The Trickle-Down Effect of Institutional Vision: Vision Statements and Academic Advising

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A description of the kinds of educated humans to be cultivated at a particular institution can be found in the college or university vision statement. The extent that vision is reflected in the governing models of advising operations, known by personnel, and transformed into day-to-day activities was assessed through a NACADA membership survey. Findings suggest a significant disconnect between the lofty educational aspirations and priorities stated in vision statements and the pragmatics of academic advising operations. The trickle-down effect of institutional vision through advising units is further impeded by a lack of access to and familiarity with vision statements, particularly at large, public institutions. Increased advising-supervisor access to upper administration and more carefully crafted vision statements can make visions actionable.

KEY WORDS: administration, advising supervisors, institutional vision, mission statement, NACADA membership survey

Relative emphasis: theory, practice, research

Every college and university has an institutional vision: a conception of what, at its best, that institution is like and the kinds of educated human beings it is attempting to cultivate (Marom, 1994; Pekarsky, 1998). According to Abelman and Molina (2006), institutional vision is a philosophical template that describes the learning community within the college or university and defines its perceived purpose, priorities, and promises. "Vision," suggested Senge (1990, p. 9), "fosters genuine commitment among all concerned parties." In the absence of such a vision, "organizational patterns, curricula, and other critical dimensions of an educating institution are dictated by tradition, by fad, or by idiosyncratic ideas of particular players" (Pekarsky, 1998, p. 278).

For some institutions, the declaration of an institutional vision is part of a mission statement. According to Morphew and Hartley (2006), such statements have become ubiquitous in higher education and strategic planning is now predicated on their formulation (see also Dickson, 1999). However, these documents are typically grounded in the physical, historical, fiscal, and political contexts in which that institution operates. Institutional vision transcends these characteristics and forms a set of aspirations that are distinctive, coherent, and appealing (Marom, 1994). The mission statement "is about the here and now," suggested Lewis (2005, p. 5), "but vision describes the future." Therefore, most colleges and universities offer a supplemental, stand-alone avowal containing its institutional vision. These vision statements can be found in a college or university's admissions document, catalog, or Web site, and they are often incorporated into a president's inaugural, convocational, or keynote address.

Regardless of where it is found, a vision statement tends to have a long shelf life, serving as a perpetual reminder of an institution's unique identity, legacy, and intellectual lineage (Rudolph, 1962). It is, however, occasionally revisited or revised to reflect an ever-changing world and the new challenges and opportunities facing higher education in general or that institution in particular (McQuestion & Abelman, 2004; Newmann, 1991). A vision statement is also a living document that is intended to be employed rather than merely revered as an historical text (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Bryson, 2004; Marom, 2003) or displayed as a recruitment and marketing tool (Kirp, 2003; Murphy, 1987; Welton & Cook, 1997). It serves to communicate with stakeholders that have specific expectations of colleges and universities and has "important legitimizing roles, both normatively and politically" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 468). By its very nature, the vision statement is a highly directive declaration that is a vehicle for enhancing the quality of higher education.

According to Pekarsky (1998, p. 280), a well-conceived vision statement is "an informing idea that is *shared*, *clear* and *compelling*" [emphases

added]. It is shared by the critical stakeholders— that is, students, faculty members, and staff—and unifies their vision of the institution with that of the upper administration, blue ribbon committee, or board of trustees that wrote it. It must be clear and concrete enough to offer genuine guidance in making educational decisions on all levels and places the critical stakeholders in position to identify the kinds of skills, sensibilities, attitudes, and understandings they should be cultivating (Fox, 1997). A vision statement that is compelling generates an enthusiasm among the stakeholders and stimulates them to transform institutional vision into a pattern of meaningful activity and purposeful action (Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick, Wofford, & Baum, 2002; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1999).

Transforming Vision into Action

Academic advising operations are at the epicenter of the transformation of institutional vision to action. They are the hub of student and academic affairs (Begley & Johnson, 2001; Lindquist, 1982) and "should be anchored in the institution's mission" (Berdahl, 1995, p. 7). An institution's curriculum and educational requirements are direct outcomes of institutional vision and the very focus of academic advising operations. Academic standards are the cornerstones of institutional vision (Fox, 2003; Newmann, 1991) and are enforced by advising personnel through the application of institutional policies and coordinated activities with the institution's governing bodies. The general approach to students and the educational aspirations of an institution, as reflected in its vision statement, can serve to advocate the adoption of a specific type of advising structure (e.g., centralized or departmentalized) (Habley & Morales, 1998), approach (e.g., prescriptive or developmental) (Creamer & Creamer, 1994), delivery system (e.g., faculty, professional, or peer delivered) (Reinarz, 2000), or procedure (e.g., intrusive or nonintrusive) (Earl, 1988) over another. According to the NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2004), "Advisors work to strengthen the importance, dignity, potential, and unique nature of each individual within the academic setting"; these activities reflect the priorities and promises that comprise the very core of institutional vision (Pekarsky, 1997).

We undertook this investigation to explore the trickle-down effect of institutional vision through academic advising. We examined whether and to what extent institutional vision is reflected in the governing models and methods embraced by advising units. We also explored the degree to which institutional vision is transformed into day-to-day advising procedures and defines the nature of advising operations. In addition, we identified factors that might impact the means and extent that those in advising operations embrace and utilize institutional vision in their activities. Through the study, we uncovered important elements of the social and structural contexts in which advisors are exposed to institutional vision.

Institutional Characteristics

Clearly, a necessary precursor to the transformation of institutional vision to action is the stakeholders' awareness of the institution's vision statement. An academic community's awareness of and access to any formal declarations by its leadership may be a function of the nature of the institution. The factors impacting accessibility to the vision statement include the physical size of the institution (Kuhtmann, 2004), the size and composition of the student population (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Rozycki, 2004), its academic mission (e.g., highest degree granted) (Baldwin, 2005), and its mode of operation (e.g., public or private) (Bryson, 2004). An institution's orientation—that is, whether that institution embraces a particular ideology or theology (Fox, Scheffler, & Marom, 2003; McGuire, 2003; Young, 2001)—may be a significant factor. Orientation impacts an institution's culture, core values, and underlying belief structure, which may be explicitly espoused or emphasized in the vision statement, and it may render the vision statement of increased significance to those in the institution and warrant a wider or more purposeful distribution to stakeholders. Abelman and Molina (2006), for example, noted that tribal, military, and religious institutions tend to have more vision-driven operations than other types of colleges and universities. Therefore, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: Does the nature of an institution influence the accessibility of its vision statement?
RQ2: Does the nature of an institution influence the stakeholders' familiarity with the contents of the institutional vision statement?

Advising Supervision

Individuals that direct or supervise academic advising operations, or who oversee the activities of advising departments, may play a particularly important function in transforming institutional

vision to action. Habley (2004) found that between 75 to 88% of all colleges and universities have assigned responsibility for coordinating the institutional academic-advising system to a specific individual. According to the *ACT Sixth Annual Academic Survey* report (Habley, 2004), these individuals typically engage in a high degree of interaction with university administrators and often serve on high-level task forces or committees as representatives of advising services. By working closely or regularly with those who formed the institution's vision and conceived its vision statement, advising supervisors may be particularly aware of its contents, more vested in its goals and objectives, or personally engaged in activities reflective of its directives (Habley & McCauley, 1987).

Abelman and Molina (2006) reported that individuals responsible for advising operations believe they are more aware of the key components of their institution's vision statement than were their counterparts in other areas of student support services, who were perceived to be more aware than faculty members. Pekarsky (1998, p. 278) reinforced this finding, noting that "limited energy and skepticism often conspire to make educators far less eager to step back and reflect on the basic aims of the enterprise they are engaged in." As a consequence of these findings, we ask the following research questions:

RQ3: Are university administrators who supervise advising operations more familiar with the contents of their institution's vision statement than are coordinators of advising offices and professional, peer, or faculty advisors?

RQ4: Does greater access to an institution's upper administration result in a greater familiarity with the contents in the institutional vision statement?

Habley (2004) also revealed that advising supervisors have a high degree of contact and interaction with students. A greater proportion of a supervisor's time is dedicated to "responsibilities related to academic advising" (p. 16). Therefore, they may also be responsible for sharing institutional vision with these stakeholders through direct reference to the vision statement or by establishing policies and procedures inspired by or reflective of the institution's vision. An advising supervisors' broad-based, pragmatic knowledge of the institution may serve to bring clarity to institutional vision that might be more existential or esoteric in its presentation in the vision statement. "Visions spread," noted Senge

(1990, p. 227), "because of a reinforcing process. Increased clarity, enthusiasm and commitment rub off on others." Through the advising operations under their jurisdiction, advising supervisors may be a primary source of institutional vision to students who, of all the stakeholders, are perceived by advising supervisors to be the least aware of institutional vision (Abelman & Molina, 2006). Kuhtmann (2004) agreed, advocating that advising supervisors consider institutional vision to be a crucial factor in establishing governing advising models for their institutions. Consequently, the following research questions are posed:

RQ5: To what extent is the organizational model of student advising on campus a reflection of the institution's vision statement?

RQ6: To what extent is the general approach to student advising on campus a reflection of the institution's vision statement?

Because of their extensive interaction with advising staff (Habley, 2004), supervisors may be advisors' primary source of institutional vision. They may make direct reference to the vision statement or implement protocols inspired by or reflective of institutional vision. This raises an additional research question:

RQ7: Is the institution's vision statement instrumental in training advisors and determining specific advising practices and procedures?

Advising-Specific Vision

Many advising operations have their own vision or mission statement (White, 2000). In comparing recent research findings with those presented in the first *National Survey of Academic Advising* (Cartensen & Silberhorn, 1979), Habley (2004, p. 8) suggested that "there appears to have been a significant increase in the proportion of institutions that have developed a comprehensive, written statement on the purposes and procedures of their advising programs." Approximately 63% of institutions had such a document in 2003, compared to only 26% of institutions in 1979, with the most comprehensive advising-philosophy statements found in 4-year public institutions. Within the context of institutional vision, the existence of advising-specific vision statements raises the following research questions:

RQ8: If advising units have their own vision statements, are they reflective of their institution's vision statement?

RQ9: To what extent is the model and method of student advising on campus a reflection of the advising unit's vision statement?

RQ10: Is the advising office's vision statement instrumental in training advisors?

Diffusion of Innovations

As was noted earlier, Pekarsky (1998, p. 280) suggested that a well-conceived vision statement has three key characteristics: It should be "shared, clear and compelling." However, communication scholar Rogers has found that for an innovative or pioneering idea to be widely diffused, generally accepted, and readily adopted, it must possess several additional components. "Diffusion," suggested Rogers (2004, p. 13), "is the process through which innovation spreads via certain communicative channels over time among the members of a social system." According to Rogers (1962; 2003), the mediated distribution of this information (e.g., print, Internet access) typically subsumes the role of informing, and interpersonal channels (e.g., word of mouth, advising, instruction) are used for persuading. This model of the diffusion of innovations has served to explain the effectiveness of health-care communication campaigns (Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; Haider & Kreps, 2004), public policy programs (McLendon, Heller, & Young 2005; Valente, 1993), business and marketing strategies (Mahajan, Muller, & Bass, 1990; Sevcik, 2004), and the acceptance of new technologies (Dekimpe, Parker, & Sarvary, 2000; Lin, 2004).

Although the adoption of any innovative idea, practice, or product is based on numerous factors, Rogers (2003) and others (e.g., Wejnert, 2002; Valente, 1995; Vishwanath & Goldhaber, 2003) have found that the attributes of the innovation, as perceived by the potential adopters, are of paramount importance. Four attributes in particular have been identified as the most salient and powerful predictors of adoption: relative advantage (i.e., the perceived benefits-costs of the innovation), complexity (i.e., the perceived feasibility of desirable outcomes of the innovation), compatibility (i.e., the perceived suitability of outcomes of the innovation), and observability (i.e., the per-

ceived practicality and pragmatics of the innovation). If an innovation is perceived as lacking in these attributes, the potential adopter will neither "consider the information for adoption nor further transmit it" to others (Deffuant, Huet, & Amblard, 2005, p. 1069). Based on the previous research on the adoption of innovation, we pose the following research question:

RQ11: To what extent are vision statements perceived by advising personnel as possessing the attributes that facilitate adoption and distribution?

The literature on the diffusion of innovations also suggests that the nature of the social system in which its members exist—in particular, the size and complexity of its infrastructure—influences which characteristics are perceived to be innovative (Rogers, 2004; Wejnert, 2002) and which innovations are perceived to be beneficial, feasible, suitable, and practical (Valente, 1995; Vishwanath & Goldhaber, 2003). Similarly, Pekarsky (1998, p. 281) suggested that "the probability of a happy marriage" between clarity and concreteness in the rhetoric of a vision statement "is high to the extent that the major constituencies that make up the institution are homogeneous in their outlook and aspiration." These findings led us to raise the final research question:

RQ12: To what extent are the perceived attributes of a vision statement a function of the nature of an institution?

Methods

Participants

The NACADA membership served as the population from which we drew a stratified random sample of colleges and universities. In accordance with the Carnegie Foundation Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Carnegie Foundation, 2005), we randomly selected 30 schools ($N = 208$) from each of the following categories: public and private doctorate-granting, master's-granting, and baccalaureate colleges and universities as well as public and private associate's-degree granting colleges.[1] Of these schools, 44 had religious affiliation, 2 were tribal institutions, and 2 were mil-

[1] Because of their unique function and operational model within the academic community, proprietary/for-profit institutions were excluded from this investigation and explored in a separate analysis. Of the 210 institutions pulled from the population of NACADA members, two institutions (one private baccalaureate college and one public 2-year college) were eliminated from the sample because their Web sites were inaccessible and vision statements could not be gathered for use in this investigation.

itary academies. The regional breakdown of this sample is consistent with the NACADA membership (Habley, 2004), and thus, the sample is representative of the population (see the Appendix for institutions in this sample).

The highest ranking advising personnel at each NACADA-member institution was sent a letter in late November 2005 and invited to respond to the on-line survey that was to be made available on the NACADA Web site. We enclosed with the letter a sealed envelope containing that institution's vision statement, or in the case where no identifiable vision statement was found, we included the institution's mission statement.[2] We had downloaded these statements from the institutions' Web site. Printed on the outside of both sides of the envelope was the instruction "Do not open until prompted to do so in the survey." On December 7, 2005, we sent a follow-up E-mail that contained the direct link to the survey. The site remained active until December 21, 2005.

The survey received a 52% response rate, resulting in a final sample of 109 anonymous institutions. The composition of institutions by mode of operation and orientation, academic mission, student enrollment, and region can be found in Table 1. Approximately 68% of these institutions have an individual that is assigned responsibility for coordinating the institution's academic advising system (Table 2); 41% of the respondents to the survey were that individual (data not shown). Institutions at which higher level graduate degrees are granted are slightly more likely to have an individual responsible for coordinating advising ($r = .32$; $p < .05$) than other types of institutions. Respondents tended to be coordinators, managers, or directors of advising offices (52.3%) or university administrators who supervised advising operations (25.7%). Others were professional, peer, or faculty advisors, counselors, or specialists (22.0%).

Respondents were asked to identify the advising model that best describes the delivery of advising on their campus as well as the general advising method that best describes the advising approach to students. As can be seen in Table 2, a wide variety of delivery systems are employed, with the split (i.e., a specific group of students is advised in an advising office and others are assigned to academic units or faculty; 29.4%) and dual (i.e., a member of the faculty advises on matters related to the major and an advisor in an advising office

Table 1 Composition of institution sample, $N = 109$

Institutional Characteristic	n	%
Institution Type		
Public	69	63.30
Private/sectarian	22	20.18
Private/nonsectarian	18	16.51
Highest Degree Granted		
Associate's	16	14.68
Bachelor's	18	16.51
Master's	40	36.70
Doctorate	34	31.19
NR	1	.92
Campus Enrollment		
Less than 2,500	33	30.28
2,500–4,999	20	18.35
5,000–9,999	20	18.35
10,000–19,999	21	19.27
20,000–29,999	6	5.50
More than 30,000	9	8.26
Region		
Great Lakes	20	18.35
Mid-Atlantic	9	8.26
Mid-South	12	11.01
North Central	12	11.01
Northeast	17	15.60
Northwest	8	7.34
Pacific	6	5.50
Rocky Mountain	6	5.50
South Central	9	8.26
Southeast	10	9.17

advises on general requirements; 15.6%) models being the most prevalent. The majority of respondents (67.0%) described their approach to students as a blend of prescriptive (i.e., advisors are in a position of clear authority, in which they make a diagnosis and prescribe information that the student should follow; priority is placed on problem-solving and personal and vocational decision making) and developmental (i.e., advisors establish a relationship with students that fosters student responsibility; priority is placed on facilitating a student's development of problem-solving and decision-making skills) strategies.

Measures

The survey instrument was comprised of 33 items. To provide comparative data with previous

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[2] Mission statements typically included reflections of institutional vision and core institutional values, principles, and goals.

description; 5 = *highly descriptive*)
Progressive: To what extent does this statement propel your institution into the future? (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *significantly*)
Compatible: To what extent does the statement reflect the current model of academic advising on your campus? (1 = *not at all reflective*; 5 = *extremely reflective*)
Comparative: To what extent does the statement reflect the method of academic advising on your campus? (1 = *not at all reflective*; 5 = *extremely reflective*)
Observable: Can its ideas and goals be used to guide general advising practices? (1 = *extremely impractical*; 5 = *extremely practical*)
Practical: Can its ideas and goals be used to guide specific advising practices? (1 = *hard to apply*; 5 = *easy to apply*)
Complex: To what extent is the statement tied to actual and doable outcomes (1 = *highly theoretical*; 5 = *highly applied*)

Advising vision statement. Respondents were asked whether their advising unit had a vision statement, and if they answered in the affirmative, the degree to which it reflected the institution vision statement (1 = *identical*; 2 = *modified/abbreviated*; 3 = *unique/independent*; 4= *don't know*). They were also asked about the physical accessibility of the statement (1 = *not at all accessible*; 5 = *readily accessible*), their familiarity with its contents (1 = *not at all familiar*; 5 = *extremely familiar*), the extent that the statement reflects the current model of academic advising on the campus (1 = *not at all reflective*; 5 = *extremely reflective*), and the extent that the statement reflects the method of academic advising on the campus (1 = *not at all reflective*; 5 = *extremely reflective*).

Statistical Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine the interrelationships among our variables and indexes. Where appropriate, nominal-level measures were collapsed into binary variables to facilitate bi- and multivariate analyses (e.g., institutional type: public = 1 and private = 2). To provide a precise analysis of influences concerning vision statement language and uses on various aspects of academic advising, we elected to include single item measures in a series of regressions. Our dependent measures included familiarity with the institution's vision statement, consultation of the vision statement for advising, and use of the vision statement in advisor training.

Our predictor blocks included the following steps: institutional characteristics, contact with the upper administration, use of the vision statement in advising operations, and perceptions of various vision-statement qualities. Inspection of variance inflation factor scores confirmed that collinearity was not a problem in any of our prediction models (data not shown).

To better assess how vision statement language impacts the use of vision statements by advising supervisors, we performed a principal-component factor analysis of these items. The analysis produced three significant factors that explained nearly 75% of the variance in the measures (see Table 3). The first focused on vision statement language and explained 51.0% of the variance (Eigenvalue of 6.12). Responses to these eight content-evaluation items were summed up for an index of "vision statement quality" (α = .92). The second factor focused on respondent contact with the upper administration and explained 12.9% of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.56). The two items loading on this factor were summed to form an index of "access to visionary" (α = .78). The final factor explained 10.5% of the variance and was comprised of measures of vision statement compatibility as well as comparability with campus academic-advising models. These measures were summed to form an index of "statement consistency" (α = .86).

Results

Through RQ1, we asked whether the nature of an institution influences the accessibility of its vision statement. All 208 sample institutions were evaluated in terms of access to their vision statement via the Web. Most college and university Web sites (n = 174; 83.7%) provide easy access, through direct or indirect links on the home page, to the vision statement; all of the tribal and military institutions and 95.5% of religion-affiliated institutions were included in this percentage. However, a few institutions (n = 18; 8.6% of the sample) had statements prominently placed on the home page or listed by name as a direct link option. Of these, two thirds (n = 12; 66.6%) were private colleges or universities.

Of the 36 institutions (17.3% of the sample) that did not provide a direct or indirect link to the vision statement from the home page, 16 provided access through their search engines, and extensive searching was needed to access the statements of 8 institutions. No vision or mission statement could be found for two institutions. Approximately 80% of these 36 low access institutions were public col-

Table 3 Principal-component varimax matrix of vision statement characteristics

| | Component | | |
Factor	Statement Quality	Access to Visionary	Statement Consistency
In-person contact with institution visionary	−0.17	0.89*	−0.001
Written correspondence with institution visionary	−0.001	0.90*	−0.0003
Language is clear	0.82*	−0.15	0.16
Language is compelling	0.87*	0.001	0.16
Language is reasonable	0.81*	−0.16	0.16
Language is descriptive	0.78*	−0.14	−0.17
Language is progressive	0.80*	−0.001	0.16
Language is practical	0.73*	−0.0005	0.48
Language is pragmatic	0.70*	−0.10	0.45
Language is comparative	0.26	−0.001	0.86*
Language is compatible	0.17	−0.0003	0.89*
Language is concrete	0.55*	−0.17	0.511
Eigenvalue	6.12	1.56	1.26
Variance explained	51.0%	12.9%	10.5%
Cronbach's Alpha	.92	.78	.86

Note. $* p < .05$

leges or universities.

Through the survey, we explored the physical accessibility (e.g., posting) of the vision statement to members of the campus community. In contrast to the findings that vision statements are relatively Web accessible at most institutions, slightly over one half the respondents indicated that their institution's vision statement is readily accessible to the campus community in general (51.4%) or their advising operation in particular (50.5%). A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and chi-square analyses revealed no significant differences in vision statement accessibility according to institutional type.

Through RQ2, we asked whether the nature of the institution influences the stakeholders' familiarity with the contents of its vision statement. Approximately 85% of respondents indicated that they are extremely or highly familiar with their institution's vision statement. The survey revealed a negative correlation between familiarity and the enrollment size of the campus ($-.28$; $p < .004$). No other school descriptor was found to be significant.

In RQ3, we asked whether university administrators who supervise advising operations are more familiar with the contents of their institution's vision statement than are coordinators of advising operations and professional, peer, or faculty advisors. None of the mean differences were statistically significant.

Via RQ4, we asked if greater access to an institution's upper administration resulted in greater familiarity with the contents in the institutional vision statement. Approximately 12.0% of respondents have daily or weekly in-person contact with their institution's president, chancellor, or board of trustees, 20.2% have contact once or twice per month on average, 25.7% have contact once or twice per term on average, 21.1% only have contact once or twice per year, and 21.1% have no interpersonal contact with upper administration. Similar percentages of respondents have written communication with upper level administrators: 14.6% of respondents have daily or weekly written contact with the upper administration, 34.9% have contact once or twice per month on average, 33.9% have contact once or twice per term on average, 11.9% only have contact once or twice per year, and 4.6% have no written contact at all. We found a significant correlation between familiarity with the contents in the vision statement and the amount of interpersonal ($r = .41$; $p < .001$) and written ($r = .24$; $p < .01$) contact with the upper administration.

Factors that best predict familiarity with the vision statement were explored in a regression analysis and accounted for over one third of the variance observed ($R^2 = .429$; $F(10, 34) = 2.5$; $p < .012$). The first step in the analysis, which focused on institutional characteristics, failed to show statistical significance and reinforces the finding reported about RQ1: Accessibility of vision statement is not related to institutional type. The second step, reflecting contact with higher administration, constituted a significantly related predictor block ($R^2 = .167$) that

explained 12.6% of the variance. In-person contact with the institution's upper administration was the most significant predictor in the second step ($\beta = .52$).

The third block, addressing access to the vision statement, was also significantly related to familiarity with the vision statement, accounting for 30% of the variance. Significant unique predictors included familiarity with the contents of the vision statement ($\beta = .32$) and access to the vision statement in the workspace ($\beta = .27$). In the fourth and final block, which addressed qualitative attributes of the vision statement, none of the predictors were found to be statistically significant.

Through RQ5 and RQ6, we asked about the extent that the organizational model and method of student advising on campus are perceived to reflect the institution's vision statement. Only 34.8% of respondents indicated that the vision statement is highly reflective of their advising model on campus, and this percentage is significantly correlated with private school affiliation ($r = .27$; $p < .05$). Approximately 41.3% of respondents indicated that the vision statement is highly reflective of the method of advising employed in their office. Once again, private school respondents were more likely to indicate that their institution's vision statement reflects current advising methods ($r = .29$; $p < .02$) than were public institution respondents. Further analyses revealed no significant mean contrasts by other institution descriptors.

The perceived compatibility of the vision statement, as measured by elements of its language, was found to be significantly correlated with advising models and methods employed by advising units. In particular, the vision statement is perceived as compatible with advising models and methods in cases where the language is perceived to be clear ($r = .34$; $p < .01$), compelling ($r = .39$; $p < .004$), noting relative advantage ($r = .30$; $p < .004$), descriptive ($r = .30$; $p < .001$), progressive ($r = .32$; $p < .001$), comparative ($r = .46$; $p < .001$), observable ($r = .43$; $p = .001$), and complex ($r = .5$; $p < .001$).

RQ7 was used to ask respondents if their institution's vision statement is instrumental in determining specific advising practices and procedures and training advisors. Approximately 65% of all respondents reported a low to moderate degree of vision statement guidance with regard to advising practices and procedures. In addition, approximately 60% of all respondents reported a low to moderate level of employment of the vision statement in the training of their staff. However, we found a significant positive correlation ($p < .01$) between respondents consulting the vision statement for both advising practices and training and their familiarity with the statement ($r = .61$; $r = .53$), access to the statement at their workplace ($r = .25$; $r = .28$), and whether the statement is perceived to be extremely clear ($r = .30$; $r = .36$), compelling ($r = .32$; $r = .33$), noting relative advantage ($r = .39$; $r = .37$), descriptive ($r = .29$; $r = .31$), progressive ($r = .32$; $r = .33$), comparative ($r = .49$; $r = .37$), observable ($r = .44$; $r = .32$), and complex ($r = .36$; $r = .39$).

It should also be noted that a regression equation predicting use of the institution's vision statement to train academic advisors accounted for over one half of the variance observed (Adjusted $R^2 = .586$; $F (15, 34) = 3.78$; $p < .001$). The first two steps, which focused on institutional characteristics, failed to attain statistical significance. These variables were then joined by our third block, reflecting contact with higher administration, which accounted for over one half of the variance in the equation. Significant unique predictors in step 3 included use of the vision statement in training advisors ($\beta = -.39$), on-line or posted access to the mission statement ($\beta = .25$), belief that the vision statement reflects the campus advising model ($\beta = .32$), and perceived vision statement access to the campus community ($\beta = .33$).

The final block, which addressed qualitative attributes of the vision statement, was also significantly related to vision statement use in the training of academic advisors. Only two of the variables from the previous step—use of the vision statement in training ($\beta = .40$) and on-line or posted access to the vision statement ($\beta = .35$)—emerged as unique predictors in step 5; they explained 9% of the variance.

We performed a regression analysis to identify the variables most likely to predict whether the vision statement will be consulted for guidance on advising policies and procedures. The variables accounted for nearly one half of the variance observed (Adjusted $R^2 = .455$; $F (10, 34) = 3.0$; $p < .002$). The first step focused on institutional characteristics, which failed to show statistical significance. These variables were joined by measures reflecting contact with higher administration, comprising a significantly related predictor block (significance of $p < .006$) that explained 12.6% of the variance. Significant unique predictors in that step included in-person contact with the institution's upper administration, which was positively related ($\beta = .52$) and written contact with the upper administration, an inverse predictor ($\beta = -.46$).

A third block, addressing access to the vision statement, was also significantly related to con-

sultation of the vision statement for advising. The only individual predictor to reach statistical significance in this block was the use of the vision statement to train advisors ($\beta = .58$). The fourth and final block, which addressed qualitative attributes of the vision statement, was not significantly related to consultation of the vision statement for advising.

Several research questions pertain to the nature and impact of an advising-operation vision statement. Approximately 56% of advising operations have a vision statement, and approximately 80% of respondents indicated that they are extremely or highly familiar with this statement. Through RQ8, we asked if the vision statement of the advising operation is reflective of the institution's vision statement. Approximately 4.6% of respondents reported that the advising operation statement is identical to the institution vision statement, 21.5% indicated that the unit statements are a modified version of the institution statement, and 16.1% reported that the advising statements are modified versions of college-level vision statements. Approximately 41% of advising-operations vision statements were created independent of any other official school document. We found no significant differences in the nature of the institution and the nature of the vision statement (unique or modified institutional statement).

In RQ9, we asked about the extent to which the advising operation's vision statement reflected the model and method of student advising on campus. Approximately 29.7% of respondents indicated that their units' vision statement is highly reflective of their advising model on campus. Approximately 43.8% of respondents indicated that the vision statement is highly reflective of their method of advising. We found interesting, significant, positive correlations ($p < .01$) between the perceived compatibility of the vision statement and all the elements of the language that predict innovation adoption and transformation into action of the vision statement: r values ranged from .30 for relative advantage to .76 for comparative.

This inquiry was followed by RQ10, which asked whether the advising operation's vision statement is instrumental in training advisors. Nearly one half (47.7%) of all respondents reported a low to moderate level of employment of the vision statement in the training of their staff. However, we found a significant positive correlation ($p < .01$) between respondents consulting the advising operation's vision statement for advisor training and their familiarity with the statement ($r = .53$; $p < .001$), access to the statement ($r = .50$; $p < .001$), and the extent to which the statement reflects cur-

rent advising methods ($r = .28$; $p < .02$).

Through RQ11 and RQ12, we explored the extent to which institutional vision statements are perceived by advising personnel to possess the attributes that facilitate adoption and distribution, and whether those perceptions are a function of the nature of an institution. As can be seen in Table 4, over one half of all respondents rated their institution's vision statements high or very high on each of the content descriptors. Clarity was rated particularly high (87.0%). Observability, comparativeness, complexity, practicality, and compatibility were the lowest rated attributes, with approximately 16 to 23% of all respondents rating their institution's vision statement as low or very low in these areas. In addition, evaluations of vision-statement content quality yielded lower scores from respondents at large institutions ($r = -.22$; $p < .03$). Conversely, perceptions that advising language is comparable and compatible with the university advising model seem to prevail to a greater extent in private institutions ($r = .31$; $p < .002$) than they do at public institutions, where the correlations were found to be statistically insignificant. Very high and high ratings in the overall quality of the language of the vision statements were positively related to access to an institutional visionary in the upper administration ($r = .28$; $p < .006$).

Discussion

According to Habley (1981, p. 45), "Academic advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for on-going, one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution." It is through these interactions that students examine the range of factors involved in the mutually negotiated expectations between themselves and their colleges (Kuh & Pace, 1999), and advisors actively shape the boundaries and nature of student engagement with their institution (Miller, Bender, & Schuh, 2005). Ardaiolo, Bender, and Roberts (2005, p. 91) noted that "the fundamental challenge facing colleges today is to change the expectations of incoming students, their attitudes and their beliefs about how they think about their school setting, academic work, and their own relationship to their academic institutions." They concluded that colleges need to better communicate their business.

Our investigation reported here confirms the conclusion made by Ardaiolo et al. (2005). A university or college's conception of the kinds of educated human beings it is attempting to cultivate and its expectations for incoming students are found

Table 4 Respondent ratings of vision statement descriptors (%), *N* = 109

Descriptors	Ratings (%)				
	Very Low	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**	**Very High**
Clear	2.0	3.0	8.1	42.6	44.4
Compelling	1.0	4.9	22.4	35.3	36.2
Relative					
Advantage	0.9	2.9	18.6	46.1	31.4
Descriptive	1.0	2.9	23.3	34.0	38.9
Progressive	0.9	5.8	20.4	37.9	34.0
Compatible	7.2	15.5	38.1	23.7	15.5
Comparative	4.2	12.5	36.5	25.0	21.9
Observable	5.9	11.7	29.1	35.9	17.5
Practical	1.9	13.6	22.4	37.9	24.3
Complex	2.0	17.2	35.4	27.3	18.2

in its vision statement. This information is best relayed through the hub of student services, its academic-advising operations. By examining the trickle-down effect of institutional vision through advising operations—that is, whether and to what extent institutional vision is recognized by practitioners and reflected in the governing models embraced by their advising units as well as the degree to which vision is transformed into day-to-day advising procedures and operations—we assessed how institutional vision is communicated to its stakeholders.

Survey results suggest a sizable disconnect between institutional vision and academic advising operations. Vision statements were found to be easily and readily accessible on school Web sites, reflective of their perceived importance as a philosophical template and declaration of institutional identity, values, and aspirations. This is particularly true for private colleges and universities, including the tribal, military, and religion-affiliated institutions that have been identified in the literature as more vision-driven in their operations than other types of institutions (Abelman & Molina, 2006; Boerema, 2006; Estanek, James, & Norton, 2006; Pekarsky, 1998). However, at all institution types, vision statements were significantly less accessible on campuses in general and near advising operations in particular. A vision statement is a living document that is intended to be employed rather than merely displayed as a recruitment and marketing tool (Kirp, 2003; Murphy, 1987; Welton & Cook, 1997). However, the vision statement does not seem to be used to guide student services at many institutions.

In addition, these vision statements were perceived to be inaccurate reflections of the actual models, methods, procedures, and protocols employed at advising operations by those who run them. Visionary conceptions of educational outcomes, student connectedness, and the manner by which the institution monitors and facilitates academic excellence and intellectual development are detached from the reality of advising operations. As a result, vision statements are rarely utilized in advising activities or employed in advisor training. The same dearth of employability was found for those advising operations that had created their own vision statements, most of which (59%) had been derived from an existing institutional vision statement.

Although these results apply to all types of institutions in all regions, we found some interesting exceptions. For example, advising supervisors at large schools tend to be less familiar with their institution's vision statement. Those at small private schools tend to have the most Web-accessible vision statements, and these statements are perceived to be more accurate reflections of existing advising models and methods than they are perceived to be by their public-institution counterparts. In addition, the statements are perceived to be more clear, compelling, depicting relative advantage, descriptive, progressive, comparative, observable, and complex then are the vision statements at other schools. Therefore, in accordance to Rogers (2003), Deffuant et al. (2005), and others, the stakeholders at small private schools may be more likely to consider vision statement information for adoption and then transmit that information to others than are stakeholders at larger institutions. Indeed, findings revealed that advising supervisors are more likely to use vision statements in the training of their staff and in the delineation of office procedures and protocols if those statements are perceived as possessing the attributes identified as compatible with

information diffusion.

The research literature suggests that an academic community's awareness of and access to formal declarations by its leadership may be a function of the institution's physical size (Kuhtmann, 2004), mission (Baldwin, 2005), mode of operation (Bryson, 2004), orientation (McGuire, 2003), and the size and composition of its student population (Rozycki, 2004). Our investigation confirms these observations and calls particular attention to the significance of the size and mode of operation of an institution. Although survey results do not explain why the stakeholders at small private schools are more connected to institutional vision than are those at other institutions, the Carnegie Foundation (2005) has suggested that "size matters. It is related to institutional structure, complexity, culture, finances, and other factors." Lyall (2005) has expressed concern about the privatization of colleges and universities, noting that this "abandons core public purposes, including the extension of intellectual and human assets to the larger community." Considering that newly enrolled students are often "clueless about their school's values and expectations" (Baldwin, 2005, p. 9), our investigation suggests that students at small private schools may be better served at least in regard to learning about the vision of their institutions.

Our research results also indicate that the trickle-down effect of institutional vision through advising operations is facilitated if advising supervisors are familiar with their institution's vision statements. Although this observation resides within the realm of common sense, we were surprised to find how many advising supervisors are not familiar with their institution's vision statement. Familiarity, in turn, is more likely to occur among supervisors with more interpersonal and written communication with their institution's upper administration. In short, the more socially connected the advising supervisor, the more functional he or she is as a disseminator of institutional vision and the greater the trickle-down effect. Diffusion, after all, "is the process through which innovation spreads via certain communicative channels, over time, among the members of a social system" (Rogers, 2004, p. 13).

Senge (1990, p. 9) has suggested that if any one idea about leadership has inspired organizations for thousands of years "it's the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future." If traditional institutions of higher education are to survive the onslaught of contemporary challenges, they must do a better job of communicating their strengths, uniqueness, and vision for the future to their stake-

holders. Academic advising operations should continue to champion this initiative and serve as the center for the diffusion of institutional vision and innovation.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this NACADA survey, the following recommendations are offered to academic advising personnel:

1. Kuhtmann (2004, p. 108) noted that there are "several factors that institutional decision makers should consider in systematically reviewing the advising models at their institutions. Institutional mission is a crucial factor." Similarly, institutional vision should be reflected in all advising operations. An institution's conception of the kinds of educated human beings it is attempting to cultivate and the nature of the learning community within the college or university should drive all facets of student services. Advising supervisors should determine whether and to what extent advising operations are in synchrony with their institution's vision statement and make adjustments accordingly.

2. In their text *Promoting Reasonable Expectations: Aligning Student and Institutional Views of the College Experience*, Miller et al. (2005) asked whether students know what to expect when they enroll at their institution and where they derive that information. The authors directed students to their institution's vision statement and academic advising department. Vision statements should be posted in or near advising operations and used to orient or remind students of appropriate expectations from their chosen college experience. Our investigation suggests that physical access results in greater familiarity and greater familiarity results in greater application.

3. Survey findings confirm the literature that suggests that a well-conceived vision statement is shared, clear, and compelling (Pekarsky, 1998) and is most likely to be adopted if it contains relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, and observability (Rogers, 2003). Advising supervisors should take ownership of their operation's vision statement and analyze its language and imagery along these dimensions. Similarly, institutional decision makers should engage in the same enterprise with regard to the institution's vision statement. This undertaking could lead to long overdue revisions (Beattie, 1995; White, 2000) and result in a more effective document.

4. The survey revealed that the more connected advising administrators are to their institution—that is, the more contact and communication they have

with members of the upper administration—the more knowledgeable they are of their institution's vision statement and the more functional and proactive they are as disseminators of institutional vision. The implications are obvious, especially to those advising supervisors at large, public institutions; more supervisors at small, private institutions already interact with administration visionaries.

5. More research should be done because our study is not without its limitations. Although the sample size was adequate and the response rate was exceptional, this study should nonetheless be repeated with larger, cross-sectional samples of institutions. Pulling a sample from the population of NACADA membership is restrictive. While appropriate for an exploratory investigation published in a periodical that caters to NACADA members, the sample limits the generalizability of this research.

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Appendix Institutions in the sample

Private Baccalaureate

Anderson College
Bethune-Cookman College
Corcoran College of Art + Design
Dean College
Elizabethtown College
Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design
Hartwick College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Holy Cross College

Huston-Tillotson University
Illinois Wesleyan University
Lafayette College
Macalester College
McPherson College
Mount Ida College
Mount Olive College
Mount Union College
North Carolina Wesleyan College
Northland College
Peace College

Ringling School of Art and Design
Robert Morris College
Shorter College
Saint Olaf College
Saint Paul's College
Stonehill College
University of Northwestern Ohio
Walden University
Wartburg College

Private Master's

Bennington College
Clarke College
Columbia College Chicago
Converse College
Curry College
Dominican University of California
Drury University
Edgewood College
Emmanuel College
Franklin University

Gannon University
Indiana Wesleyan University
International College
John Brown University
Laurentian University
LeMoyne College
Marian College
North Central College
Olivet College
Quinnipiac University
Rider University

Rosemont College
Saint Joseph's College
Saint Lawrence University
Saint Thomas University
Southern California Institute of Architecture
Thomas University
Union University
Washington College
Wingate University

Private Doctorate

American University
Arcadia University
Brandeis University
Brigham Young University
Clarkson University
Drake University
Drexel University
Elon University
Johnson & Wales University
Liberty University
Long Island University– CW Post

Loyola Marymount University
Loyola University of Chicago
Marquette University
Mount Saint Mary's College
New York University
Northwestern University
Nova Southeastern University
Regis University
Rochester Institute of Technology
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Smith College
Springfield College
Tulane University
University of Denver
University of Miami
University of Notre Dame
University of Regina
University of Rochester
Western New England College

Appendix Institutions in the sample (continued)

Public Baccalaureate

Brandon University
California State University–Channel Islands
Chipola College
Concord University
CUNY–York College
Dalton State College
Fairmont State University
Kansas State University–Salina
King's College
Lewis-Clark State College
Macon State College
Miami University–Hamilton Campus
Missouri Western State University

Nipissing University
Oregon Institute of Technology–Portland
Penn State University–Lehigh Valley
Pennsylvania College of Technology
Purdue University–North Central
Red River College
Saint Mary's College of Maryland
SUNY-Delhi
United States Coast Guard Academy
University of Maine–Augusta

University of Montana–Western
University of South Carolina–Beaufort
University of South Florida–Sarasota
University of Pittsburg–Johnstown
Utah Valley State College
West Virginia University–Parkersburg

Public Master's

Arkansas Tech University
Bowie State University
Bridgewater State College
California State University–Dominguez Hills
The College of New Jersey
CUNY-Hunter College
Evergreen State College
Fort Hays State University
Georgia College & State University
Indiana University Northwest
Minnesota State University–Moorhead
Missouri State University

Montana State University–Northern
Montclair State University
Ohio University–Lancaster
Saginaw Valley State University
San Jose State University
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania
Sonoma State University
Southern Oregon University
SUNY–Purchase College
University of Alaska–Anchorage

University of Arkansas–Monticello
University of Maryland–University College
University of North Carolina–Wilmington
University of Tennessee–Chattanooga
University of Wisconsin–Stout
Weber State University–Davis
West Texas A&M University
Western Washington University

Public Doctorate

Alabama State University
Bowling Green State University
East Tennessee State University
Eastern Michigan University
Florida International University
Grand Valley State University
Kansas State University
Mississippi State University
Northern Arizona University–Phoenix
Oklahoma State University–Tulsa
Rutgers State University–New Brunswick
Texas Southern University

University of Arkansas–Little Rock
University of California–Berkeley
University of California–San Diego Extension
University of Colorado–Colorado Springs
University of Illinois–Chicago
University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign
University of Iowa
University of Massachusetts–Boston

University of Massachusetts–Dartmouth
University of Missouri–St Louis
University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill
University of Pittsburgh
University of South Florida
University of Vermont
University of West Georgia
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Wichita State University
Wilfrid Laurier University

Appendix Institutions in the sample (continued)

Public and Private 2-Year Colleges

Arapahoe Community College
Bethany Lutheran College
Blackfeet Community College
Blue Mountain Community
    College
CCC–Malcolm X College
Cloud County Community
    College
Collin County Community
    College District
Community College of
    Allegheny County
Corning Community College
Cuesta College
Des Moines Area Community
    College
Dine College

Frederick Community College
Georgia Military College–
    Augusta
Grand Rapids Community
    College
Highline Community College
Kent State University–Salem
    Campus
Metropolitan Community
    College
Middlesex County College
Mid-South Community College
Mount Wachusett Community
    College
New Hampshire Community
    Tech

New Mexico State University–
    Carlsbad
Normandale Community
    College
Patrick Henry Community
    College
Rockingham Community
    College
Seminole Community College
Tri-County Technical College
Tunxis Community College
University of Wisconsin–
    Barron County
Western Wyoming Community
    College