A few advisers were active in NACADA (the National Academic Advising Association) or MCPA (Michigan College Personnel Association) and often attended conferences or made collaborative presentations with other advisers at other institutions. Advisers only occasionally received calls or called other advisers about transfer courses or programs at their respective institutions.

Summary

Advisers engage in several ways of learning about their role. Advisers often spend a great deal of time, particularly as new or relatively new advisers, reading and reviewing information on an individual basis. As they gain more of a "handle" on this information, they often engage in a kind of informal one-on-one mentorship or apprenticeship with a supervisor or another, more experienced adviser, and may spend time observing other advisers meeting with students. Following this period of informal apprenticeship, they often begin advising students on their own. As they begin to settle into their role, advisers spend more time engaged in social interaction and begin to feel more of a sense of belongingness to a group of professional advisers in their centralized unit, or to their department or unit at Michigan State University. There is a cyclical nature to these ways of learning.

Though there is not a great deal of regular, informal interaction among advisers across the institution, or even across some colleges, there is often an enormous amount of interaction among advisers within centralized or mixed units. One of the most important reasons for this is the issue of proximity – advisers whose offices are close or relatively close by become more familiar and have the physical opportunity to talk informally about problems or new information. Centralized and mixed advising units also appear to more often have regular meetings of professional advisers where there is an exchange of ideas and innovations, and communal problem-solving.

It is important to note that advisers view their learning as ongoing. I asked advisers if they felt learning how to be an adviser was a continuous process, and they unanimously answered "yes." Advisers cited keeping up with the constant changes in courses, curricula, policies and procedures, but they also mentioned the nature of working with students. As one adviser put it, "…there's not a week that passes that a problem doesn't come along that I've never seen before."

Part of the purpose of this study was to find out whether or not advisers formed organizational communities of practice to facilitate their learning. Though advisers clearly interact with each other, there does not appear to be a great deal of regular interaction across the institution. Communities of practice, by definition, are based on regular informal interaction among the members. Based on this lack of regular interaction across the institution, I concluded that there is not an institutional community of practice among professional academic advisers at Michigan State University. Having decided that there was probably not an institutional community of practice because of a lack of regular, informal interaction among advisers, I decided to spend time within a centralized or mixed advising unit to see if communities of practice existed within colleges or units.

A Community of Practice at Michigan State University

As Wenger (1998) notes, communities of practice are informal groups of people within an organization who interact on a regular basis with fellow practitioners for the purpose of improving their practice. A community of practice exists and defines itself along three dimensions: 1) mutual engagement; 2) joint enterprise; and 3) shared repertoire. Mutual engagement signifies that participants in the community take individual and collective actions and that the meanings of those actions are negotiated within the community. A joint enterprise exists because the process of participation and negotiation are collective, and because a sense of mutual accountability within the community is created (in that a negotiated sense of responsibilities or obligations are created). A shared repertoire suggests that members of the community negotiate over time certain meanings, practices, ideas, artifacts, and language that are shared within the community.

As explained earlier in Chapter Three, after the initial interviews with professional advisers throughout the institution, I decided that an institutional community of practice did not exist because of a lack of regular informal contact among advisers throughout the institution, but that there might be communities of practice within some centralized or mixed advising units, based on the level of interaction that advisers had talked about. I decided to spend additional time within one college that had a mixed model of advising, attending staff meetings, observing advisers interacting with each other, and re-interviewing advisers and other persons involved with advising in the college.

For reasons explained earlier, I chose to spend additional time within the College of Engineering at Michigan State University, specifically the Office of Undergraduate Studies. In the initial phase of the study, I interviewed the Associate Dean and five academic advisers in the college – three freshman-sophomore advisers and two departmental (also referred to as upper-level) advisers. In the second phase of the study, I was allowed to observe a series of staff meetings within the college, and re-interviewed four advisers (one of the five advisers originally in the study left the college during the summer of 1999), the Associate Dean, and the former Associate Dean in the college. I talked informally with several of the advisers. I reviewed a number of documents related to undergraduate studies and academic advising within the college. I also asked several advisers as well as the Associate Dean to review parts of my findings and comment on them.

Based on the analysis of the data, I believe that an advising community of practice exists within the College of Engineering, and that there are several groups throughout the college and the institution that belong to this community. Based on the earlier definition of a community of practice, I believe there is an informal group of organizational members both within and outside of the college who do: 1) interact on a regular basis, and 2) negotiate meaning and actions, create mutual accountability and create shared meaning, practices, ideas, artifacts and language. The advisers that I interviewed within the college, when asked about their interaction with other advisers in the college, commented on the regular interaction:

> Within engineering, we're pretty good about talking about problems, and how we can do it [i.e., solve problems]...if there are problems, all of us work very well together in working out the problems. Every Wednesday, we have staff meetings, so we do talk about transferring up any problems that are, you know, within the college.
>
> ...during the school year the staff meeting is extremely valuable that we have once a week; there's a lot of face to face [interaction] that goes on there. Um...within our office here, I would say...probably 90 percent of it is face-to-face. Um...with the upper-level advisers there's a lot more telephone and e-mail conversations going on...but down here we talk amongst ourselves quite a bit...
>
> ...we share a lot with, amongst the other advisers here, and you probably heard this already if you've talked to advisers here [in the college], [but] we have weekly staff meetings – not just the freshman-sophomore advisers, but all the professional advisers. It's a great help to get a lot of information about what's going on...
>
> Definitely weekly, because we meet for a weekly meeting within the college....we [also] do do a lot of talking and problem-solving during the summertime. Um, there's not a week that goes by that I haven't picked up the phone a couple of times to talk to someone else about a question or a response, and by the same token, they call me a lot.

Though I did not specifically ask about interaction with other offices on campus, advisers consistently mentioned talking regularly with three other offices on campus: the Registrar's Office, the Office of Study Abroad, and the Career Services and Placement office (the Office of Study Abroad and the Career Services and Placement office also sent out a large number of announcements via the adviser listserv). As one adviser noted:

> Yeah, I talk to them [Registrar's Office] a lot...they are like a guide for when I have problems, or have questions... [they] know how to solve problems, and its been helpful. Now, with the Registrar['s Office], and I was thinking about this the other day, I ask them to do things, or I needed stuff, and they would just do it right over the phone, which surprised me at first.

The advisers mentioned specific persons in the Office of Study Abroad and Career Services and Placement who functioned as liaisons to the college. Interaction with the Registrar's Office was not always with the same person.

It is interesting to note that all of the advisers also mention the weekly staff meeting as significant, and that they view it as a valuable opportunity to interact with each other to share information, identify and solve problems, and share best practices. It was also during the staff meetings that advisers would often mention talking with other offices on campus.

The following parts of this section are devoted to describing the existence of an advising community of practice within the College of Engineering and its impact upon the academic advisers. The first part of this section describes who makes up the community of practice, describes the setting and advising organizational model within the College of Engineering and includes two vignettes describing a weekly staff meeting and daily interactions between advisers. The vignettes do not depict any one meeting or individual, but are a composite image formed from interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and my notes from observations. The vignettes serve to illustrate the type and regularity of interactions that advisers talked about or that I observed, and also illustrate what I observed during weekly staff meetings. The vignettes provide evidence of a community of practice. As with the earlier vignettes in this study, I asked informants in the College of Engineering to review the narratives for accuracy and authenticity, and I made several changes to the vignettes based on their suggestions. The following part of this section provides additional evidence of a community of practice, and describes the impact of the community of practice upon the practice of academic advising within the College of Engineering.

The Community of Practice

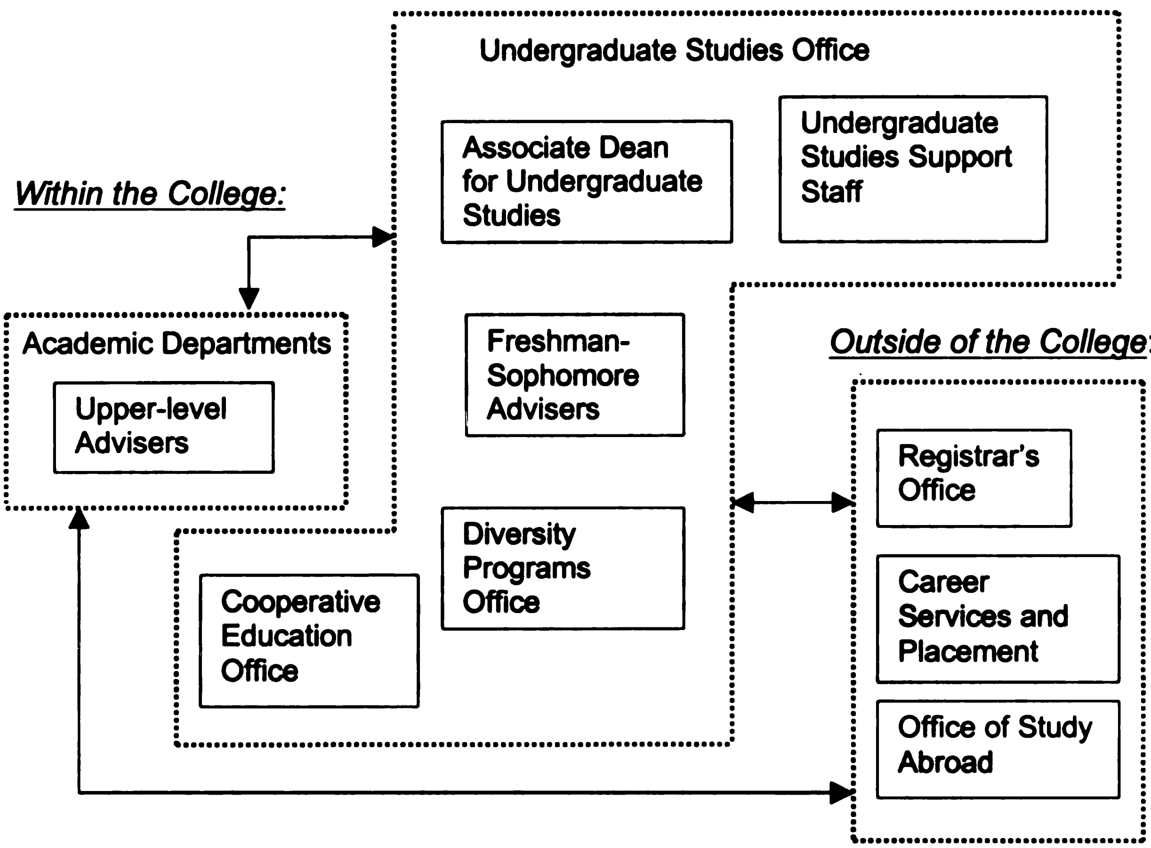
Who belongs to the advising community of practice within the College of Engineering? My account of the make-up of this community is based on my analysis of the interview transcripts, my observations, and those of the advisers and the undergraduate studies staff within the college. At one staff meeting, the Associate Dean asked me to describe what I was observing. As I talked about the community of practice, I outlined on the chalkboard my ideas about what constituted a community and who made up the community. The group of advisers and staff present reacted by telling me that they agreed with my representation except that they believed there were two other groups that should be represented as part of the community. Figure 5 is the result of this discussion, and shows the members of the advising community of practice within the College of Engineering. The community of practice exists both within the College of Engineering and outside of the college. As the figure shows, this community of practice exists across organizational boundaries, and provides a context for intra-institutional sharing and collectivity (consistent with Wenger's (1998) and Brown and Duguid's (1991) arguments). Participation within the community of practice is fluid, and each individual or unit's level of participation ebbs and flows as they engage in the activities of the community. For some members of the community, such as the freshman-sophomore advisers, the participation and the interaction is constant, but for others such as persons in the Registrar's Office or the Diversity Programs Office, participation is more limited, though still very important in terms of contributing to the practice of advising. This fluidity of participation is consistent with Wenger's (1998) arguments. He notes:

> It is not necessary that all participants interact intensely with everyone else or know each other very well – but the less they do, the more their configuration looks like a personal network or a set of interrelated practices rather than a single community of practice.

It is clear from my observations that those inside the College of Engineering knew each other well, and interacted regularly on an informal, first-name basis. The advisers mentioned specific persons that they knew on a first-name basis within the Career Services and Placement Office and the Office of Study Abroad, but did not mention specific persons in the Registrar's Office. Thus, the community is made up both of individuals and of offices. The Registrar's Office is included in the community of practice since advisers mentioned that they regularly talked with persons in that office to answer questions, solve problems or clarify situations.

It should be noted that no faculty members are included as members of the community of practice. This exclusion is based on the fact that I neither observed nor found compelling evidence that members of the community of

Figure 5: Advising Community of Practice in the College of Engineering



practice interacted with faculty on a regular and informal basis. Academic advisers in the College of Engineering did not report that they interacted with faculty on a regular basis (though they did interact with faculty), nor were any faculty members present at or invited to any of the staff meetings that I observed.

In describing the community of practice, it is necessary to think about at what point the interaction between individuals or groups becomes participation in a community of practice. In my second interview with informants in the College of Engineering, I specifically asked about whether or not the advisers felt that the indicators of a community of practice (see Figure 1) were present within their work. In reviewing the data, I concluded that the informants felt that a majority of the behaviors and conditions present in these indicators were, in fact, present in their practice. Presumably, when regular, informal interaction takes place in the context of these behaviors and conditions, a community of practice exists. What is less clear is what signifies membership within the community of practice. Who decides what constitutes membership? Wenger (1998) suggests that membership is constituted by the community itself, in that the members would tend to substantially agree about who "belongs" and who does not. I have previously mentioned that when I reviewed my conception of the make-up of the community of practice, the advisers agreed on who they thought belonged to the community of practice – presumably because of the level of interaction and the contribution that those who are seen as belonging make to the practice of advising. Members are seen as those who are recognized as competent and able to understand and contribute to the activity of the enterprise.

Setting

The College of Engineering at Michigan State University is one of the oldest undergraduate colleges within the university. Its current total enrollment is approximately 4500 students, with approximately 3700 undergraduate students. The college is led by the dean, and has two associate deans (Research and Graduate Studies, and Undergraduate Studies). In addition, there are several assistants to deans and directors. The college has over 130 faculty members, and annually expends approximately 25 million dollars in research activities. The college is divided into seven academic departments, with one department, Agricultural Engineering, reporting jointly to the College of Engineering and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Within the college, there are also a number of interdisciplinary divisions and research centers, and the college maintains active outreach programs both at the main campus and at sites throughout the state of Michigan. The college is located in three buildings on campus (and three research facilities immediately off the main campus), though the bulk of the college's departments and faculty are housed within the main Engineering building (called the Engineering Building) on campus.

Undergraduate student services in the college are centrally administered within the Undergraduate Studies Office, which coordinates a variety of services and resources for undergraduate students. The office is led by the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, and coordinates services such as undergraduate scholarships, undergraduate research opportunities, upper-division undergraduate admissions, recruitment of prospective students, undergraduate academic advising, engineering cooperative education programs, and diversity programs. The Associate Dean reports directly to the college dean, and has two directors who report directly to him (Engineering Cooperative Education and Diversity Programs Office). There is, however, no director of undergraduate advising. There are also a number of professional advisers, program staff and support staff within the office. The Associate Dean and one

Director are all within a centralized area, along with the freshman-sophomore academic advisers, several program staff and support staff. Undergraduate student records are also kept within this centralized area. The Diversity Programs Office and its director are located in another part of the main engineering building. Bulletin boards and brochure racks in the hallway outside of the Undergraduate Studies main office are covered with posters and flyers containing information for students and filled with publications about the college, scholarships, co-ops, academic majors and general university information. The hallways are always heavily traveled by students, particularly since several classrooms and computer labs are just down the hallway from the office.

There are eleven professional academic advisers within the college. The college has a long history of utilizing professional advisers beginning in the late 1960's, and now advising is done almost exclusively by professional advisers, with the exception of Honors College students, who are advised by faculty. The initial decision to utilize professional advisers, according to the former Associate Dean, was made to remove the burden of undergraduate advising from faculty, and to enhance the recruitment and retention of students in the college. The college currently has a "mixed" model of academic advising, with two distinct groups of advisers: freshman-sophomore advisers, and upper-level (departmental) advisers. Freshman and sophomore students who declare engineering as a major preference are advised by freshman-sophomore advisers, most of whose offices are centralized within the Undergraduate Studies office, and most of whom report directly to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate

Studies[20]. Some upper-level advisers also function as freshman-sophomore advisers. Students in Biosystems Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Honors College students, Materials Science, and Engineering Arts and Mechanics are advised by the same advisers throughout their undergraduate years. Students in all other majors are assigned to freshman-sophomore advisers by the first letter of their last name (e.g., advisers are assigned sections of the alphabet, such as A – G, H – O, etc.). These students, when they meet the college requirements for admission to a degree program as juniors (or in some limited cases, seniors), are then advised by upper-level advisers located within the academic departments. Upper-level advisers report to their respective department chairs, though the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies assists in their evaluations and controls the funding pool for their salary increases. Freshman-sophomore advisers and one upper-level adviser have private offices that are clustered together just down the hallway from the Undergraduate Studies office. All of these offices are across the hallway from one another. These advisers are constantly talking to each other, either by talking across the hallway when both office doors are open, sticking their heads into each others' offices, talking in the hallway, or at informal gatherings like having a cup of coffee or going to lunch together. Other upper-level advisers have private offices within their departments, but all of the advisers know each other well, and they all interact frequently throughout the semester in a variety of ways – face-to-face contact at

[20] But as noted earlier, these students' official academic files are housed within the Undergraduate University Division until such time as they are formally accepted in engineering degree programs as juniors.

staff meetings or informally, in each other's offices, via phone calls, e-mail, and occasionally, written notes or memoranda.

Like other professional advisers at Michigan State University, advisers within the College of Engineering are classified as academic specialists (non tenure-track appointments), with a mix of fixed and continuing appointments. Unlike many other colleges, all of the advisers in the College of Engineering have twelve-month appointments because of significant summer responsibilities. All of the advisers have at least a Master's degree. Most of the college's advisers do not have an engineering background, but rather a background in some area of higher education, student affairs or counseling. Several advisers have been with the college for over ten years now, but there is a range of years of tenure, with several advisers in their first or second year of advising. There are both male and female advisers, though the majority of the advisers are female (nine females and two males). Though I did not specifically ask about race or ethnicity, I also observed that all of the advisers in the college appear to be Caucasians; thus the group did not appear to be racially or ethnically diverse. In addition to performing the role of academic advisers that I described earlier in this study, all of the advisers have other significant professional duties and responsibilities, such as overseeing departmental web sites, administering the summer engineering high school institute, advising student groups, coordinating the college's living/learning program (ROSES – Residential Option for Science and Engineering Students), planning departmental and college events, and planning and participating in the university's summer Academic Orientation Program. All of the advisers also actively recruit students.

All of the college's advisers attend a weekly staff meeting, to which advisers and other Undergraduate Studies staff are invited. Other groups on campus are also occasionally invited to attend the staff meetings.[21] The former Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies started the meetings over a decade ago as a way of bringing all of the advisers together, and the current Associate Dean has continued this tradition, though the meeting is apparently held at the discretion of the Associate Dean and the advisers. It is this meeting which I attended and observed during October, November and December 1999. The first vignette in this section generally describes this meeting.

Because communities of practice are defined as being informal, there is an inherent discrepancy in talking about a staff meeting that could be construed as a formal activity that is organizationally sanctioned. Is the act of meeting a formal or informal activity? I construed the staff meetings as informal for several reasons. First, although the Associate Dean convenes the meetings and follows an informal agenda (I never received a written agenda, nor was a written agenda ever prepared for the meetings), the meeting is not rigidly organized around the agenda. At any point during the meeting, advisers might begin a discussion or talk about matters related to the original agenda item. Discussions might cover a variety of topics before someone steered the group back to the original topic.

[21] For example, while I was observing the meetings, representatives of the Office of Study Abroad and the Office of Supportive Services attended meetings. A representative of the Lyman Briggs School has a standing invitation to attend.

Second, the atmosphere of the meeting itself is very informal. Advisers came in late, or left during the meeting, and at no meeting were all the advisers in attendance. Individuals often interrupted each other, or carried on separate conversations with another person while someone was talking to the group. The group often erupted in laughter at a sarcastic or humorous remark made by an individual, or enjoyed an "inside joke" that I did not initially understand. Third, the meetings are not held automatically each week. If the group decides that there will not be enough attendance in any particular week because of a conflict such as a conference or university in-service, or if the group felt that there was no need to meet, the meeting was cancelled. Several meetings were cancelled in between the meetings that I observed. Finally, the meeting served as a catalyst for informal interaction. The act of meeting in one physical space often brought advisers together for informal conversations and discussions that arose simply because several people were in one space at one time. At each meeting I observed, small groups of advisers came early or stayed late to talk amongst themselves. The associate dean was usually not a part of these conversations.

Vignette I – The Weekly Staff Meeting

It is about 8:20 a.m. on Wednesday morning, and I arrive in the Engineering Building, carrying my briefcase and my coffee. The weekly staff meetings for advisers (and other Undergraduate Studies staff) are held in a small conference room just down the hall from the main Undergraduate Studies office. In addition to the small conference table and chairs, the conference room has a chalkboard and usually has a VCR and monitor sitting in one corner. One small window looks into a small courtyard. I walk into the conference room where two advisers have arrived early and are talking informally about a presentation they are working on for a future professional advising conference. I greet the advisers, and then leave them to their conversation. Such conversations are not uncommon before a staff meeting. The conference room is not used by any other groups on Wednesday mornings, so the advisers who come early often use this time to talk informally with one another, or to compare schedules and find a time to talk later in the day. I sit at the very end of the table so as not to be in the middle of all the advisers, and to make my presence as minimal as possible. As I settle in, other advisers and the Associate Dean (Robert) begin arriving, and everyone settles around the table waiting for the meeting to start at 8:30 a.m.. Several advisers greet me, and ask me how the study is going. There is often lighthearted banter during this time, as the meetings hardly ever start on time, and advisers often come in after the meeting starts. Coming in late to the meeting does not seem to be a problem, as people only briefly look up and whatever is being said or announced is not interrupted while the person gets settled at the table. The mood is very informal, which is apparently deliberate, and may serve to encourage discussion and the occasional frank exchange of opinions.

At about 8:35, Robert begins the meeting by making several announcements from the bi-weekly associate deans meeting. The associate dean often shares information from these meetings, particularly if he feels that the advisers need to know the information, and the advisers seem to appreciate the information, as many of them take notes while this is being done, and they often comment on the information and its utility to them in their advising. Today, Robert begins by announcing that several advising positions are currently open in the university, including one in the College of Engineering, and two others in another college. The openings in the other college are for one fixed term appointment and one continuing appointment. Several advisers joke that the best candidate gets the continuing appointment, with the runner-up getting the fixed appointment. Everyone laughs, but there is a serious undertone, as continuing appointments in the Academic Specialist rank are hard to come by, and coveted by advisers. Several of the advisers in this room are on fixed-term appointments. I only understand this "inside joke" because I already know about the appointment status in the academic specialist system. The position description for the position in the College of Engineering has been finalized by the search committee, and has been advertised across campus and in several national print publications and listservs[22].

Robert next talks with everyone about the number of Goldwater scholarship applications that the college can submit, and he encourages all the advisers to try and identify students who would be good candidates for this scholarship. Several advisers proceed to talk about individual students who they feel might be good candidates for the scholarship, and as names are mentioned, other advisers who also know that student nod in agreement. I am surprised at

[22] I reviewed this position description, and noted that it stated "...[the] successful candidate will work in a *collaborative* work setting with other advisers and student support staff." [my italics]

how well the advisers seem to know individual students in the college. The college has very recently put the undergraduate scholarship application on the college's web site, and Robert hopes that this change will encourage more students to apply for any type of scholarship. Several of the advisers nod their heads in agreement with this statement. Robert also talks about several issues surrounding the university's residency policy that were brought up at the Associate Dean's meeting. There have been several instances where there were significant questions about who is or is not considered an in-state resident. Robert asks if any of the advisers have had problems, and a few advisers acknowledge that the policy can be confusing. Mary tells the group that there is a woman in the Registrar's Office who is the institutional expert on residency issues, and that she has called her on several occasions. I notice that several other advisers write her name down as this is happening.

After Robert has finished with these announcements, the roundtable section of the meeting begins. Going around the table, each person attending the meeting shares information from their department or majors, or general information that they think would be helpful to others. Problems are often brought up at this time. Virtually everyone has something to say at this point in the meeting. Betsy talks about the upcoming Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) day, and about how planning is progressing for it. Betsy is in charge of planning for SET day, which is a day-long program where Engineering and several other colleges and units organize a small scale "open house" for high school students and their parents. Departments in the college set up displays and booths in the main engineering building, and faculty and the advisers meet and talk with prospective students. Research labs are also open on SET day. Though the activity is a college-wide activity, most of the work falls on the advisers, and the mention of SET day leads several advisers to talk about any ideas or difficulties they have with SET day. Several advisers are having difficulty getting faculty to participate, and this leads to a more in-depth discussion of who should take responsibility for SET day. Several advisers argue that though they agree that faculty should take more of a role in the event, the group needs to be realistic and recognize that the advisers will always do most of the planning. Sarah sighs out loud at this point, but she and several others nod their heads in agreement. Robert announces that he will talk to the dean about this problem, because the dean wants to see more faculty get involved in these types of activities. Several other announcements follow.

Dave, the associate director of the Diversity Programs Office (DPO) announces a new program designed for underrepresented students in the college, and says he will distribute information to the advisers. He then thanks the advisers for referring so many students to his office. The next announcement concerns problems that Terry is having with another office on campus. The other office works with disadvantaged and underrepresented students who are admitted to the university in a special program where they receive intensive assistance to help them be successful. Though a number of these students have declared engineering as a major preference, the other office insists on advising the students, and this is causing problems for the engineering advisers, since the students are often placed in lower-level math and science courses, even if test scores show the students can go into a higher level course. If the same students come to engineering advisers, they are told to take the higher-level courses. The students are understandably confused by this conflicting advice. Other advisers quickly jump in to agree with Terry that this is a real problem, and after some discussion, the group agrees that the main problem is that students are getting different information from the two sets of advisers, and that placing students in the lower-level math courses causes some significant scheduling problems later on for the students who are in engineering majors. In following the discussion, I get the sense that there is a rising level of tension between the College of Engineering and the other office. Most of the advisers have now joined into the conversation, and are using course numbers and acronyms that I am not familiar with, and I am having difficulty following parts of the conversation.

Finally, the associate dean, Robert, stops the conversation, and asks all the advisers for their opinions on the matter. As they go around the room, it is apparent that there is strong disagreement about this matter. Two sides form - one group of advisers want the other office to do all of the advising so that students do not have to go to two sets of advisers, which they say is too confusing. The other group of advisers insists that the engineering advisers need to have a presence with these students so that they feel a stronger connection to the college. Though the conversation is growing heated, I sense that everyone respects each other's ideas and opinions. There is no shouting and no personal accusations are made, even though everyone seems to feel very strongly one way or another about this issue. After everyone has talked, Robert announces that he wants to have the advisers in the other office do the advising for the present time but that he will appoint an engineering adviser to act as a liaison to the other office, and that the two sides need to meet and begin trying to find a better system of advising these students.

Following the roundtable section of the meeting, Robert asks for any general discussion items. Janet tells everyone that she recently sent out information (that had been given to her by the Career Services and Placement office) to her students, and that after sending it, she read it carefully, and found, to her consternation, some inaccurate information. She cautions everyone to review information from other offices before sending it out. She has already talked with Vincent, the Career Services and Placement liaison to the college, and he has apologized to her and assured her that he would personally check to make sure the information was corrected. Several advisers mention that they trust Vincent, and they know he will take care of this. It is obvious to me that advisers take this kind of thing very seriously, and feel accountable to immediately correct any inaccurate information given to students. The advisers know that students must be able to trust the information that they get from advisers, or it will harm their relationship with students.

The time is now 9:40, and the meeting is winding to a close. Dorothy mentions that she and Janet are going to an area community college to make a recruiting presentation later in the week, but she has a conflict, and can someone take her place? All the advisers check their calendars, and Leslie says that she can go in Dorothy's place. At this point, Leslie tells the group in jest she has a very "difficult" student coming in for an appointment tomorrow, and can someone else take the appointment? Everyone laughs at this, and the meeting is adjourned. As I am gathering my things to leave, I notice that three advisers are talking and agree to remain behind after the meeting to talk about the problem with the career services information being inaccurate.

Vignette II – A Day in the Life of an Engineering Adviser

Leslie, who is in the beginning of her second year of advising, is not having a good day so far. When she arrived at her office this morning and checked her e-mail and voice mail, she had fifteen e-mail messages that came in from students overnight, and they all seem to require her to do some research before she is able to answer them. Based on the content of these messages, Leslie will probably have to ask several of the students to make an appointment to come in and see her, as she cannot adequately answer the questions posed without talking further with the students. Answering the e-mail takes an hour and twenty minutes, and she had planned to use some of that time to finish a presentation she is making at the MCPA conference next week, but Leslie has a policy of answering e-mail as quickly as possible, and knows that she may not get to her e-mail again until late afternoon. Fortunately, there is only one voice mail message, and it is from the Associate Dean, who wants some information about a student who is applying for a scholarship. The request is simple, and Leslie lays it aside for later in the morning.

After she finishes her e-mail, Leslie prints out her schedule of appointments for the day. She only has five appointments today, and two of the students she knows very well. However, one of these students is having real academic difficulty, and will probably not be admitted to a degree program in the college. Leslie needs to make sure the student understands this, and needs to talk with the student about his options. She sees that there is some open time after the student's scheduled appointment, and she crosses another half-hour off the schedule after the appointment because she thinks it will take more than the allotted thirty minutes. The other student has recently lost a good friend in a car accident, and has come to Leslie twice already to talk about it. Leslie is not a professional counselor, but she feels an obligation to listen to the student and be supportive. Leslie has already recommended that the student go to the university counseling center, and she hopes that the student has done so. Both of these appointments may be difficult and emotional. The other three appointments seem routine, based on what Leslie knows about the students, and based on her previous appointments with them.

After reviewing her schedule, Leslie turns back to one of the e-mail messages. The student, a freshman, is having trouble with her residency status – she believes she should be classified as an in-state student - and wants to know who she can call to talk about it. Leslie does not know much about residency, but she remembers that Dorothy, another adviser in the college, recently had a student with a similar situation. Leslie runs down the hall to Dorothy's office, sticks her head in, and they talk about it. Dorothy gives her the name of a person in the Registrar's Office who is considered the resident "expert" on residency status, and recommends that Leslie have the student call her.

When Leslie returns to her office, she decides to call the person in the Registrar's Office, and talks briefly with her about the student's question. The person tells Leslie about the university's official residency policy, mentions that it is on the Registrar Office's web site, and recommends that the student come in to talk with her. After the phone call, Leslie e-mails the student back with the person's name, phone number, and the web address, and recommends the student call the person and set up an appointment. Leslie asks the student to keep her informed of what happens. Turning to her voice mail message from the Associate Dean, Leslie goes down to the Undergraduate Studies central office and requests the file on the student who has applied for the scholarship. She copies the information that the Associate Dean requested, and walks it across the hall to his office, leaving it with a note on his desk. She checks in with the secretary to let her know about allotting the extra time for one of her appointments this afternoon, and then returns to her office.

It is almost ten a.m. now, and Leslie has a meeting in a few minutes with the Associate Dean and another adviser regarding the summer high school engineering institute. Leslie and the other adviser are collectively in charge of the institute, and they need to send out the information packets for the next summer's program to high school counselors throughout the state. There are several changes to the packet from last year, and the purpose of the meeting is to finalize the changes so the materials can be printed and mailed. The meeting goes fairly quickly, and the three of them review the information and agree on the final changes to the packet. The other adviser, Janet, agrees to actually make the final changes and get the packet to the printer. After the meeting, Leslie asks Janet to stay behind for a few minutes so they can talk about her appointment with the student who is having academic difficulties. Leslie wants to know if Janet has lunch plans, because she is nervous about this afternoon and wants to talk with her about how to handle the appointment. Janet has been an adviser at the university for nearly fifteen years, and Leslie trusts her advice. They agree to have lunch; though Janet tells Leslie that she, Betsy, and Dorothy had already talked about having lunch together. Leslie says this is fine with her.

When she returns, Leslie stops by the central office and requests the files for the students who have appointments this afternoon. Whenever she has time, Leslie likes to review the information in the file to familiarize herself with the student's academic record and to look at her notes from past advising appointments. Leslie particularly wants to review the file for the student who is having academic difficulty so she can talk with Janet and the others about it at lunch. When it is time for lunch, Leslie knocks on Janet's door.

Janet, Betsy, Dorothy, and Leslie pick up something for lunch at the student center across the street, and then head back to the Engineering Building, where they go into a conference room, and talk while eating. As they eat, the four of them talk generally about how the day is going, what problems they have encountered, about their personal lives, etc. They often have lunch together when their schedules permit. After a while, Leslie brings up her appointment, and talks about the student's background and academic standing, and they all agree that the student has very little chance of being admitted to a degree program in the college, even though he still believes he can major in civil engineering. The four of them discuss strategies for talking with the student, with the more experienced advisers drawing on past encounters with similar situations and telling "war stories" about how the situation was resolved. Janet recommends being positive with the student, but also very up front and honest with the student about his chances of being admitted to the civil engineering program. Dorothy and Betsy agree and add that they follow the same kind of strategy. Leslie says that she had planned to also talk with the student about his options, whether they be seeking admission to another college at Michigan State, or trying to get accepted into an engineering program at another college. Leslie has talked with the student before, and he seems firmly committed to majoring in engineering, but the four of them agree that Leslie needs to help the student think more realistically about his goals and his options. As they finish lunch, everyone gets ready to leave, and the others tell Leslie that everything will be fine. Leslie hopes so, and feels better after talking to the other advisers.

Leslie returns to her office after lunch and continues reviewing student files until her first appointment. Her first two appointments are routine, as both students wanted to check over their spring schedules with Leslie. Both students are doing fine academically, and, as usual, are organized and prepared for meetings with her. Leslie wishes all of her students were so organized, but she also enjoys the challenge that comes from working with a variety of students.

The student with academic difficulties is the next appointment. After they exchange small talk the student says he wants to talk with Leslie about applying to the college, and Leslie explains that, given his current academic record, he has little chance of being accepted into the civil engineering degree program. To her surprise, the student acknowledges this, and says that he has done a lot of thinking about it, and wants to know about other degree programs he could pursue at Michigan State University. Leslie and the student talk for about forty-five minutes about his interests and his career goals, and they look up some information together on different web sites. It turns out the student has become very interested in Political Science, and they look in the academic catalog at the requirements for that major. Leslie recommends that he talk with an adviser in that department, and gives him the name of an adviser she has previously met at an advising in-service. He says he will schedule an appointment with her, and thanks Leslie for the information. Just before he leaves, Leslie also suggests that the student go to the Career Services and Placement office to get some information on careers in the field of Political Science. She recommends that he contact Vincent, who is the liaison from that office to the College of Engineering. Leslie knows and trusts Vincent, and is confident that he will help the student find the necessary resources that he wants. Leslie is relieved that the appointment has gone so well, and though she does not want to have students leave the

College of Engineering, she believes it is ultimately more important for students to be happy and successful, whatever their major.

Her next appointment is routine, as the student has some simple questions about some classes he wants to take next semester. Her last appointment is with the student who lost a good friend in a car accident a few weeks ago. The student comes in and says he just wanted Leslie to know that he has seen a counselor at the university counseling center, and that it has helped him through a rough time. He lets Leslie know that he appreciates her taking the time to listen to him. He also has a question about which computer science course he should take to satisfy the requirements for the Mechanical Engineering curriculum, which is what he will apply to next year when he becomes a junior. Leslie is unsure, since this requirement has recently been changed, and decides to double check with the adviser in that department. She quickly calls the other adviser, who is not in, but Leslie leaves her a message, and tells the students that she will e-mail him the information as soon as she hears back from the other adviser. Leslie smiles at her good fortune as the student is leaving. Two appointments that could have been very difficult have both gone very well.

It is now four p.m., and Leslie decides to work on the presentation she is giving at the conference next week. She is just pulling up the computer file when Betsy, whose office is across the hall, walks in to ask Leslie about a Study Abroad program in Australia. Betsy has a student who is interested in the program, and wants to pick up some information from her later in the week. Betsy cannot find this flyer and wonders if Leslie has a copy. Leslie remembers that she recently saw a memo from the Office of Study Abroad on the program, and digs it out of her files for Betsy. Betsy takes it and says she will make a copy for the student. Leslie tells Betsy she also recently saw an announcement on the adviser listserv about a Study Abroad in-service and wonders if it will include the program in Australia. Betsy also remembers seeing it, and says she will check her e-mail files. After Betsy walks back across the hall, Leslie works on her presentation, and finishes a rough draft that she can polish tomorrow morning. She prints it out, and decides to check her e-mail again. There are only two messages, and they are both from the MSU adviser listserv. One is an announcement for a new course next spring, and the other is a position announcement for an advising job in another college. Leslie prints out and saves the e-mail regarding the course announcement, because she sometimes finds that sort of thing helpful when helping students plan their schedules, but she deletes the other message, as she is happy in Engineering, and is not looking for another job. Leslie then e-mails the Associate Dean, telling him she left the information he wanted on his desk this morning, and asking him to let her know if he needs more information. Looking up, she notices it is after five-thirty, and she is tired. She accesses her schedule for the next day, and sees that she has only two appointments scheduled in the late afternoon, which means she can hopefully finish her presentation and work on some materials for the summer high school institute the rest of the day. She prints out her schedule, and leaves it on her desk before leaving for the day. As she leaves the office, she sees

Janet and Dorothy talking in the hallway and thanks them for their advice at lunch. The three of them talk for about five minutes about how the appointment went before saying goodbye for the day.

Summary

There is an academic advising community of practice within the College of Engineering that includes members within the college and outside of the college. Membership is seen by the advisers as belonging to those who are perceived as competent and able to contribute to the practice of advising. The description of the setting and the vignettes of the weekly staff meeting and a day in the life of an adviser serve to provide an illustration of how much informal interaction takes places among the academic advisers within the College of Engineering, and with other members of the community of practice. There is a constant flow of information and discourse – both oral and written - across the community of practice. Knowledge is contained and shared within the community of practice. Ideas and practices are debated and shared. Problems are identified, discussed and resolved. Individuals talk with other individuals, or in small groups. In talking with each other, or with other people like the Associate Dean, representatives of the Registrar's Office, Career Services and Placement, and the Office of Study Abroad, advisers are seeking answers to questions, negotiating meanings and actions, creating a mutual sense of obligation and accountability, and developing and using a language that those who are not members of the community may not understand. Interaction takes on a variety of forms. A phone call, a memorandum, an exchange of e-mail, a conversation in the hallway or during an informal lunch may serve to clarify a problem that an adviser needs to solve, provide a new perspective on how to view a problem, illustrate possible solutions, or it may simply allow the participants to "blow off steam." Staff meetings also serve as an arena for the sharing of ideas, knowledge, and for the negotiation of meanings – for example, what does it mean when another office insists on advising students who have a major preference in engineering? – and help to create a sense of mutual accountability, as advisers discuss, and come to some level of agreement on what their collective actions should be, and what their obligations toward these students are. Staff meetings also serve as a safe environment for new or relatively new advisers in the college to begin actively participating in discussions and become more familiar with ideas and language used by more experienced advisers. In short, the community of practice is a place where its members continuously define and redefine their practice while engaging in the authentic activities of their daily lives.

The Impact of the Community of Practice

How does the community of practice impact advisers in the College of Engineering? As Wenger (1998) argues, a community of practice provides a way for practitioners to invent ways of squaring institutional demands with the reality of everyday situations. The main impact of the community of practice is that it provides a social arena for advisers to learn about and refine their practice. This community of practice can:

- provide resolutions to institutionally generated conflicts

- support a communal memory that allows individuals to do their work without having to know everything
- help newcomers join the community by participating in its practice
- generate specific perspectives and terms
- make the job habitable by creating an atmosphere in which monotonous aspects of a job are woven into rituals, customs, stories, and rhythms of community life (Wenger, 1998, p. 45)

The advising community of practice within the College of Engineering provides an environment in which its members cope with everyday situations by engaging in professional discourse, building a communal memory, and socially constructing knowledge that informs practice. Though they work individually, members of the community are aware that their jobs are made easier and more tolerable by the symbiotic interdependence that pervades their practice. Evidence that the community of practice helps square institutional demands with everyday reality is everywhere within the community of practice.

The following examples of how the community of practice impacts the practice of its members are taken from my notes and interview transcripts:

Resolutions to Institutionally Generated Conflicts

University, college, and departmental policies and procedures often generate problems and conflicts for students and for advisers, and the community of practice provides a "safe space" for advisers to identify and define the problem and discuss a resolution. Members of the community work creatively together to solve problems, whether it is two or more advisers working together, or an adviser talking with another Undergraduate Studies staff member, the Associate Dean, or another office on campus. As one adviser commented:

> Usually my problem solving has been to pick up the phone and calling to get an answer or asking where else I should call. I rely a lot on the undergraduate advisers downstairs...for answering questions about a student who's changing their major from one degree to another, and about how we are counting certain courses. I [also] work heavily with the Registrar's Office to find out how things are set up.

The weekly staff meetings also provide an opportunity for the advisers and undergraduate studies staff within the community to identity and solve problems. As one adviser noted,

> [At weekly staff meetings] it's a great help to get a lot of information about what's going on, and requirements and guidelines wise, but also any kind of trends that we're noticing with the difficulty students run into because of other policies on campus, and we want to help them out with that, or even policies that we've set up and [that have] set up roadblocks that we didn't intend to.

For example, take the case of the discussion (in the vignette on the staff meeting) where advisers talked about the problem that was created when another office insisted on advising the disadvantaged students, often placing them in math courses that were below their tested level. During the course of the staff meeting discussion, the advisers and the Associate Dean came to agreement about the basic nature of the problem (that students were confused by having to see two sets of advisers who gave conflicting advice) and though the advisers disagreed on a possible solution, the Associate Dean decided on a tentative resolution to the problem (let the other office continue to advise the students, but with a liaison from the college, and with the assumption that the two groups would meet and try to negotiate a more permanent solution that satisfied the expectations of both groups).

An additional concern that came up during a staff meeting was with the user-friendliness of the college's Undergraduate Studies web site. Several advisers voiced their concern about prospective students' and parents' ability to navigate the site, specifically the need to go through several links before coming to the actual academic programs. The group agrees that the web site ought to be changed so that academic programs are directly linked to the college's home page. The Associate Dean agrees to bring this up with the Dean, who wants to standardize the content of web pages across the college.

But conflicts are not just discussed and resolved in staff meetings. Conflicts and resolutions are debated in hallways, on sidewalks, in offices, over the phone and e-mail, and over meals or coffee. Members of the community of practice are constantly identifying, defining and solving problems that arise in the daily business of academic advising.

A Communal Memory

The amount of information and detail that advisers must know is overwhelming, and no one in the community of practice can know everything. Fortunately, the community of practice provides for a communal memory. Participants are not forced to rely solely on their own knowledge, but can "tap into" the knowledge contained within the community. Members of the community are constantly retrieving items from this communal memory by asking for information from other members. This ability to utilize communal knowledge may have a positive impact on the "information resource/adviser," "career advising," "affective/counselor," and "referral agent" role of advising. Having relatively ready access to information beyond that which they possess individually allows advisers to share this communal pool of information with students. For example, in the vignettes, when Betsy walked across the hall into Leslie's office to ask about a particular Study Abroad program that Leslie had information about, she was accessing the shared resources of the community, even though in this case, the resource was constituted by information possessed only by Leslie. Leslie's memory of the Study Abroad program is communal in the sense that it is accessible by any member of the community who chooses to interact with Leslie. Another example comes from Leslie's lunch with Janet, Betsy, and Dorothy to talk about dealing with a student having academic difficulty. Leslie relies on the other advisers' experience and memory of having dealt with students who, for whatever reason, were having academic difficulty and were not likely to be admitted into a degree program within the college. This information was ultimately used to assist students.

This communal memory was also evident during staff meetings. During one meeting an adviser asked whether students could get assistance with computer graphics software, and another adviser immediately responded that there was a software tutorial package that students could use, and provided a contact name. On another occasion, when questions arose about residency issues, an adviser told the group about a person in the Registrar's Office who was the resident "expert" on residency, and who could answer questions that others might have. It is this collective reservoir of information that can be accessed by any member of the community that constitutes the community's communal memory.

Help Newcomers Join the Community by their Participation in its Practice

There were two relatively new advisers in the college during this study. Several things within the community of practice help newcomers quickly join the community. The first of these is related to the "ways of learning discussed" earlier. In the College of Engineering, new advisers are formally assigned mentors whom they can observe or turn to whenever they have questions or concerns. One adviser who I interviewed in the college commented on this mentorship: "They did assign me to other advisers to help me within Engineering. One I really relied on, the other one was so busy, it was hard, [but] they were both willing to help out." This type of mentoring seems to provide new advisers with an immediate source of, as it were, professional "companionship". The college was also in the midst of hiring a new freshman-sophomore adviser, and when I asked the Associate Dean about training that individual, he replied that the person would be assigned an experienced adviser as a mentor, and that they would have to be able to work in a collaborative environment. This mentoring may help relatively inexperienced advisers to more quickly learn about the multiple roles that they must perform, and about styles and strategies that have proven effective for other advisers. Mentoring may also help new advisers perform their complex role as they see how other advisers do so.

The second way that newcomers join the community is through participation in staff meetings. The weekly staff meetings provide a kind of "safe space" where participants can interact in a relatively non-judgmental environment. New advisers learn about more experienced advisers' opinions, experiences, ideas, and best practices. They see others laughing at inside jokes and talking in a common language. They hear about interaction with other members of the community of practice, and learn about shared resources. They see others attending to what is shared at the meetings. New advisers observe more experienced advisers talking amongst themselves, and with other staff members of the Undergraduate Studies office. The weekly meetings also help new advisers to quickly become familiar with other advisers and staff. The Associate Dean noted: "[staff meetings] provide an environment where everyone always comes together, and serves the important function of getting everyone together on the same page".

Physical proximity also helps newcomers join the community. A new freshman-sophomore adviser would have an office next to more experienced advisers, and would find it physically easy to interact with more experienced advisers, and to observe their styles and their interaction with each other.

Generating Specific Perspectives and Terms

Members of the community of practice share a similar perspective on the world of advising in that they espouse a student-centered philosophy. Members of the community realize that their primary responsibility is to help students, and this perspective often guides their thinking and discussions. One adviser in the college commented on this:

> ...the common thread for all these people is [that] they truly believed that they were there [sic] to assist the students to the best of their ability and that the student was why we were here. That tends to be the common thread in people who I see as having an influence in my life, my professional life

This shared perspective may help advisers in their "student advocate" and "affective/counselor" roles. Advisers share a perspective that, in a sense, mandates their attention to dealing with students' problems, and inexperienced advisers may learn what more experienced advisers consider an "appropriate" level of attention or assistance, depending on the situation. As problems were discussed in staff meetings, or among small groups of advisers, I often observed that advisers shared a similar perspective on both the definition of the problem and its impact on students or on their practice. During one staff meeting, there was a discussion of the current requirement for engineering undergraduate students to have participated in cooperative education experience in order to graduate. Though advisers noted that different academic departments had differing perspectives on the role of cooperative education, they agreed that cooperative experiences were beneficial and that advisers had an obligation to help students identify and participate in cooperative education.

Specific terms are also generated within the community of practice; terms that may or may not have meaning outside of the community of practice. As Wenger (1998) notes, one indicator of a community of practice is the use of a common language and common artifacts. Though there was not a complex language, members of the community did use a number of terms presumably familiar to everyone within the community. I listened to numerous conversations and interactions where specific acronyms – campus programs and units, course numbers, policies and procedures, names of software packages – and artifacts – schedules of courses, advising manuals, software packages, bulletins – were used or talked about without anyone stopping to ask what something meant or what it was[23]. In my interviews, I asked advisers about the usage of a common language and common artifacts, and the majority of them agreed that there was some level of common language and artifacts shared among advisers and other academic support units on campus. As an outsider, I often had to ask about the meaning of terms that members of the community used in daily communication. In addition to the usage of the terms or artifacts, members of the community also understand the context for the usage of these common terms.

Makes the Job Habitable

Wenger (1998) also argues that a community of practice makes a job habitable by creating an atmosphere in which monotonous aspects of a job are woven into rituals, customs, stories, and rhythms of community life. There is no doubt that certain repetitive aspects of academic advising can be monotonous – particularly administrative tasks such as graduation certification or athletic certification. Advisers often do the same things with students day after day,

[23] For example, to name just a few: AOP (Academic Orientation Program), OSS (Office of Supportive Services), ASUS (Academic Standing of Undergraduate Students), CAAP (College Achievement Admissions Program), LRC (Learning Resource Center), SIS (Student Information System), ACTS (Admission Credit Transfer System) and EDMS (Engineering Degree Monitoring System).

semester after semester. Yet I observed members of the community of practice go about their daily business with enthusiasm, and advisers talked to me about how much they enjoyed their work. Members of the community of practice also seemed to enjoy working with each other. The community of practice is an environment where members create and participate in rituals and customs such as attending the weekly staff meeting, or having frequent lunches with other advisers or other members of the community. Staff meetings were filled with stories and laughter (as well as serious discussion) as people talked about their work and their practice. Social situations like informal lunches are not only an opportunity to exchange stories, but they may also serve the purpose of allowing participants to "blow off steam" by sharing their experience and their frustrations. In and of themselves, social situations may become ritualistic, and the participants may eagerly anticipate them. In short, there is a rhythm of daily discourse about individual experiences that serves to make the job of being an adviser more enjoyable.

"War stories" are also an important part of how the community of practice makes the job of advising habitable. These stories are anecdotal narratives of experiences that members of the community have had. They are told, as Orr (1996) notes, "...with as much context and technical detail as seems appropriate to the situation of their telling" (p. 125). These stories occur naturally in discourse among the advisers within the community of practice, and after they are told, they often become artifacts to be preserved and circulated again and again throughout the community of practice. War stories are shared in variety of arenas - staff meetings, as advisers talk in the hallway, and during informal social situations. War stories can serve several important functions – they serve as a tool for resolving problematic situations that arise out of a similar context, they serve as a way for the teller to make discursive claims to membership within the community of practice, they reinforce the teller's professional identity, and they also serve to provide amusement for members of the community (see Orr, 1996).

Other Impacts on Adviser's Role and Practice

In addition to the impacts of a community of practice described by Wenger (1998), there are other impacts that I believe result from involvement in the community. These impacts are directly related to the role of advisers as described earlier.

The community of practice may play a kind of cybernetic role in regulating the activities of its members. For example, I described earlier how some of the roles (particularly those of "student advocate" and "affective/counselor") involved in advising create ethical and professional dilemmas for advisers. Advisers may share war stories or talk informally about the situations they encounter that create dilemmas for them. For example, when Leslie went to lunch with the other advisers to talk about her appointment with the student in academic difficulty, the group discussed strategies for dealing with the student. If Leslie had discussed a strategy that the more experienced advisers felt would not be successful, they might share their concerns about the strategy with her, and suggest alternate strategies. It is also conceivable that an adviser might share a "war story" about how they dealt with a student, and that other advisers would find these actions inappropriate and speak privately with that adviser. In fact, during my second interview with advisers in the College of Engineering, several of more experienced advisers mentioned that they had occasionally spoken privately with relatively new advisers about what they felt to be the inappropriateness of the new adviser's actions and had suggested ways to deal more appropriately with a similar situation in the future. The advisers also mentioned that they moved quickly to correct any inaccurate information that was given out by any member of the community of practice, given such an incident's adverse impact on the level of trust between students and advisers.

Identity

Wenger (1998) argues that identity is inextricably connected to practice. The concept of identity is intimately related to practice in that one's professional identity is at least partially formulated within the context of practice. A community of practice is made up of individuals, and each individual develops a unique identity that is both a part of and apart from the community. Developing a professional identity within the context of the community of practice is thus an ongoing negotiation of the meaning of one's experience collectively and individually. New advisers bring preconceived notions of what it means to advise to their practice. But being an adviser is both a process of calling oneself "adviser" and doing things that give the term "adviser" meaning. Over time, as new advisers participate within a community of practice, they observe more experienced advisers and other members of the community talking about and attending to what they believe is important. New advisers interact with more experienced members of the community and modify their individual notions of identity to fit the meanings crafted by the community. At the same time, the identity of more experienced advisers is not static. As they work with relative newcomers, listening to their questions and observing their learning, their preconceived notions of identity are reshaped and reformed. As Wenger notes,

> Engagement in practice gives us certain experiences of participation, and what our communities pay attention to reifies us as participants. Becoming a claims processor, for instance, is both taking on the label "claims processor" and giving this label specific meanings through engagement in practice. It is doing what claims processors do, being treated the way they are treated, forming the community they form, entertaining certain relations with other practices, and – in the details of this process – giving a personal meaning to the category of claims processor. (pp. 150-51)

In this way, the community continually negotiates over time what roles and activities give meaning to advising. As several advisers commented:

> ...interacting with professional who share similar responsibilities and who have a history with the department/college has helped me become a more confident and effective adviser. There was always someone to discuss student concerns with and to brainstorm new ideas with.

> ...the other advisers with Engineering helped me see how important we are as individual advisers but [also] as a group to the students and university. The Engineering advisers have received a lot of accolades in a sense from various parts of the university, including students, so that has helped me see how important we are, and told me that I have to be accessible to both students and faculty, open to feedback, and open to help in any situation outside of my department in the sense of helping other advisers with their job duties...we are a team and not always a group of individuals from different departments....

> ...my interaction with other advisors has helped me form a professional identity...we share a lot of information. But we also often explore it in more depth...For example, we might talk about how to help students who are not going to have the requirements to

be admitted. That will lead us to a discussion of our role as advisors, what they can expect from us, what we, as advisers have a responsibility to do for them. That helps mold what we should be doing.

Note that in the last quotation, the adviser is specifically talking about her identity in the context of sharing information, ideas and practices, as well as the negotiation of mutual responsibility and accountability. There is in the comments also a sense of "we-ness" that develops among the advisers who are members of the community of practice. Identity is construed as collective.

In a sense, learning how to *be* an adviser and *being* an adviser are inseparable; each informs the other, and each is continuous and ongoing. Identity is in a constant state of flux, as the community continually negotiates what it means to be a professional adviser.

Summary

Professional academic advisers at Michigan State University perform a multi-faceted role within a variety of organizational models. Some advisers in decentralized models work by themselves within a department, often with little or no assistance. Other advisers in centralized models work together with other advisers in close proximity, and have several support staff to assist them. Other advisers work in mixed models with both centralized and decentralized advising. The role of the adviser is made up of seven primary behaviors and functions: information resource/adviser, administrator, career adviser, referral agent, affective/counselor, student advocate, and "other." Advisers often perform significant "other" roles that may or may not be directly related to advising.

Most advisers admit that they received very little formal training for their position. Advisers learn to perform their role in a process that incorporates three ways of learning. These three ways are not always easy to distinguish from one another. The first way is highly individualized, as advisers spend time reading and reviewing materials in order to acquire information necessary to advise. The second way is one of informal apprenticeship and mentoring, often one-on-one, where the adviser observes and works with a more experienced adviser. The third way is social learning, where the adviser feels more like an adviser, is more comfortable interacting in social settings, and has a greater sense of belongingness to a community. In centralized models this community tends to be made up of the academic advisers within the unit; in the decentralized models this community tends to be made up of members of the department or unit, though the adviser may feel a connection to a loosely knit institutional community of advisers. In mixed models, advisers tend to conform to the organizational model they fit into (e.g., decentralized or centralized). There is a cyclical nature to these ways of learning, as experienced advisers constantly shift between individualized, mentorship/apprenticeship, and social ways of learning.

There does not appear to be regular informal contact among advisers across the institution. Those contacts that occur tend to be on a "need to know" basis. However, there are some advisers who have extensive contacts throughout the institution. These advisers typically possess some specialized skill or knowledge (such as teacher certification), or interact with others as a function of their personality. Based on this lack of informal contact, I concluded there was not an institutional community of practice. However, there does appear to be regular informal contact among advisers in centralized or mixed organizational models.

Based on further research, I concluded that an advising community of practice did exist within the College of Engineering, which utilizes a mixed model of advising (departmental advisers and centralized freshman-sophomore advisers). Members of this community of practice existed both within and outside of the college. The community of practice allows its members to share information, ideas and best practices; negotiate meanings and actions; resolve problems; build and access a communal memory, share a common language and artifacts, and engage in customs, rituals and stories (especially "war stories") that helped them relieve stress and make their jobs more enjoyable. Members of the community of practice may also regulate the behaviors of other members of the community. Advisers also continually negotiated a professional identity within the context of the community of practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is organized into the following sections: summary of the study, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research. After briefly summarizing the study, I will discuss implications of the findings for academic advisers, college and unit administrators, and the institution. Finally, recommendations for further research will be presented.

Summary of the study

This was a qualitative study that looked at the following research questions:

1. How do academic advisers engage in ongoing learning about their role within the organizational context of a university?
2. Do academic advisers form communities of practice? , and if so,

   2a. What contribution do communities of practice make to the learning and performance of the advising role?

The theoretical framework for the study was that of situated cognition – the idea that learning is situated within context and intent. Other theorists have reframed this idea as social learning that is characterized by social participation situated in communities within an organization. An assumption of social learning is that individuals learn within the context of activity in the informal communities that exist within organizations. Viewed from this theoretical perspective, the advisers in this study are not so much learning to *do* advising as they are constantly learning to *be* an adviser. The specific theoretical construct used to guide the second question in the study was that of the community of practice. A community of practice is defined as an informal group of organizational members who interact on a regular basis to negotiate meanings and actions, create mutual accountability, and create shared meanings, practices, ideas, artifacts and language.

Before the study began, it was approved by the Michigan State University University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). Each of the informants signed a consent form verifying their agreement to participate in the study before they were interviewed or observed. The consent form outlined the rights of the study participants. The study took place over the course of a year at Michigan State University (MSU), a large public land-grant institution with over 40,000 students. The study utilized interviews, participation observation and document analysis as the methods of data collection. I interviewed associate deans and directors in nine undergraduate colleges and units and also interviewed 21 professional academic advisers representing these same undergraduate colleges and units at MSU. These nine undergraduate colleges and units represented three distinct organizational models of advising: decentralized – advisers were situated within academic departments or units throughout the college, centralized – advisers were grouped together in a central advising office (or groups of offices) serving a college, and mixed, where advisers were in situated in both centralized and decentralized settings. Documents related to academic advising were collected throughout the course of the study. Following the initial round of interviews, I spent five weeks within the

College of Engineering, observing weekly staff meetings, re-interviewing academic advisers and administrators, and collecting additional documents.

The data for the study were analyzed by reviewing interview transcripts, participant observation notes, documents and fieldnotes. I reviewed these items and recorded what I thought were major ideas and points. I then organized these ideas and points into three thematic modules. The data were reviewed several times, and the modules were further refined during the course of the study.

In order to answer the two overarching research questions guiding the study, major findings of the study were categorized under the following sections: the role of the adviser, ways of learning (to advise), and a community of practice at Michigan State University.

The first research question was: How do academic advisers engage in ongoing learning about their role within the organizational context of a university?

In order to answer this question, I first wrote two vignettes describing the daily experience of a relatively new adviser in a centralized organizational model, and a more experienced adviser in a decentralized model. These vignettes served to illustrate the daily activities of academic advisers and provided a glimpse into their busy lives. I also defined the role of an adviser. This multifaceted role included seven primary areas of activity and responsibility: information resource/adviser, administrator, career advising, referral agent, affective/counselor, student advocate, and "other" (responsibilities that were unique to each individual and may or may not have been closely related to academic advising). These behaviors were overlapping, and advisers performed numerous tasks that satisfied the expectations of more than one role. Several of the behaviors presented advisers with multiple challenges and ethical and legal dilemmas.

I then described how advisers engage in ways of learning how to be an adviser. Almost all of the advisers interviewed for the study admitted that they "fell into" the role of advising, and that training programs were often either short-lived or virtually non-existent, though a few advisers did receive significant training from individual supervisors. However, training to be an adviser was distinguished from learning how to advise. There emerged three general ways of learning: individualized reading and review, apprenticeship and mentorship, and social learning. Advisers spent time in individualized reading and review to acquire information about academic policies and procedures, curricula, degree requirements, and other information that they felt was necessary to advise students. Advisers were also engaged in a period of informal apprenticeship and mentorship, where they worked one-on-one with more experienced advisers (or supervisors), asking questions, sharing information, observing the experienced adviser in advising sessions and then debriefing. This process seems to be different for advisers in centralized settings who have immediate access to other advisers, versus advisers in decentralized settings, where advisers may be physically separated from other advisers and have the opportunity to work only briefly with a predecessor and then with a department chair or faculty member. Finally, as advisers gained more experience and confidence, a better understanding of the context of advising, and a stronger sense of identity and belongingness emerges, they began to engage more in social learning, interacting more often with other advisers, or other members of their department or unit. Advisers also learned from their interaction with students. There is a cyclical nature to these ways of advising.

Advisers in centralized units tend to feel membership with other advisers while decentralized advisers tend to feel membership primarily as a part of their department or unit. All advisers tended to feel that they belonged to a loosely-knit community of academic advisers across the institution. Advisers unanimously felt that their learning was continuous because of constant changes in academic policies and procedures and in curricula, but also because they were constantly faced with new and unique situations while advising students.

The second research question was: Do academic advisers form communities of practice, and if so, what contribution do communities of practice make to the learning and performance of the advising role?

In order to answer this question, I had to first decide, based on the data, whether or not advisers formed communities of practice. There did not seem to be regular informal interaction among advisers at the institutional level. Reasons given for this were the size and complexity of the institution, a general lack of time, lack of familiarity with other advisers, and situations or problems that were unique to a major, department, unit, or college. Based on this lack of regular interaction, I concluded there was not an institutional advising community of practice.

There did, however, appear to be an enormous amount of informal interaction among advisers within centralized and mixed organizational models. Therefore I decided, rather than re-interviewing advisers across the institution, to spend additional time within one undergraduate college to see if a community of practice existed within that college. I chose the College of Engineering, which utilizes a mixed model of advising that incorporates two distinct groups of advisers – freshman-sophomore advisers in a centralized setting, and upper-level (departmental) advisers in a decentralized setting. Over a five-week period, I observed staff meetings within the Undergraduate Studies office in the College of Engineering, re-interviewed academic advisers, re-interviewed the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, interviewed the former Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, and gathered additional documents for review. Based on the analysis of this data, I concluded that there was an advising community of practice within the College of Engineering. This community of practice included several groups from within the college, including the freshman-sophomore advisers and the upper-level (departmental) advisers, and several groups outside of the college: the Registrar's Office, the Office of Study Abroad, and the Career Services and Placement office. Each member of the community interacted on a regular basis with other members of the community, though the level of participation and interaction was fluid and ebbed and flowed over time, particularly with those members who were outside of the college. Some members of the community interacted and participated on a nearly constant basis, while others had a more limited, though still important, level of interaction and participation. Membership is seen as belonging to those who regularly interact with others, and who understanding and can contribute to the practice of advising.

I wrote two vignettes to illustrate the types of interaction that take place among the members of the community of practice. Part of this participation and interaction take place during and around a weekly staff meeting attended by the academic advisers and the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies as well as other Undergraduate Studies staff members. During these meetings, the participants shared information, ideas and best practices; created and distributed knowledge; identified, discussed and resolved problems; negotiated meaning and created mutual accountability, and communicated using a shared language and common artifacts. These same types of actions also took place during one-on-one interactions between individual advisers, or groups of advisers, or between other members of the community. The interactions included face-to-face conversations, formal meetings, informal meetings, phone calls, e-mails and written correspondence.

There are several impacts of this advising community of practice. Its main impact is to provide a way for practitioners to cope with the daily demands of their practice. The community of practice provides an arena for: identifying, discussing, and negotiating resolutions to institutionally generated conflicts; developing and supporting a communal memory that relieves individuals of the burden of having to master what is often an overwhelming amount of information; welcoming new or relatively new advisers into the community by facilitating their social participation in practice; generating and using specific language and artifacts and seeing information from relatively similar perspectives; and making the job habitable by incorporating rituals, customs and stories into everyday practice within the community. The community of practice may also serve to regulate the actions of its individual members. The community of practice also allows advisers to continually negotiate the meaning of their actions and thus of their identity. Advisers within the community gain a professional identity not only by perceiving themselves as advisers, but more importantly, by the ongoing negotiation of the meaning of their actions.

In short, the major findings of this study are:

1. Advisers perform a complex and multi-faceted role that consists of at least seven major areas of activity and responsibility: information resource/adviser, administrator, career advising, affective/counselor, student advocate, referral agent, and "other" responsibilities that may or may not be related to academic advising. Advisers are often faced with challenges and ethical and legal dilemmas resulting from these responsibilities.
2. Advisers learn to perform their complex and multifaceted role by engaging in a continual cycle of individualized reading and review, informal apprenticeships and mentoring, and, as they gain more experience and confidence in their abilities, and a better understanding of the context of their practice, in social learning. Advisers in centralized models and mixed models, who are in close physical

proximity to other advisers, tend to interact on a more regular and sustained basis with other academic advisers. Advisers in decentralized models tend to interact more with members of their department or unit. All of the advisers also interacted with and learned from students.

3. Though there is not an institutional advising community of practice, there is an advising community of practice within the College of Engineering. This community of practice is composed of members within and outside of the college, and has a positive impact on the practice of academic advising.

Implications of the study

There are a number of implications of this study, and these are presented in the following sections: implications for academic advisers, implications for college and unit administrators, and implications for the institution. In each section, recommendations are coupled with the implications.

Implications and Recommendations

The major implications of this study are that advisers learn to perform their complex role primarily within the social context of their practice, and that training seems to play a small role in the ways of learning to advise; and that communities of practice provide a way for academic advisers to perform their complex role within the constraints of an organizational environment. Part of the reason for conducting this study was to remedy the apparent lack of research about how advisers actually learn to advise. Though there is an existing body of research and literature on adviser training, it has historically been construed as relatively unimportant, prescriptive and consisting primarily (though not exclusively) of the transmission of content information and basic skills thought necessary to advise (Habley, 1995). This type of training is valuable and has its place, but I contend (and the results of this study tend to show) that the majority of advisers' learning to advise comes not during their initial training which is apparently often very limited and inconsistent, and disconnected from actual practice, but rather, only as they engage in the ongoing practice of advising. Learning is a cyclical process of individualized reading and review (subject-oriented learning), mentorship/apprenticeship, and social learning through interaction and participation that occurs within the activity of practice.

But social learning did not always occur within a community of practice. There was not an institutional community of practice, nor did advisers within decentralized organizational models seem to have the level of interaction found in a community of practice (though I did not specifically look closely at advisers within decentralized models).

In at least one college, this social learning took place at least partly within a community of practice. Judging from the results of this study, two environmental conditions seemed to be necessary in order for a community of practice to form – first, at least some of the members of the community had to be in relatively close physical proximity, and second, members had to have a high level of comfort and trust in each other (though one could argue that a high level of comfort and trust was not a condition but rather the result of the presence of a community of practice). Members of the community of practice must develop a sense of "we-ness" that pervades their practice and their collective identities. These environmental conditions are more likely to be found within a centralized or mixed organizational model.

But if a community of practice exists, what is the value of a community of practice? Wenger (1998) has defined several impacts of a community of practice that I felt had a positive effect on how academic advisers performed their complex role. In their daily work, advisers are often faced with questions they cannot answer or situations and problems that are not easily addressed by general university, college or departmental policies and procedures. The community of practice provides an mechanism for answering these questions and dealing with these situations and problems. Not only does the presence of a community of practice provide a way for its members to define, discuss and resolve problems, support a communal memory, help new advisers join the community, generate specific perspectives and terms, and make the daily grind of the job more enjoyable, the community of practice may also provide a way for advisers and other members of the community to self-regulate the way that individual members of the community of practice carry out certain roles. Professional identity is also shaped and reshaped within the context of the community of practice. Identity is negotiated both within the meaning of individual and collective experience, and by engaging in activities that give the identity meaning. I believe their place in the community of practice helps advisers to better perform their complex roles.

There are, however, several disadvantages that may be associated with a community of practice. Communities of practice do not form just anywhere. In that they are, by definition, informal, it is not possible for advisers or their supervisors to simply build a community of practice by decree. Communities of practice are not invented, nor can they be imposed. Like weather phenomena, they seem to arise only when certain organizational environments exist. The environmental conditions that I suggest are necessary for the formation of a community of practice simply do not exist across all advising organizational models. There may, of course, be additional environmental conditions. Not all advisers are in close physical proximity to one another, nor do all advisers know each other well enough to possess or develop a high level of comfort and trust in each other. Michigan State University is an enormous and complex organization that is divided into numerous units that are separated both by physical space and function.

It is also conceivable that a community of practice can become too insular. Patterns of thought or action may become so intertwined with particular contexts or environments that they become resistant to change. Individuals within the community of practice may become so involved with the reflective capacity of the community of practice that they resist or at least are not fully aware of the reflective capacity that exists outside of their own community of practice (see Putnam and Borko, 2000). Communities of practice may become, to borrow a phrase, "gated" communities that attempt to shut out the world around them.

Given the implications of this study, I offer several recommendations for professional academic advisers. Advisers can use the concepts and findings discussed in this study to become more aware of the complex role of advising, understand better the nature of how they learn to advise, and understand that there is an ongoing, cyclical nature to their learning that must be connected to the authentic activity of practice. Advisers might also gain an awareness that they are, in fact, already members of a community of practice.

More specific ways that adviser might advance their understanding and their learning include:

1) An appreciation that they are not being trained as much as they are learning to perform their complex role within the context of practice.
2) A recognition of the importance of spending time in informal apprenticeship and/or mentoring relationships with more experienced advisers to help them identify information and skills needed to advise and to observe the more experienced advisers' style and rapport with students.

Performing a complex role is consistent with the literature on academic advising that traces the development of advising from a primarily prescriptive activity to a more holistic and complex developmental process. While training may play a role in introducing both conceptual and informational elements, it is only a starting point, and may not be as well connected to what Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) refer to as "authentic activities" – activities that are more closely aligned with the ordinary tasks and roles that make up actual practice. Mentoring and apprenticeship that involves observation of more experienced advisers and social learning within practice are closely connected to authentic activities in that both involve learning that occurs within activity – watching other advisers actually advise students, or talking with others about how they engage in authentic activities, or sharing in their reflections about authentic activities. Advisers are, in effect, not being trained but are being enculturated into a practice.

3) Understanding that identity is formed through engagement in practice, and negotiating the meaning of those activities.

The literature notes that advisers have had difficulty defining a professional identity because they perform a wide variety of roles (Trombley and Holmes, 1980; Stamatakos, 1981). Recognition that identity is not static but rather is a process of both taking on the label of adviser and engaging in activities that give the label meaning may help advisers cope with this difficulty by understanding that identity is a fluid concept, and not one that should be tied to a static definition derived at least in part for the benefit of the standing of the profession.

4) Engaging in ongoing efforts to form stronger connections with other advisers and other offices that support advising across campus, and a recognition that they can tap into a communal memory that already exists across the institution may help advisers to share information, ideas, best practices, and to identify and resolve institutional problems. These connections are not necessarily found within the context of formal, organizationally sanctioned events and groups.

5) Utilizing technology in order to construct a "virtual" discourse community that helps overcome obstacles of space and time. This should be in addition to the existing adviser listserv (at Michigan State University).

I have noted earlier that certain environmental conditions must exist in order for a community of practice to form, and that not all advisers are situated within this type of environment. However, advisers might still be able to foster stronger connections across an institution by actively reaching out and seeking and sharing information from and with others. Those advisers who are in decentralized models might form a discourse community centered around weekly lunches or some other type of informal activity. Discourse communities are groups of professionals who interact in a reflective stance to draw upon and incorporate members' insights about craft knowledge, roles, and cultural contexts (see Putnam and Borko, 2000; Wineburg and Grossman, 1998; Thomas, et al., 1998). It is important to note that this is not a community of practice, but rather a way for advisers to engage socially with other advisers.

New and emerging technologies such as electronic mail and the World Wide Web are transforming various aspects of academic advising. This offers an opportunity for those advisers who are within the same college or unit but not in close physical proximity to form a virtual discourse community. Again, this does not fit the existing criteria of a community of practice, but it does provide for a kind of social interaction. The current advisers listserv is an important way for information to be shared, but it has not yet served as a forum for the definition of problems, problem solving or sharing information about best practices. Based on the concerns of advisers about privacy and about being exposed to accusations of perceived incompetence or ignorance, it is not likely that the institutional listserv will be used in this capacity in the future. Perhaps smaller networks that are situated within colleges and units could serve to facilitate communication. Advisers might not be as reluctant to talk about problems or dilemmas if the virtual community was smaller and made up of advisers who were somewhat familiar with each other and had established some level of trust in each other.

6) Developing a better understanding of how a community of practice facilitates and informs adviser learning and practice.

The majority of academic advisers already engage in some type of professional development activities, be they local (e.g., all university in-services) or regional or national (e.g., ACPA or NACADA conferences) where they hope to gain information about current or emerging advising practice. Advisers might do several other things to develop a better understanding of communities of practice. Advisers could review the literature on social learning theory and communities of practice to gain a better understanding. Advisers who are members of a community of practice could present information at local, regional and national professional development activities about how the community of practice impacts their practice. Advisers could also initiate research or agree to participate in further research on the possible existence and impact of communities of practice within advising. Though not all advisers are situated within an environment where a community of practice exists or perhaps might form, a better understanding of the impacts of learning through social interaction and participation might still be beneficial to advisers who seek to improve their practice and better understand how to carry out their complex roles.

There are also several implications and recommendations for college and unit administrators who are primarily responsible for advising. Perhaps the most important implication is that training is to be distinguished from learning, particularly where training is not connected to actual practice. The importance of learning within practice by working with a more experienced mentor or in an apprenticeship-like situation, or by engaging socially with others in the same context seems clear. Administrators can at least encourage and support this type of learning.

A second implication is that communities of practice are informal and thus cannot be defined or formed by caveat or decree, though they can be encouraged, supported and nurtured (Wenger, 1998). The "local" conditions of close physical proximity and a high level of comfort and trust necessary for a community of practice likely do not exist in all colleges and units. It follows that college and university administrators who have primary responsibility for advising cannot necessarily create the environments where communities of practice might arise, but they can at least understand the nature of social learning and communities of practice and how these impact the practice of advising. Administrators might also be able to create environments or groups like discourse communities that at least facilitate social learning by creating time for interaction and creating physical or virtual spaces for interaction. Above all else, there must be some type of ongoing opportunities for learning that is connected in some way to engagement in practice. Specific recommendations for college and unit administrators include:

1) Understanding how advisers learn to advise, and encouraging new advisers (or relatively inexperienced advisers) to seek out apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities, or formally assigning mentors for new advisers.

Most advisers reported that one of the ways they learned how to be an adviser was through working with a more experienced adviser (or, in some cases, a department chair or faculty member) in a mentoring or apprentice-like relationship. Administrators can encourage advisers both to seek mentors and to serve as mentors, or could even assign mentors to new or relatively inexperienced advisers. Mentoring provides an opportunity for advisers to learn about advising as they observe others within the practice of advising, thus both the mentor and the new adviser are learning through engagement in "authentic activity".

2) Providing physical and virtual opportunities for academic advisers to interact, including professional development activities.

This could be accomplished by administrators helping creating time for adviser interaction, and creating physical and virtual means for advisers to interact, including funding (if it is not available already) for advisers to attend external professional development activities. Administrators can also assist advisers in developing connections with other advisers both within their college and unit, and across the institution by strongly encouraging advisers to participate in all-university in-services, to serve on college and university committees, particularly those concerned with advising issues or issues related to advising, and to attend and make presentations at internal and external professional development activities. Requiring advisers to attend formal staff meetings or roundtables may also serve to bring advisers together, even if in a formal activity.

In addition to implications for advisers and for administrators, there are implications and recommendations for the institution as a complex organization. I offer several implications and recommendations for the institution:

1) A recognition that communities of practice exist, and that they provide a localized means for practitioners to cope with the daily demands of complying with institutional policies and procedures.

As noted before, communities of practice cannot be made, but they can be supported or nurtured, or at the very least, organizations can avoid interfering with the work of localized practice. Brown and Duguid (1991) argue that an organization needs to "...reconceive of itself as a community-of-communities..." (p. 77), and that a large organization like Michigan State University, if it conceives of itself as a collection of communities that are relatively autonomous and independent from a dominant organizational world view, may actually foster innovation within the communities and thus within the organization. Wenger (1998) offers a similar view when he argues that organizations exist as dual structures in which there is a pre-existing designed structure and the emergent, ever-changing structure of practice. Institutions may establish systems of accountability, measures of achievement, and a series of procedures, rules and policies, but communities must incorporate these artifacts into their own practice to, as Wenger argues, "...decide in specific situations what they mean in practice, when to comply with them and when to ignore them." (p. 245). Thus, localized practice provides a way for individuals and communities to, as I have noted earlier, meet the daily demands of practice within the larger context of institutional systems and constraints. Members of a community of practice find a way to work both within and around "the system." In this way, meaning is negotiated, knowledge is created and preserved, information is shared, and identities are created and recreated through the social interaction inherent in communities of practice. This hopefully makes the organization work more effectively.

2) A desire to help the global campus community better understand the complex role of the academic adviser and the impact that communities of practice have upon the performance of this role.

If institutions understand that they are made up of communities-of-communities, and that those communities of practice that exist within academic advising help advisers to carry out their practice by resolving conflicts generated by institution policies and procedures, then all members of the institution may be better able to understand the complex role of the academic adviser and the demands made upon academic advisers. Such an understanding might help advisers establish a more salient professional identity and worth that is more highly valued and recognizable throughout the institution.

Recommendations for Further Research

Academic advising has evolved from an informal and unstructured function to a more formal, holistic process based at least in part on developmental theory. Much of the research on academic advising has been conducted to measure the efficacy and impact of academic advising, particularly the relationship of academic advising to student success (e.g, academic persistence) and student retention. These results have been used politically (and understandably so), to justify the emergence and continued existence of professional academic advisers, yet the field of academic advising still struggles with the issue of whether advising is, in fact, a profession, and whether or not some national standards for skills and knowledge ought to be established (NACADA, 1987). Related to this struggle for identity and national standards is the literature that suggests that there have been only limited advances made in the prevalence, effectiveness and comprehensiveness of adviser training programs (Habley, 1995). Rather than focusing again on training, the type of research done in this study provides an opportunity to reexamine academic advising within the context of practice and authentic activity by focusing not on training and thus what advisers ought to know, but rather on what advisers do, and how advisers learn to advise and how they learn to perform their complex role within an organizational context. The central issue shifts from training advisers to understanding and facilitating the process of becoming an adviser, and the unit of analysis shifts from the individual as passive trainee to looking at how the individual actively becomes part of a larger context of daily practice.

From this perspective, advisers within communities of practice are, in effect, constantly seeking new knowledge and information, and constantly negotiating meaning and identity as they struggle to balance the daily demands of practice against the institution's policies and procedures. This portrays the adviser as an active and innovative learner performing a complex role, rather than portraying the adviser as lacking the training to come to grips with information and lacking the skills needed to be an effective adviser while at the same time struggling to establish a professional identity. Even if the shift in portrayal is partly one of perception, it is nonetheless an opportunity to rethink the practice of academic advising as a complex and demanding job, and worthy of more respect within institutions of higher education.

This study was, however, limited in that it only examined a small sample of advisers at one institution and only looked at the existence of a community of practice within one undergraduate college at that institution. Additional research should be conducted to learn more about how academic advisers learn to perform their role and about the potential existence and impact of communities of practice upon that learning. Additional research should also look at how communities of practice impact the perceived quality of advising. Ultimately, the most urgent research question is that of whether or not the presence of a community of practice impacts the quality and effectiveness of academic advising. In short, are those advisers that participate in communities of practice better advisers[24], and are these advisers better because of their participation in communities of practice, or because of other factors, or because of a mixture of both?

In addition to research that is specifically related to the field of academic advising, there is a need for additional research into the very nature of communities of practice. The human dynamics of communities of practice are not well understood, particularly in terms of relationships among individual members of a community of practice. Do hierarchical power structures exist within communities of practice? If such structures exist, how are they created and maintained? Who holds power and how is it used? Would these structures impact the concept of membership and the level of participation in the community of practice? Can individuals be excluded from communities of practice? How might the community of practice deal with conflict among its members? What is the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on membership and participation within a community of practice? Though these types of questions were not part of the scope of this study, there is a clear need for a better understanding of the human dynamic, for better or worse, within communities of practice.

Following are specific recommendations for additional research. The first three recommendations are for general research into communities of practice,

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[24] It is interesting to note that results from a recent survey of academic advising at Michigan State University (Hembroff & Clark, 1998) suggest that, when asked about the overall quality of academic advising, 88.3 percent of students whose major was in Engineering reported the quality of advising to be "excellent" or "good". However, there were several other colleges with similar ratings, and my study did not attempt to find out whether other advising communities of practice exist in other colleges at Michigan State University.

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the other recommendations are specifically concerned with the field of academic advising.

1) Additional research should be conducted to examine in greater detail how communities of practice are formed and how they are maintained in an effort to learn more about the conditions necessary for communities of practice to exist and thrive.

In this study, I have proposed that close physical proximity and a high level of comfort and trust among at least some members are necessary conditions for the formation of a community of practice. Are other conditions necessary? What role, if any, does individual leadership play in terms of the formation of communities of practice? Further research could attempt to further explain and understand the environmental conditions that are necessary for a community of practice to exist, and could lead to a better understanding of the role of the "parent" organization vis-à-vis it's communities of practice. This study looked at a large, public, land-grant institution, and Wenger's (1998) research has looked at a private corporation (a large insurance company). How do organizational characteristics impact the formation of communities of practice?

2) Additional research should be undertaken to determine whether or not institutional characteristics impact ways of learning and the existence of communities of practice.

This study looked at a large public, research intensive, land-grant institution. How do the differing characteristics of other types of institutions of higher education (e.g., two year colleges, private colleges and universities, liberal arts colleges, etc.) impact the existence of communities of practice and their effect upon practice? Further research should look at a variety of types of institutions and institutional characteristics to understand more about how communities of practice form (or why they do not form) in colleges and universities.

3) Additional research should be conducted where communities of practice exist to learn more about the impact of communities of practice upon their members.

This study examined the impact of a community of practice, but there may be additional impacts that are not yet detected or understood. For example, is there any form of hierarchy within communities of practice, and do any members of a community of practice act as the primary gatekeepers for knowledge and information? Does membership in a community of practice provide for a more egalitarian workplace? Does the community of practice impose different standards of practice for its members, particularly in terms of ethical and legal constraints versus those not in communities of practice? How does the community of practice resolve conflicts if there is disagreement among its members – does it reach out beyond the boundaries of the community to resolve some problems? What impact does the gender, race and ethnicity of the members have on the community of practice? What are the negative impacts of a community of practice?

4) Additional research should look at academic advising both at Michigan State University and within other institutions of higher education to learn

more about how advisers learn to perform their role. These studies could also look at whether or not communities of practice exist at other institutions, or within other advising organizational models.

Further research in the area of adviser learning might yield improvements, further insights, and changes to the "ways of learning" model proposed in this study. This research might expand the concept of the ways of learning I have described in this study, and seek to identify critical skills and understanding useful in performing the advising. A longitudinal study might seek to better understand how learning is carried out as an adviser gains more experience and confidence in their abilities, and how this learning changes over time.

5) Additional research – both qualitative and quantitative – should look at the impact of advising communities of practice on how advisers, students, faculty, and administrators perceive the effectiveness and quality of academic advising. Quantitative and qualitative measures should be developed that allow the measurement of differences between the quality and effectiveness of advising by advisers who participate in communities of practice versus those that do not.

As I mentioned previously, perhaps the most important question regarding communities of practice and academic advising is whether or not the presence of a community of practice has a positive impact on the effectiveness and quality of academic advising. Are advisers in communities of practice better advisers, and if so, how and why are they better? If communities of practice positively impact the quality and effectiveness of advising, then how can this effect be brought to those advisers who are not members of a community of practice?

6) Additional research should look at whether or not communities of practice exist in other areas of institutions of higher education and examine the impact of communities of practice upon the practice of individuals in those areas.

Institutions of higher education are complex organizations made up of many offices and units. What other communities of practice might exist, and how might these communities overlap and interact with each other? This study identified three other offices outside of the College of Engineering that belonged to the advising community of practice. Might other offices and units (e.g., academic departments, research institutes, counseling centers, financial aid offices, learning centers, support services, athletic departments) form communities of practice, and if so, what impact would those communities of practice have both upon those offices and upon academic advisers? Research could look for the existence of these communities of practice and their impact, and any potential relationships between different communities of practice, or if clusters of communities of practice exist within institutions.

Summary

Academic advising is a field that has undergone enormous change in a relatively short period of time, and that has struggled to find its place within the institution of higher education. In the process, advising has evolved into a developmental process that assumes a holistic view of students. However, the heart of academic advising still remains a sharing between the individual student and adviser of information and advice about how the student can ultimately complete a course of study, make sound academic, personal and career decisions, and plan to engage in a satisfying career or further education following graduation. Advisers must provide information that is timely, accurate and genuinely helpful to a student. Advisers must know when to refer students, and where to appropriately refer them. Advisers must make decisions about how to best help students, and about whether or not their actions and advocacy are appropriate within a variety of situations. Advisers often find themselves in a counseling role that they may or may not feel comfortable in. Simply put, the academic adviser must learn to provide a variety of kinds of information and perform a complex role that is critically important to a student's ultimate success in an institution of higher education.

This study attempted to define the complex role of advising and examined how advisers learned to perform that role. As with any research, the study raises more questions than it begins to answer, but it does provide a glimpse into how advisers are in the constant process of learning to be an adviser. In fact, there is much more to the role of advising than meets the eye. Advisers are not performing an explicit role as much as they are giving meaning to what they do through engaging in practice. There is within this ongoing quest for meaning an implicit standard of practice that is more concerned with the meaning of what advisers do than what they actually do, in that the quality of advising that they provide directly impacts students. At the heart of this quest for meaning then, is the satisfaction that is derived from helping students and making a difference in their lives.

Given the challenges and rewards and the impact of academic advising, the importance of knowing more about how advisers are able to learn and perform this role, and knowing more about organizational structures that would impact this learning provides an impetus for further research and a better understanding of academic advising.

In addition to understanding more about academic advising, there is also the more global need to better understand the nature of communities of practice, and their impact upon people within organizations. I am hopeful that this study has, in some small way, served these purposes.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

University Committee On Research Involving Human Subjects – Application and Consent Forms

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

INITIAL REVIEW (and 5 yr. renewal) **UCRIHS**

University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects
David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair
246 Administration Building Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
PHONE (517) 355-2180 FAX (517) 353-2976 E-Mail - UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu
http://pilot.msu.edu/unit/vprgs/ucrihs/
Office Hours: M-F (8:00 A.M.-Noon & 1:00-5:00 P.M.)

DIRECTIONS: Please complete questions on this application using the instructions and definitions found on the attached sheets.

1. Responsible Project Investigator
(Faculty or staff supervisor)
Name: *Kathryn M. Moore*
Social Security #:

Department: *Educational Administration*

I believe the research can be safely completed without endangering human subjects. Further, I have read the enclosed proposal and I am willing to supervise any student investigators.

Signature:____________________________

Additional Investigator(s)

Name: *Lance Brian Lewis*
SS or Stu. ID#:

Name: ____________________________
SS or Stu. ID#: ____________________________

Name: ____________________________
SS or Stu. ID#: ____________________________

2. Address

419 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

Phone #: *517-432-2276*
Fax #: *517-355-1784*
E-mail: *kmmoore@pilot.msu.edu*

Address

4143 Breakwater Drive
Okemos, MI 48864

Phone #: *517-347-1403*
Fax #: *517-347-7068*
E-mail: *lewislan@pilot.msu.edu*

3. Title of Project

"Academic Advisors and their Role Definition within an Organizational Context"

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4. Have you ever received Preliminary Approval for this project? No [X] Yes [ ]

   If yes, what IRB # was assigned to it? __________________

5. Funding (if any) *None*
   MSU Contracts and Grants app. # ___________ if applicable

6. Does this project utilize an **Investigational Drug, Device or Procedure**?
   No [X] Yes [ ] **If yes**, is there an IND #? No [ ] Yes [ ]
   IND # ________________

7. Does this project involve the use of **Materials of Human Origin** (e.g., human blood or tissue)?
   No [X] Yes [ ]

8. When would you **prefer** to begin data collection? *Around April 1, 1999*
   Please remember **you may not begin data collection without UCRIHS approval.**

9. Category (Circle A, B or C below. See instructions pp. 5 & 6)

   a. This proposal is submitted as **EXEMPT** from full review.
      Specify category or categories. *1-C, 1-D, 1-E*
   b. This proposal is submitted for **EXPEDITED** review.
      Specify category or categories. __________
   c. This proposal is submitted for **FULL** sub-committee review.

10. Is this a full review multi-site project? No [X] Yes [ ]
    If yes, do the other sites have a Multiple Project Assurance IRB that will also review this project?
    [ ] No. Please contact the UCRIHS office for further information about meeting the PHS/NIH/OPPR regulations.
    [ ] Yes. Please supply a copy of that approval letter when obtained.

11. **Project Description (Abstract): Please limit your response to 200 words.**

Academic advising is a multifaceted task characterized by the sharing of information between student and advisor about how the student can complete a course of study, make sound decisions, and plan for a career or further education following graduation. Most institutions of higher education use a combination of advising delivery models, including faculty advising and centralized advising units staffed by full-time, professional academic advisors.

Professional advisors have often had difficulty defining their roles and professional status, and little is known about how they actually learn their roles. This is a qualitative study that will investigate how professional academic advisors at Michigan State University learn and perform their roles. Learning a role is a complex process involving social learning within a professional and organizational context. Using a theoretical framework of organizational learning theory and social role theory, the study will investigate how advisors learn about their role and whether or not advisors form organizational "communities of practice" within the institution that contribute to them learning and performing their roles. The study will utilize interviews, participant observation and document analysis to gain a better understanding of how advisors learn and perform their roles. This knowledge can then be used for the systematic improvement of the advising process.

12. Procedures: Please describe all project activities to be used in collecting data from human subjects. This also includes procedures for collecting materials of human origin and analysis of existing data originally collected from human subjects.

A list of professional academic advisors at Michigan State University will be compiled using information from the MSU Faculty and Staff Directory, academic personnel records, and self-reports from those colleges providing undergraduate instruction, and the University Undergraduate Division. Academic personnel records will be formally requested after the proposal has received UCRIHS approval. Subjects will be selected from this list and queried as to their participation in the study. Those individuals who agree to participate by signing the informed consent will be used as subjects in the study.

Data collection will be accomplished using interviews, participant observation and document analysis. The additional investigator will carry out all data collection procedures. Subjects will be initially interviewed and at least one follow-up interview will also be conducted. Interviews will be audio-recorded. The additional investigator will also observe subjects in such activities as staff meetings and professional development activities. Subjects will also be asked to voluntarily furnish written documents such as electronic mail messages, written correspondence, job descriptions, planning documents, university reports and internal memoranda for analysis.

13. Subject Population: Describe your subject population. (e.g., high school athletes, women over 50 w/breast cancer, small business owners)

Professional academic advisors at Michigan State University.

a. The study population may include (check each category where subjects **may** be included **by design or incidentally**):

Minors	[ ]
Pregnant Women	[X]
Women of Childbearing Age	[X]
Institutionalized Persons	[ ]
Students	[ ]
Low Income Persons	[ ]
Minorities	[X]
Incompetent Persons (or those with diminished capacity)	[ ]

b. Number of subjects (including controls) *approximately 20*

c. How will the subjects be recruited? (Attach appropriate number of copies of recruiting advertisement, if any. See p. 13 of UCRIHS instructions)

Potential subjects will be identified from a list of professional academic advisors at Michigan State University. The primary and additional investigators will send to these potential subjects a letter outlining the purposes of the study and how data will be collected, and asking for the potential subjects' voluntary consent to participate. Those subjects who sign the informed consent can serve as subjects.

d. If you are associated with the subjects (e.g., they are your students, employees, patients), please explain the nature of the association.

No association exists.

e. If someone will receive payment for recruiting the subjects please explain the amount of payment, who pays it and who receives it.

No payments are to be made.

f. Will the research subjects be compensated? [X] No [ ] Yes. **If yes**, details concerning payment, including the amount and schedule of payments, must be explained in the informed consent.

g. Will the subjects incur additional financial costs as a result of their participation in this study? [X] No [ ] Yes. **If yes**, please include an explanation in the informed consent.

h. Will this research be conducted with subjects who reside in another country or live in a cultural context different from mainstream US society? [X] No [ ] Yes.

(1) **If yes**, will there be any corresponding complications in your ability to minimize risks to subjects, maintain their confidentiality and/or assure their right to voluntary informed consent as individuals? [ ] No [ ] Yes.

(2) **If your answer to h-1 is yes**, what are these complications and how will
you resolve them?

14. How will the subjects' privacy be protected? (See Instructions p. 8.)

This study does not allow for anonymity, but the researcher will ensure confidentiality to all subjects.

Several methods will be used to protect subjects' identities. Pseudonyms will be used to conceal the identity of subjects in the study, and descriptions of the subjects' environment will be worded so as not to allow identification of a subject by association with an environment.

If the researcher is observing a subject in an activity involving other persons who are not subjects (e.g., a staff meeting or professional development activity), all participants in the activity will be informed of the researcher's presence, and ensured that their identity will remain confidential. Any objections to observation will result in the researcher's withdrawal from that activity.

The researcher will further ensure confidentiality of subjects by keeping all research data and findings safely secured in a locked filing cabinet in his home office.

15. Risks and Benefits for subjects: (See Instructions p. 8.)

This study poses minimal risks to subjects. The data collected for this study is not of a nature to adversely impact subjects' employment. However, it is conceivable that subjects might feel a risk in talking about the actions of themselves and colleagues that they would not want to be exposed to the University community or the general public. It is also conceivable that subjects might feel a risk in releasing certain documents such as electronic mail, internal memoranda, internal planning documents, or other internal communication (internal within a unit). Subjects should self-monitor in terms of sensitive information and candor, and the use of pseudonyms, and the wording of descriptive passages so as to prevent identification of individuals should eliminate these potential risks.

The benefits for subjects associated with this study would be a deeper understanding of how academic advisors learn and perform their roles, and resulting recommendations about individual and institutional actions to promote workplace learning and disseminate best practices for the systematic improvement of advising services. For the general population, the study may provide a better understanding of social learning within an organization.

16. Consent Procedures (See Instructions pp. 9-13.)

The consent form is attached to this application. Subjects who are queried as to their participation in the study will be asked to review and sign an informed consent document that clearly states their rights as subjects and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form will be enclosed with a cover letter that provides contact information, and estimates the time involved in participating in the study.

If the researcher is observing a subject in an activity involving other persons who are not subjects (e.g., a staff meeting or professional development activity), all participants in the activity will be informed of the researcher's presence, and ensured that their identity will remain confidential.

CHECKLIST: Check off that you have included each of these items.
If not applicable, state N/A:

[X] Completed application

[X] The correct number of copies of the application and instruments, according to the category of review (See instructions p. 13.)

[X] Consent form (or script for verbal consent), if applicable

[ ] Advertisement, if applicable

[X] One complete copy of the methods chapter of the research proposal

Informed Consent to Participate

"Academic Advisors and their Role Definition within an Organizational Context"

You are being asked to participate in a study to examine how advisors learn about their roles, and whether or not advisors form organizational "communities of practice" in order to learn and perform their role within their institution. This qualitative study will attempt to describe this phenomenon and how it impacts the work of advisors.

Data will be collected in the spring, summer and fall of 1999. Data collection will involve interviews, observation of staff meetings and other activities, and document analysis. The researcher will collect all data.

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in this study: You are free to decide not to participate in this study, or any part of this study, and free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your participation could entail any or all of the following: participation in interviews (which will be audio-recorded), observation of your participation in staff meetings and other activities, and analysis of documents that you may have written or contributed to. You may ask any questions or request clarification about the study or your participation in it at any time by contacting Lance Lewis at 347-1403, or Dr. Kathryn Moore at 432-2276. If you have any questions regarding your rights as human subjects of research, you may contact Dr. David Wright, Chair, University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), 246 Administration Building, at 355-2180.

Though your identity will be known to the researcher, you will remain anonymous in any report of the findings of this study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will also be used to protect the identity of any individual who is named or identified by you or in any documents used in the course of the research. Research findings will be shared with you upon your request after the study is completed.

The expected benefits of this research are a better understanding about how advisors learn and perform their role within an institution, and a better understanding of social learning within organizations.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign this form, and return it to the researcher. A copy of this form will be given to you upon request.

In signing this form, you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. You also understand that only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

Please print your name:

____

Signature of participant

Date

Informed Consent to Participate

(Participant Observation)

"Academic Advisors and their Role Definition within an Organizational Context"

You are being asked to participate in a study to examine how advisors learn about their roles, and whether or not advisors form organizational "communities of practice" in order to learn and perform their role within their institution. This qualitative study will attempt to describe this phenomenon and how it impacts the work of advisors.

Data collection will involve observation of academic advising staff meetings in the College of Engineering during the fall, 1999 semester. The researcher will collect all data.

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in this study: You are free to decide not to participate in this study, or any part of this study, and free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your participation entails observation of your participation in academic advising staff meetings. You may ask any questions or request clarification about the study or your participation in it at any time by contacting Lance Lewis at 347-1403, or Dr. Kathryn Moore at 432-2276. If you have any questions regarding your rights as human subjects of research, you may contact Dr. David Wright, Chair, University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), 246 Administration Building, at 355-2180.

Though your identity will be known to the researcher, you will remain anonymous in any report of the findings of this study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will also be used to protect the identity of any individual who is named or identified by you or in any documents used in the course of the research. Research findings will be shared with you upon your request after the study is completed.

The expected benefits of this research are a better understanding about how advisors learn and perform their role within an institution, and a better understanding of social learning within organizations.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign this form, and return it to the researcher. A copy of this form will be given to you upon request.

In signing this form, you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. You also understand that only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

Please print your name:

____

_______________________ _______________

Signature of participant Date

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Letter inviting advisers to participate in the study

Date

Dear Mr./Ms. ():

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in a dissertation research project involving academic advisors at Michigan State University. This letter is being sent to academic advisors representing ten undergraduate colleges and the Undergraduate University Division. Advisors have been selected so as to represent a range of years of service and a variety of colleges and units at the University.

As you know, academic advising is a complex task that involves multiple skills and roles, and that is critically important to students' academic persistence and success at the University. Through this study, I hope to gain a better understanding of how academic advisors learn to advise. I want to hear your stories about how you became an advisor, and how you continue to learn what it means to be an academic advisor.

My dissertation research is a qualitative study of how academic advisors engage in learning about and performing their professional roles, and specifically about whether or not advisors form organizational "communities of practice" that impact on these processes. Organizational communities of practice are informal networks of people who interact on a regular basis for the purpose of improving practice. I will use three methods of data collection: 1) informant interviews, which will consist of one-on-one meetings with individual academic advisors; 2) participant observation, which will consist of observing such activities as staff meetings and professional development events; and 3) document analysis, which consists of analyzing information contained in planning documents, internal communication, university studies, e-mail, or any other documents which might impact on the topic. I anticipate having at least two interviews with participants during the course of the study.

This study is intended to provide a better understanding of how academic advisors perform their complex role, and of how learning within an organizational context takes place. It is my hope that the results might provide a better understanding of learning within an organizational context, and of the diffusion of knowledge and innovation among advisors in all colleges and units at the University.

This research project has been approved by my dissertation committee and the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) (IRB #99-167). This study will provide confidentiality to anyone who participates in this study. Pseudonyms will be used to conceal the identity of participants, and any references to individuals in transcripts or documents will be concealed by use of a pseudonym. Only I, as the researcher, will know your identity. If you have questions regarding the rights of human subjects, please contact Dr. David Wright, UCRIHS chair, at (517)355-2180, or via e-mail to *UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu.*

A "consent form" that outlines the rights that you have as a participant is enclosed with this letter. Please review this form, and if you would be willing to participate in this study, sign the letter and return it to me using the envelope provided. You must sign a consent form in order to participate in the study. If you have questions about this study, please contact me at 347-1403, 432-2033, or via e-mail at *lewislan@pilot.msu.edu.*

If you agree to participate in this research project, I will contact you to set up a time for an initial interview. Data collection will continue through the end of the Fall, 1999 semester. Thank you for your interest in this project!

Sincerely,

Lance B. Lewis
Ph.D. Candidate in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education
4143 Breakwater Dr
Okemos, MI 48864
(517)347-1403
lewislan@pilot.msu.edu

enclosure

cc: Dr. Kathryn M. Moore, Department of Educational Administration and Dissertation Chair

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol for Associate Deans/Directors

Name of interviewee:________________________________

Date of interview: ___________________________________

Time of interview:___________________________________

Interviewer: Lance B. Lewis

1. Can you give a general description how academic advising is organized and administered in your college? Who supervises and evaluates academic advisers?

2. How are academic advisers trained in the college? Who provides the training?

3. What opportunities for professional development exist for the academic advisers in the college? How are they funded?

Thank you. Any closing comments?

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

Informant Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

"Academic Advisors and their Role Definition within an Organizational Context"

I. Interview Data

Interviewee: ______________________________

Time of interview: Starting:________am/pm Ending:__________ am/pm

Date of interview: ______________________________

Place of interview: ______________________________

Interviewer: ______________________________

II. Review of research project

- Briefly review purpose of study.
- Has interviewee signed a consent form? (if not, must be signed before proceeding)
- Does interviewee consent to being audio-recorded? Yes _____No _____

III. Demographics

Sex: F M Job Title: ______________________________

College or Department: ______________________________

Years at Michigan State University:_________

Years of service as advisor at Michigan State University: _______

Have you held positions other than advisor at MSU? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what were they: ______________________________

IV. <u>Questions</u>

1. Describe a typical "day in the life" of (interviewee).

2. Describe your role as an academic advisor at MSU. What is it that you do?

   If you had to prepare a job description for yourself, what would it say? (ask for formal job/position description)

3. How did you learn how to be an academic advisor at MSU? What formal training did you have? Informal training?

   Do you feel that learning how to be an advisor as a continuous or ongoing process? If so, describe how you engage in ongoing learning.

4. Who influenced/helped/mentored you in the early part of your advising career?

5. If you have problems or difficulties in carrying out your job, what resources do you use to help you solve the problems or overcome the difficulties?

Do you consult with other advisors (both within and outside of your unit at MSU)?

Names?

Do you consult with others outside of MSU? Who are they?

Names?

6. Do you regularly interact with other advisors (and others) at MSU to solve problems, develop procedures, share information, identify problem areas in advising, etc. Do you feel that you share a common "language" (e.g, terms, symbols, artifacts, etc) with other advisors?

   Examples? How do you communicate? share ideas? develop proposals?

7. How do you think others perceive advisors at MSU?

IV. Conclusion

- Thank interviewee for participating in the interview.
- Assure of the confidentiality of responses and inquire about potential future interviews.
- Ask interviewee if he/she would be willing to share e-mail messages, letters, etc.
- Ask interviewee if he/she would be willing to keep a "log" of what they do in a day (or several days) – what roles do they perform?

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol for Second Informant Interview

Interview Protocol - II

"Academic Advisors and their Role Definition within an Organizational Context"

I. Interview Data

Interviewee: ______________________________________

Time of interview: Starting:__________am/pm Ending:_____________am/pm

Date of interview: ________________________________

Place of interview: ____

Interviewer: ______________________________________

II. Review of research project

- Briefly review purpose of study.
- Has interviewee signed a consent form? (if not, must be signed before proceeding)
- Does interviewee consent to being audio-recorded? Yes _____No _____

III. Questions

I'm going to describe indicators of a community or practice, as outlined by Wenger (1998). Tell me whether or not you think this applies to academic advisors here in the college, and if so, provide anecdotal (or written) evidence to support your claim.

1. sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual ?

2. shared ways of engaging in doing things together

3. the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
4. absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
5. very quick setup of the problem to be discussed
6. substantial overlap in participants' description of who belongs
7. knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
8. mutually defining identities
9. the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
10. specific tools, representations, and other artifacts
11. local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
12. jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
13. certain styles recognized as displaying membership
14. a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.
(pp. 125-26).

IV. Conclusion

- Thank interviewee for participating in the interview.
- Ask interviewee if they would be willing to share e-mail messages, letters, etc.
- Ask interviewee if he/she would be willing to keep a "log" of the contacts they have for one week.

APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol for interview with Associate Dean in Engineering

Interview Protocol

"Academic Advisors and their Role Definition within an Organizational Context"

I. Interview Data

Interviewee: ____

Time of interview: Starting:___________am/pm Ending:___________ am/pm

Date of interview: November 17, 1999

Place of interview: ____

Interviewer: Lance B. Lewis

II. Review of research project

- Briefly review purpose of study.
- Has interviewee signed a consent form? (if not, must be signed before proceeding)
- Does interviewee consent to being audio-recorded? Yes ____No _____

III. Questions

1. Prior to your becoming Associate Dean, you were a faculty member in the Department of Civil Engineering. What were your perceptions of academic advisers as a faculty member, and have they changed since you become Associate Dean?

2. Describe your role as Associate Dean. What are your primary responsibilities?

3. What kinds of things do you do to support and facilitate the work that academic advisers do in this college?

4. You are hiring a new academic adviser in just a few weeks. How will that person be trained, and who will train that person?

5. How do you support/encourage ongoing learning and training for the academic advisers in the college?

6. Do you think the advisor in the college regularly interact <u>on both a formal and informal basis</u> to solve problems, develop procedures, share information, identify problem areas in advising, etc. Do you feel that they (and you) share a common "language" (e.g, terms, symbols, artifacts, etc)?

7. How important are the weekly staff meetings in fostering informal interaction among the advisers?

8. How do you think that faculty in the college (generally) perceive the academic advisers?

IV. <u>Conclusion</u>

- Thank interviewee for participating in the interview.
- Any final comments the interviewee would like to make?

APPENDIX G

APPENDIX G

Field Notes

This study necessitated taking fieldnotes, which became part of the data collected for the study. The notes contain mostly short descriptions or summaries of events, interviews, observations, etc. After each interview, I jotted down notes on how I felt the interview had gone, and if there were things about the interview that I found interesting and worthy of more study. I also tried to remember question or comments that I could use in future interviews. In some cases, I added questions or comments from one interview into the following interviews.

These notes are, in effect, personal diaries of my time with this study. While reviewing these notes, I usually noted my reactions and interpretations of things that occurred to me during or immediately after an event. These interpretations sometimes served as a catalyst for further analysis of other data later on in the study.

The following sample represents a formal transcription of notes taken immediately following an informant interview.

<u>General notes</u>

Molly (professional academic adviser)
6/30/99

General comments following informant interview:

This was the tenth informant interview for me, and I feel much more comfortable now, having had some previous experience. Everyone has taken my questions seriously so far, and no one has refused to be recorded. Whew! I've learned how to follow up with more questions, and get more information out of the questions I've posed.

This was a difficult interview (for me). The informant seemed sort of willing to answer the questions, but I felt like I had to drag a lot of information out of her. She took two phone calls and talked with another person outside her office during our interview, which always throws me off (guess I can understand why she needs to take phone calls). Unlike some other informants, this adviser never acted very friendly or open with me, though I think she gave very honest answers, and I have no reason to think she held information back from me. However, this was the quickest interview so far – I thought it ended too abruptly.

Everyone acts differently while I am in their office – some advisers let their voice mail pick up, and others tell me that they may have to take phone calls – is this related to support staff or lack of staff?? This adviser never really mentioned having support staff, though in this large of a department, surely there is some secretarial help!?

- Adviser seems bitter about lack of respect accorded her by faculty – have not sensed this depth of feeling in other interviews – or is it there, under the surface? Maybe this is very situational?

- Talked about why advisers did not interact – institutional organization – size and complexity prevent people from getting together (another indication to me that physical proximity is a necessity for COP to exist – look at data from centralized advisers). But I know there is more than one adviser in this department – she really did not talk about her colleagues very much.

  (misses the interaction in her old job with another unit where she had mentors and could just go down the hall and ask a question, or do it at meeting – look at transcripts of the advisers who I interviewed in this office – do they feel the same way?)

Talks about how students have changed, and about how they are more attuned to instant gratification – some other advisers had talked about this too – see if there is a pattern to this? I recall another adviser who talked about how the overwhelming amount of information that students were exposed too made it difficult for students to sort through everything.

Participant Observation Notes

NOTE: Following are notes from one observation of a staff meeting. Those notes in italics are comments about the "minutes" I have been recording.

Observation of Engineering Advising Staff Meeting
Wednesday, October 27, 1999, 8:30 a.m.
Engineering Building, Conference Room

When I arrive, I again decide to sit at the every end of the table in order not to be too intrusive. Meeting actually starts on time, but again, advisors already there are talking amongst themselves. Many of them are talking about SET (Science, Engineering and Technology Day), which is October 29th. I notice that when the Associate Dean comes into the room, he generally remains somewhat apart from these discussions – wonder why?

Associate Dean writes several agenda items on the chalkboard in the room, and then asks if the roundtable part of the meeting needs to be later on so that everyone can give roundtable items.

The Associate Dean lists the following agenda items:

Announcements
Roundtable
Old Business
    SET Day
    Display Board
New Business

At this point, several advisers come in late to the meeting. No one seems to notice – very informal atmosphere regarding people coming and going.

Announcements: Associate Dean announces that Professional Advisor Site Visit Grant deadline is next Wednesday. He apologizes for the late notice, but notes that he did not get this information until Monday afternoon.

The grant program allows advisors to go to a Study Abroad site - goal is to familiarize advisors with site, and encourage advisors to "push" study abroad to students. One advisor is apparently doing this later this semester, or has already done it. I don't catch the exact meaning of this conversation.

There are openings for two specialist advisor positions in the College of Business – both 12 month, but one being a continuing appointment, and the other being a fixed term. The Associate Dean jokes that the best candidate gets the continuing appointment, and everyone laughs.

This is an inside joke, but one I understand. Continuing appointments give a form of job security for advisors – this is seen as a real benefit.

Roundtable: the representative from the DPO (Diversity Programs Office) announces that the "showcase of stars" is tomorrow at 7pm in the Engineering Auditorium.

Advisor from Biosystems Engineering announces that their recent Freshman Forum seemed quite successful. They had good attendance, good feedback, and all those present made advising appointments.

Advisers seem very willing to share information about new activities or ideas with the other advisers.

There were no other roundtable items. The advisors quickly went around the room with no other items.

Dorothy reminded everyone that SET day was on Saturday. She has ordered tables for the building, but not chairs. People will have to provide their own chairs. The college ordered tables from an outside source this year, as the Physical Plant is unable (or unwilling) to provide the tables that the college wanted. The Physical Plant is being uncooperative and unsupportive.

Lots of jokes and laughter about the university bureaucracy and lack of support.

There is a poster contest among student groups for SET day.

Several advisors talk about what their departments are doing for SET day. EECE is sponsoring a light show and robotics demonstration in the basement of the building, and this should be a big hit with kids.

There is some tension when one adviser says not to expect much from his department, and associate dean wants to know why. I infer from this discussion that the advisers are the ones who are primarily responsible for getting departments to participate in SET day.

An advisor asks about how students can get assistance with Computer Graphics – another advisor shares that there is a software package with tutorial that students can use, and provides the name of a contact person.

Advisers are sharing information about resources that are available to students. I notice that several advisers are writing this down.

Display Board: Robert, who had to leave early last week, asks about the status of getting a display board(s) for the college. The advisors mention that they had hoped to get a tabletop display and a larger, more permanent display. Robert asks that someone get firm cost information for a future meeting.

New Business: an advisor brings up a complaint about Undergraduate Studies' website – that the actual academic programs are embedded with several links necessary before reaching them. He wonders if this could be remedied.

The complaint has originally come from prospective students and their parents. Advisers are concerned – comes from responsibility for recruiting?

This sparks a much longer discussion about MSU's homepage, and its lack of user-friendliness. The advisors offer there opinions about how the website could be improved. There is a discussion of who actually controls the homepage. Tom notes that it is Libraries, Computing and Technology.

Several advisers complain again about the university's bureaucracy, and joke about program terminology and web design and how nobody seems to be able to use the MSU main web site.

Robert asks me if I think, since I work in the Provost's office, if LCT will relinquish control – I hesitate to interject my own opinion, but say that I doubt that they will do so without a fight.

Robert says that a national trend is for University Relations to have a hand in developing web materials with an eye toward the general public.

Robert mentions that he is on a college-wide committee to look at the College and departmental websites. The dean is trying to standardize the content of webpages across the college.

There is also a discussion of what terminology to use for prospective students – Academic Programs vs. Degree programs vs. Majors.

Robert announces that the colleges scholarship applications will now be available on the web – they cannot be submitted electronically, but the BIG changes is that students are now required to attach an actual resume to the application rather than listing involvements and accomplishments piecemeal.

Several advisers nod their heads in agreement as this announcement is made. Again, information is being shared with everyone.

The summer research grants will now require that the student produce a poster at the end of the semester that the college can use at future SET days, Open House's etc.

Another advisors talks about how he was given inaccurate information from the Career Services office and sent it out to students without carefully reading it first. He cautioned other advisors to carefully review information before sending it out.

This brings up a general discussion of how to avoid the duplication of information via e-mail to students – students complain about the volume of duplicated e-mail. Robert asks for opinions, but assumes that upper-level advisors will send out information only to juniors and seniors unless it needs to go out to all.

One upper-level advisor always asks the freshman-sophomore advisors about information before she sends it out to avoid duplication.

Advisers are concerned about mutual accountability – that they not provide inaccurate or duplicate information. The advisers are particularly concerned about the inaccurate information they have been given.

I am surprised when Robert asks me how much longer I will be attending staff meetings. I tell him probably only one more. He then asks me if I will give a short five minute summary of what I am seeing during the meetings. I hesitate, than say that I will.

The meeting ends. As with the last two weeks, several advisors remain behind to talk amongst themselves.

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