Navigating the Academic Maze: An Auto-ethnographic Reflection on Advising in Thai Higher Education

Jesse Sessoms, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Thailand

Abstract

Academic advising is an integral component of higher education that impacts student achievement, university retention, and graduation rates. Given the current competitive arena in Thai higher education, advising plays an increasingly critical role in students' and universities' success. However, advising is a complex process, and what actually occurs, with whom, when, and where is complicated. Furthermore, little is known of the current state of advising in Thai higher education as in the extant literature there are as yet no articles in English on the subject. The present article presents an auto-ethnographic reflection of the author's lived experience in conducting advising at a university in Thailand between 2020 and 2022. The purposes of this article were to shed light on the current state of advising in Thai higher education by sharing the author's lived experience, and to connect this experience to broader issues in advising at Thai universities. Suggestions are given to further the professionalization and quality of advising in Thai higher education, including a call for a paradigmatic shift from a traditional, prescriptive approach to a developmental, holistic one. Given the lack of English literature on advising in Thailand, this paper provides needed insights into the subject.

Keywords: *Academic advising, faculty advising, higher education, Thailand*

Introduction

A substantial body of empirical research indicates that academic advising supports positive outcomes for students as well as universities (Springer & Tyran, 2022). For students, advising has been linked with increased self-efficacy, improved decision making, and greater satisfaction with their university experience (Hart-Baldridge, 2020; Holland et al., 2020), while for universities advising supports student retention and graduation rates (Asavisanu & Mhunpiew, 2014; McGill, 2021). Academic advising has therefore come to be acknowledged as a function instrumental to both students' and universities' success (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2021; Complete College America, 2013). These benefits likely arise from the nature of the academic advising relationship, which inherently entails a longer-term relationship with a caring university member in a structured setting outside of the classroom. The development of a sustained, trusting relationship over time between a concerned university figure and a student fosters a greater sense of connection for students with their university, helping them feel that the university cares about them. In fact, advising is perhaps the only structured campus activity that facilitates having a personal, ongoing, one-to-one interaction with a caring university member. Indeed, as they navigate the growing complexity of higher education, today's students demand high quality advising to assist them in their educational planning and academic decision making. Around the world, the importance of high quality advising in contemporary higher education is being recognized, with more international academic advising conferences taking place, the establishment of international academic advising networks, and growing international research on the subject (White & Steele, 2016).

In Thai higher education, universities are confronting several pressures. Driven by the country's declining birth rate and ongoing economic stagnation, total higher education enrolment has consistently fallen over the last decade. In the 2020 academic year, approximately 100,000 openings were left unfulfilled (Joungtrakul, 2019; Quigley & Svare, 2021). Thai universities are experiencing serious financial stress, and many are implementing measures such as slashing budgets, paring staff and faculty, and cutting programs (Dumrongkiat, 2017, 2018). These issues have been exacerbated by

the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, graduation and retention rates are a major concern. Data indicate that the national college completion rate hovers around 33%, meaning that only one in three students actually graduates within six years (World Bank, 2009). In the contemporary landscape of a highly competitive, financially stressed higher education market and a low retention rate, academic advising has become even more vital to helping Thai college students stay in school. It is even more crucial to ensure that enrolled students stay on course and graduate. Yet despite its importance, a lack of clarity still surrounds the complex process of academic advising (McGill, 2021).

What actually occurs in an advising session, with whom, where, when, and how can be difficult to determine. The answers to those questions may appear simple; advisors help students plan their courses according to the prescribed curriculum and meet with them on a regular basis in their offices throughout the student's time at university. However, a number of factors contribute to make advising a complex function. These factors include the organizational structure of advising; who delivers advising; the advisor's theoretical approach, assumptions, and attitudes towards advising; the type and quality of training provided to advisors; whether advising is proactively valued by the Institute of Higher Education's (IHE) leadership; the IHE's mission and campus culture; the funding and resources allocated for advising; and the characteristics of the student populace (Robbins, 2012). Due to such factors, advising takes a different shape at each university in accordance with its unique identity and circumstances.

The discipline of academic advising is nascent in Thai higher education, a factor contributing to the current dearth of knowledge on the subject. Academic advising is a component in the national higher education framework for the accreditation of universities, and all IHE are required to have an academic advising function (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2014). It is important to note, however, that a formalized, national set of standards for academic advising programs has not yet been devised. Thus, while Thai universities are technically required to provide academic advising services, there are no key performance indicators nor quality assurance measures for advising programs. Without standards or program oversight, it is probable that the types and quality of academic advising programs vary dramatically among Thai IHE.

The nation's top universities, such as Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and Mahidol, tend to have more developed academic advising programs, while outside of these top tier institutes, there is a high level of variability. Further clouding our understanding of the situation in Thai higher education is the lack of a national association of academic advising. Lacking such an association, national empirical surveys have not been conducted, and fundamental knowledge of the profession does not yet exist. Key missing information includes staffing numbers, fiscal budgets, ratios of advisors to advisees, employment requirements for professional academic advisors, predominant models of advising, predominant theories of advising, types of advising services provided, and more common issues. Moreover, there is no journal dedicated to advising, and little research has been conducted in English on academic advising in the Thai higher education system. Thus, while each university must provide some form of advising, dramatic differences exist among the systems, delivery, and quality of advising across Thai IHE.

The present academic article seeks to address the murkiness of the current state of advising in Thai higher education. In the following passages, the researcher uses an auto-ethnographic approach to describe his lived experience in conducting academic advising at a Thai university. Auto-ethnography is a type of academic writing that is autobiographical, and analyzes and interprets the lived experiences of the researcher, connecting emerging insights to larger socio-cultural issues and trends (Poulos, 2021). Along this line, another purpose of this article was to connect the author's experience to broader concerns regarding advising in Thai higher education. Questions guiding the investigation on the experiences described included the following:

What was the organizational model of advising at their university? What were Thai students' perceptions of advising? What training was given? What was the administrative system of advising? What were salient issues around advising? How did the author's personal experience connect to broader issues in the field of academic advising in Thai higher education?

What is Academic Advising, Exactly?

To answer this question, it is important to understand that advising and counselling are not synonymous. Advising helps students to achieve their educational and career goals, as well as personal goals, while counselling specifically supports students to overcome personal problems that interfere with their academic achievements (Kuhn et al., 2021). While advisors may help students with personal goals, they are not trained to treat mental health issues and are not allowed to do so; in such instances, advisors must refer the student to a school counsellor. Academic advising has been defined as a series of intentional interactions grounded in the teaching and learning mission of the IHE that aim to synthesize students' educational experiences within the contexts of their aspirations, abilities, and lives to extend learning beyond classroom and campus boundaries (NACADA, 2006). This modern definition of advising represents a holistic approach, in which academic advisors support student learning and success beyond the classroom, collaborating with them to achieve their personal goals and aspirations, and maximize their abilities.

While academic advising in American higher education dates to the founding of Harvard University in the early 17th century, advising as a professional field is only slightly over forty years old, having as its origin the founding of The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and The Global Community for Academic Advising in 1979 (Cook, 2009). The Association (NACADA), an international organization of professional advisors, counsellors, faculty, administrators, and students, endeavours to enhance students' educational development through the provision of quality academic advising (NACADA, 2023). Following the establishment of NACADA, early key events in the progress of advising toward professionalization involved using the term "academic advising" as a descriptor in the Educational Research Information Centre database and the publication of the first issue of the NACADA journal. Both of these developments occurred in 1981. Since then, graduate and postgraduate degree programs, scholarships, and research grants in advising have been established. Official national standards for advising programs have been promulgated, including standards on advising's mission, organization, administration, funding, facilities, campus and community relations; program evaluation has also been implemented. In addition, an extensive body of manuals, monographs, empirical research, and research meta-analyses has emerged (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2021; Young & Zeng, 2021). Thus, advising has become a distinct, formalized, professional field that is an area of specialization and expertise unto itself.

Three components are universal to advising: namely, curriculum or what advising deals with, pedagogy or how advising does what it does, and learning outcomes or the results of advising (NACADA, 2006). Curriculum encompasses advising theory, attributes of the IHE (e.g., vision and mission, campus culture, etc.), and the practicalities of enrolment, such as the organizational structure and administrative system of advising, informational resources, policies, and procedures. Advising pedagogy represents the preparation, facilitation, documentation, and assessment of advising interactions, as well as the relationships and interpersonal interactions involved. The advisor-student relationship is at the heart of this endeavor and is characterized by the development of a lasting relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior. Central to every interaction is the student's best interests. Development of such a trusting relationship demands that advisors have a conscious personal philosophy and approach to advising, that they have empathy and emotional intelligence, and that they demonstrate interpersonal and communicational skills in order to generate rapport and promote meaningful interactions (NACADA, 2006). Finally, learning outcomes are intertwined with the IHE's unique mission, goals, and curriculum, which direct what students will be expected to know, value, and do after participating in advising. To be effective, student outcomes must take into account student demographics. In American higher education, learning outcomes are affected by the student populace, which has grown increasingly diverse, with older people, single mothers, military veterans, international students, non-binary and LGBTQ+ people, and diverse ethnicities now constituting a significant portion (Hinton et al., 2014; Hodges, 2017).

A diversity of organizational structures of advising exist. A common structure adopted is the supplemental model, which is a shared structure whereby faculty instructors deliver advising in

addition to professional advisors in an independent advising center (Pardee, 2004). Regarding training, often training of half a day to one full day once per semester is allotted (Robbins, 2012). Researchers have identified three aspects of effective advisor training: the informational component, which focuses on administrative-curriculum details and policies; the conceptual component, which covers theories and philosophies related to student learning and life-span development; and the relational component, which covers the interpersonal skills used in the one-to-one interaction (NACADA, 2006). Since each student is unique and student behavior is complex, a single advising theory does not circumscribe advising, which draws on an array of psychosocial and educational theories in such areas as student development, learning, decision-making, retention, personality, life span development, and moral development theories (Williams, 2007). Prescriptive advising and developmental advising are two notable approaches. *Prescriptive Advising* represents the traditional approach, and is based on the hierarchical relationship between the academic advisor and the student, in which the student asks questions and the advisor answers directly, often telling the advisee what to do. In contrast, *Developmental or Holistic Advising* focuses on the whole student, and promotes a relationship where the advisor is interested in such things as the student's decision making, relationships, attitudes, and problem solving skills. With this approach, the advisor encourages students to take responsibility for their own development and progress.

The evolution of advising, from being primarily information sharing to being more developmental and holistic (incorporating student learning beyond the classroom, developing students' strengths and autonomy, collaborating on personal goals, etc.), has meant that the humanistic aspect of the advisor-student interaction has garnered much attention (McGill, 2021). Extensive research has highlighted that a critical component of effective advising is the establishment of a relationship based on trust (Holland et al., 2020; NACADA, 2017). To develop a trusting relationship, researchers have found that the key qualities of effective advisors are empathy and warmth (Springer & Tyran, 2022).

Finally, although faculty-delivered advising is common, a number of issues have been identified in the literature. These include an inequitable workload for instructors; non-existent or poor assessment systems of advising; the absence of recognition and rewards systems; a lack of clarity on management's expectations of advising; inadequate training, especially a lack of coverage of relationship and interpersonal skills; and (low) instructor motivation (Hart-Baldridge, 2020; Hutson, 2013; Robbins, 2012; Troxel et al., 2021; White & Steele, 2014).

Academic Advising at a Private Thai University
From 2020 to 2022 I conducted academic advising within the undergraduate School of Arts at a private international university in metropolitan Bangkok with an approximate enrolment of 8,000 students. In the following passages, I delineate such matters as the model of advising, training, advising policies, administrative system, student perceptions of advising, and other advising concerns.

Model Administration of Advising
The target university utilized the supplemental model of advising. This meant that departmental faculty-delivered advising occurred in addition to the provision of professional advisors in a stand-alone advising center located in the academic affairs department. This advising center primarily served incoming students and sophomores through welcoming events, group orientations, and individual interviews. As well as these services, the advising center also provided one-to-one psychological counselling, free of cost for all students, and career guidance. The department head and an assistant were responsible for advising matters within a faculty. Leadership appeared supportive of advising, as evidenced by their communicating to faculty the importance and value of advising, stating that given the current competitive economics in higher education, advising had become a truly important mechanism to create strong engagement and rapport with students, and that advisors should make every effort to provide effective advising (Personal Communication, 1 June 2020).

Policy dictated that students attend one advising session per semester; students failing to do so were barred from registration for the upcoming semester. Instructors were typically assigned twelve

advisees. As with all programs at the university under investigation, an app-based system was used for advising. This app allowed instructors to schedule sessions, review students' academic transcripts on both a quarterly and a cumulative basis, confirm students' participation in advising, and record session notes. Advising sessions normally occurred on campus at the office of the reporting investigator. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2020 to 2022, they took place online. A minimum session time of fifteen minutes was mandatory. In practice I allotted thirty minutes per session because less than that did not feel adequate to provide quality service. Advising policy suggested that the best time to schedule sessions was after the midterm exam period. Considering the scheduling of advising sessions, students were encouraged to schedule a session about a month prior to the final exam period. This gave students more time to determine whether they would need to retake a class, which would affect their course planning. By then students were also beginning to think ahead to the next semester, yet there was ample time remaining for advising to happen without interfering with students' final exam preparations. The author received one training session of three hours duration at the beginning of the semester which was provided by Academic Affairs department professionals. This training focused on the informational component, explaining how to use the app, curriculum requirements, and policies and procedures. The focus on administration to the neglect of relational components (i.e., interpersonal skills, soft-skills), while disappointing, was common as advisors of necessity must possess a comprehensive understanding of credits, course sequences, and requirements.

Student Characteristics, and Perceptions of Advising

Typically, I was assigned twelve students per semester for advising (thus a total of 48 students were advised between 2020 and 2022). These advisees were not the investigator's students, which provided the advisees with an opportunity to connect with a caring university member outside of their classroom. These students were from within the same program (Business English), reflecting the author expertise. In my case, the advisees primarily consisted of fourth year students nearing degree completion and graduation. Although the American university student demographic profile has diversified drastically, as previously noted, Thai higher education is still strongly characterized by a traditional student profile (Thai students are about 18–24 years of age, entering university from high school). This was the case at the target IHE, a private international university with relatively high tuition fees, where students were often of a higher socioeconomic status. As most of the advisees interviewed were within two semesters of graduation, they did not need much assistance in course planning. By this point, they had repeatedly been through the process of course planning and registration and were aware of the last remaining requirements they needed to fulfil in order to graduate. If advice was provided during the second semester of the academic calendar, there were usually a few advisees who were planning to enrol in summer school, with questions regarding whether the classes they needed would be offered and the maximum number of credits allowed.

Over time, I observed certain concerns prevalent among advisees. One concern was that they had not given sufficient thought to post-college plans and felt worried and anxious about upcoming, impending major life decisions regarding their careers, independence, and adulthood. Through discussion with them, it was found that most, if not all, had never been specifically asked by an instructor or an advisor in the academic affairs center as to their post-graduation plans. Other notable student concerns included trouble with time management (a frequent cause of poor management was spending excessive time playing online games, and not scheduling regular study time), sleep issues (usually staying up too late, and then feeling drowsy and unable to concentrate during class), relationship issues with friends or romantic partners, and academically related stress and anxiety. These student concerns mainly represented well-being and life issues that were different from the advising traditionally undertaken in academic planning. In my experience these issues were not difficult to detect. In a warm, friendly atmosphere where genuine care is shown, Thai students often wanted to share and get help with their personal concerns.

What Actually Happened in an Advising Session?

In my capacity as an advisor, I had two critical responsibilities. One was to check the student's academic performance by scanning their transcript to identify academic concerns (or to give praise for good achievement). The second was to examine their study plan for the upcoming semester to evaluate whether they had chosen the correct courses in the right sequence, completed the prerequisites for their chosen classes, and taken an appropriate course load. The gist of an advising session thus centered on ensuring that advisees were prepared for registration and provided with information and resources as needed.

Prior to the session the advisee was contacted via a message from the author that was composed in a way that would be friendly to students, in which I provided a brief self-introduction, notified the student that advising session dates had been scheduled and that they could select the time most suitable for them, asked them to complete and return their pre-registration course planner at least one day prior to their advising session, and expressed excitement to meet them. The introductory messages were written with the intent of addressing the advisees as valued people. Most students appreciated this message and replied in turn. After this, I reviewed the student's transcript, checking for outlying occurrences such as a course(s) being repeated multiple times or low grades in a specific course or semester, as well as for indicators of excellence.

A session was opened by giving a short self-introduction so that the student could get to know the advisor personally. Then I asked the student to share something of their own background, especially their hobbies, which was intended to be a pleasant ice-breaker. These introductions were not required, but were crucial in developing a warm, personal relationship. Only after this was a transition made to discuss the student's academic performance. However, rather than immediately focusing on any specific academic concerns, an indirect path was used by inquiring as to how the current semester had been going for them so far. Taking this indirect approach helped put students at ease, rather than making them feel defensive. Then any relevant academic matters were raised or performance praised. Finally, their pre-registration planner was reviewed. Once the core academically related tasks had been completed, I talked with them in what was intended to be a warm manner to explore if they had any further concerns or questions. At this juncture, students would often share their personal concerns. Then the advising session went beyond its academic focus to life issues and well-being concerns. Finally, sessions were concluded by clearly informing the student that if they had any questions or needed assistance in the future, their advisor was happy to help.

Pertinent Issues

Regarding workload, assuming a normal load of twelve students and, in my case, an average session time of thirty minutes, advising accounted for about an additional six hours of work per semester. This calculation was not inclusive of preparation and follow-up documentation. An additional six hours was manageable, but not insignificant. It demanded careful planning to schedule sessions to fit into the author's busy work schedule and yet also be convenient for students. At times it was difficult to find a mutually suitable appointment date, and advising sessions could end up falling on a packed day of classes, creating work overload and stress. To prevent such occurrences, it was sometimes necessary to schedule advising sessions on a Sunday, with the student's agreement.

The advising assessment system was another concern. My experience verified that a lack of clarity on management's expectations regarding advising was an important issue. Students were required to complete an evaluation form following their session. However, the content of the evaluation form (its items and rubric) was not explained to faculty. Thus, faculty advisors were unable to know the specific criteria being used in evaluation, which created confusion. Furthermore, the results of these evaluations were not communicated to the faculty. Without receiving the assessment results, the evaluation felt meaningless, and I wondered what purpose it actually served. Certainly, it was not a metric in considerations of faculty compensation. This experience highlighted the findings noted earlier by other investigators (Robbins, 2012; Troxel et al., 2021). Even if an IHE has an evaluation

system, it is rare that it truly incorporates, evaluates, and weighs advising as a formal component in decisions of promotions, salary raises, merit, and tenure.

Another issue was that the training provided was only one three hour session, which was insufficient. The training did not provide guidelines on best practices in advising, an explanation of management's expectations, nor did it include explanations of humanistic and student development theories. Many instructors may be unfamiliar with the advising strategies available to promote student success; hence, such training is vital. Furthermore, the interpersonal-relational component of advising is central to the endeavor, but approaches to generating and developing a long-term relationship based on trust, empathy, and caring were not covered in the training received.

A low commitment to advising was perceived among most fellow advisors/instructors. Advising was felt by many instructors to be a burden, which is a common concern. While this was unfortunate, it was a probable outcome considering the issues noted above: the poor advising assessment system, lack of recognition and monetary incentives (or other rewards), inadequate training, and management's unclear expectations. In addition, a few instructors viewed advising as a form of coddling students, whom they felt were of a mature enough age to do their own academic planning, and hence should be expected to do so.

Table 1 below presents several themes arising from this discussion, and offers a glimpse of the current state of advising at the selected private Thai university based on the author's lived experience.

Table 1 *Themes Emerging From the Author's Experience in Conducting Academic Advising*

Organizational Model	Administration	Policies	Training
The supplemental model; a shared structure whereby advising duties are shared between faculty and a central, standalone unit	Department head and their assistants in charge of advising Sessions scheduled after midterm exams An app used to schedule sessions and record session notes	Students required to attend one advising session per semester, if not, barred from registering for upcoming semester Minimum required session time: 15 minutes	One training of three hours Training dedicated to information on program credits, courses, requirements, and administration and policies
Student Characteristics	**Student Perceptions**	**Prevalent Student Issues**	**Prevalent Advisor Issues**
Few non-traditional path students (almost exclusively traditional students; about 18–25 years of age, entering college from high school)	Students apathetic to advising, participated because it was a pre-registration requirement Many advisees were stressed over their future and had not done enough planning for post-college life Common concerns: Time management, poor sleep, anxiety/worry, stress, and relationship issues	Student apathy Students lack awareness of the benefits to them of receiving advise	Instructor workload Instructor motivation Inadequate training Poor assessment system Lack of recognition or reward system

Another concern that I observed was a prevailing apathy among students toward advising. Students felt advising to be an obligation and participated only because it was a pre-registration requirement. One reason for this indifference was that they seemed not to fully understand the benefits to them of advising beyond course planning. Also, their past advising sessions had almost exclusively been focused on the informational component, to the diminishment of the relational aspect. Thus students (as well as most faculty) viewed advising as merely a routine, obligatory task.

Discussion

Although the present investigator was genuinely committed to delivering high quality academic advising, it was challenging at times to do so. It is true that a busy work schedule, exacerbated by a lack of recognition and credit for advising, were demotivating factors. There were occasions when the importance of advising was subsumed under the routine pressures of a busy teaching schedule. As these factors affected the author, who cares about advising, it is likely that they had an even greater effect on those instructors who were less committed in the first place. The lived experience reported demonstrates that for quality advising to occur, demotivating factors should also be addressed.

For the author, advising was one of the most rewarding educational duties. It is rare that instructors have an opportunity to meet individually with students in a structured setting, especially those who are not members of their own classes, with the opportunity to hear and learn from them about their experiences at university. Further, students may open up and share more with instructors who are not their own teachers. Therefore through advising, instructors may attain a more insightful understanding of a student's perspective. As noted earlier, researchers have commented that advising connects the student to the university. Interestingly, I found that by being able to better know the student's perspective, it deepened my connection to the students and the university. When it is possible to deliver high quality advising, a genuine, meaningful human interaction occurred, which can be a positive experience for both the instructor and the student.

My effort to make advising as pleasant and positive an experience as possible was validated when, at the session's end, most students expressed sincere thanks, and when others sent thank you messages later on. An indirect form of positive feedback was that after some time had passed following their advising session, students did not disappear, but followed up with questions as needed. This is noted because there is a marked tendency for Thai students to avoid asking questions of teachers if they do not feel comfortable with them. It is worth noting further that multiple advisees informed the author that they highly appreciated advisors who obviously cared, which in their experience was rare. This clearly highlights the importance of advisors being caring and empathic. A lack of those qualities can make the process feel like a robotic task.

To advance the professionalization and quality of advising, a number of recommendations are made. These suggestions arise from the author's lived experience, yet are based on and aligned with the extant body of advising literature. First, university leadership should actively support advising and treat it as a function critical to the university's success. The following are four ways that leadership can directly support advising.

Improve training. Training should not be solely information based (Hutson, 2013). As the key to successful advising is the development of a relationship built on trust, effective training should incorporate a component on soft skills, which should receive an equal (if not greater) allocation of time than that given to the informational component. Increasing the duration of training to at least one full day would give more opportunity to achieve this aim. Moreover, ongoing professional development activities specific to advising should be conducted.

Improve the evaluation system. Assessment criteria should be explained to faculty so that advisors know exactly what aspects of advising are being evaluated, and why (Hart-Baldridge, 2020). It is difficult, if not impossible, for instructors to deliver quality advising without clearly knowing what is expected of them. The evaluation results should be shared with the instructor at the end of each semester, and be included as a component of the instructor's year-end performance evaluation. This feedback should be used constructively and contribute toward the growth and professional development of instructors.

Reward high quality advising. A formal reward system should be designed and implemented. Incentives for excellence in advising may be either intangible (e.g., a certificate of excellence or appreciation) or monetary (i.e., advising could be a factor in promotions or salary increments) (McGill, 2021).

Enhance students' understanding of advising. Achieving this goal may involve educational efforts. One suggestion would be to incorporate an educational component on advising into freshman

seminars and student activities and workshops, as well as incorporating such a component into relevant courses like Psychology for Daily Life.

Researchers such as Hart-Baldridge (2020), Springer & Tyran (2022), and White (2015) have called for a "culture of advising." A culture of advising can be seen as one where discrete factors are interconnected holistically to generate a set of values, beliefs, and best practices that support effective advising. The components of an advising culture include, but are not limited to, ongoing training that incorporates a focus on interpersonal and soft skills; clearly communicated expectations; a performance evaluation system that is used to provide regular feedback to instructors for their professional development; and a reward system for high performing instructors. In this way, each of the above recommendations can be seen as interconnecting holistically to promote such a culture of advising.

The argument is made here that in order to develop a culture of advising in Thai higher education, it is critical to shift from the traditional, prescriptive paradigm of advising to a more modern developmental, holistic approach. The target university's prescriptive approach is not likely to be either unique or singular, but rather represents the predominant approach among Thai universities. While students today need help to navigate the increasingly complex curricula of modern education, they also do not want to be treated as if they are merely a student identification number, to simply be told what classes to take, and in what sequence. Students appreciate feeling that they are valued and cared for by their university. The approach to advising taken by the current investigator, very briefly described earlier, represents such a holistic approach. A comment I received from more than one advisee strengthens this assertion: "Thank you so much [for your advising]. … I've never had an advisor who showed that they cared."

To reify the holistic approach and its benefits, a further example is provided from the author's lived experience. In one instance, an advisee had an unresolved issue with an administrative office. The student felt stymied as to how to handle it and requested advice from the author (their advisor). This student was frustrated and upset with university administration, and was strongly considering asking his parents to intervene in this situation. I suggested that prior to taking that step, it would be better to first make a greater effort to obtain more information from that office. Further, to do so, the student would need to prepare by being polite and respectful, having a well-groomed appearance, and generally behaving in a professional manner. Second, the advisee needed to think through the situation in more detail to crystallize their specific needs and questions. The overall emphasis was to act in a professional manner. In response to these recommendations, the advisee stated that this was the first time to carefully consider an actual interaction with administrative staff. For this student, it was a novel approach. Weeks after the session, the student sent an appreciative message of thanks, explaining that by following the advice given, the matter had been successfully resolved without needing to involve his parents. This case illustrates several benefits of holistic advising: (a) how advisors can support student autonomy (in this case, helping a student learn how to solve a problem independently, (b) how the university benefitted from effective advising by the student not involving parents, (c) how the university also benefitted from effective advising when the student felt empowered and cared for by the advisor (a representative of the university), and (d) how effective advising also serves to connect instructors to students (the author felt more connected to the student knowing that the student had been helped to solve this problem).

Conclusions and Limitations

The present article presented a reflection on the author's lived experience in delivering academic advising at a university in Thailand. It was suggested that a culture of advising should be developed, in which advising is valued for its ability to generate a sense of connection for the student with the university and that promotes an approach that strongly emphasizes interpersonal skills and qualities of warmth, caring, and empathy, which are fundamental to the advising relationship. Along this line, it was argued that, as has been noted in the literature, a developmental, holistic approach may be better suited for today's students, and may confer more benefits to the university than a prescriptive

approach, which is likely the predominant approach in Thai universities. Examples were provided from the author's lived experience of how a holistic approach can support students beyond the classroom.

This being an ethnographic paper, a natural limitation was that one individual's subjective experience cannot be generalized to the broader population. Thus, my experience is not intended to be applied to the entire Thai higher education system. Furthermore, I recognize potential biases that may have unknowingly influenced the expression of ideas in this article. However, the author strove for objectivity and neutrality, and hopefully a balanced interpretation of his experience has been shared. Multiple avenues for future research are called for. Given how little we know about advising in Thai higher education, a fundamental question has been asked in this paper. How similar or different was the author's experience to the experience of instructors/advisors at other Thai universities? In addition, as no advising association exists in Thai higher education, national data on advising programs has not yet been collected. An overarching need is to collect quantitative data across Thai universities in areas such as the predominant types of organizational advising models; the use of technology in advising, theoretical approaches; advisors' and students' attitudes towards and perceptions of advising; methods of assessment of advising; types and effectiveness of training; and the governance of advising, including staffing (e.g., academic advising department headcounts, job entry requirements, and workloads), and funding. In conclusion, advising is a key function of institutes of higher education, one which is needed now more than ever. In writing this article, the hope was to spark much needed further research and discussion on the contemporary status of advising in Thai higher education, and how its further professionalization can best be supported.

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