STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT AT A PUBLIC

SUBURBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT AT A PUBLIC

SUBURBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Amanda Fox

This research study examined student perceptions of advisement experiences with a primary role advisor in a centralized advising office. The intent was to explore the connection between academic advising and student connectedness to the institution. This study utilized Tinto's theory of student departure to provide an understanding of how student success can be impacted by institutional relationships, particularly in a community college environment. Tinto asserted that a student's decision to stay or depart from an institution was largely impacted by interactions and relationships between the student and other members of the institution (Tinto, 1975). This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of effective advising strategies and barriers, which may have contributed to their retention and persistence. This study utilized a qualitative case study approach, guided by three research questions. Data collected consisted of observations, interviews, and artifacts. Data analysis explored thematic connections linking student advising and student support experiences to overall institutional connectedness. The findings of this study can be used to inform future decision making about the delivery of advising services, specifically focusing on the needs of community college students.

Keywords: academic advisor, connectedness, student success and academic advising, student perceptions and academic advising, student success and community college

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to Dr. Blanche Helen Dimin Felton, my grandmother. She was brilliant. She was strong. She was a pioneer. An educator. An advocate. A woman truly ahead of her time in a world where females had to fight to be seen, heard, and valued.

She earned her B.S. in pharmacy at Long Island University in 1943, her M.S. in biology at St. John's University in 1965, and her Ph.D. in cellular biology at Fordham University in 1972, all while using a typewriter. She had commitment like no other, and I am in awe of her dedication. She accomplished this while being a mom to 3 kids and a wife to my amazing grandfather.

I was her first grandchild. She was my biggest cheerleader. A constant source of love, support, and encouragement from the moment I was born. Grandma, this is for you. I did it! I love you always. Thank you for giving me all that you have. I wish I could text you using a million emojis! I hope you know that I wouldn't be the woman I am today without you.

me throughout my journey. I am so lucky that I have gotten to play that same role in the lives of so many students over the years. Thank you to my work family, for trusting me, and for always stepping up in the interests of serving our students. I am so proud to be on your team.

Thank you to my NCC Cohort. I don't think any of us knew what we were getting into, but it was a joy to learn with you, to celebrate the wins, and commiserate during the difficult times (especially those stats classes). Dave, thanks for always reminding me you that you were a Dr. first. It motivated me to finish as soon as possible so I could be one, too, and wouldn't have to hear it anymore. I am sure that was the intent, and it worked! To my longtime friends and colleagues, especially Maria, Molly, Jessica, Genette, and Kerri, I will cherish the time we spent together, and I wish nothing for each of you but success, health, and happiness. Can't wait to watch each of you cross that finish line!

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to the students who took the time to share their experiences and trusted me with their stories. This study is as much their work as it is mine. I will continue to listen to you, to value you, and to fight for you.

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CHAPTER 1

Habley (2004) identified academic advising as among the campus interactions that have the greatest impact on student persistence. Academic advisors serve as guides to curriculum selection, make referrals to resources and services on campus, provide support to students, and assist with development and achievement of academic and professional goals. Advisors are in a position to help students develop a sense of connection to the institution that can positively influence student persistence (Frost, 1991).

Prior research has established that academic advising is an important component of student success in higher education (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Bitz, 2010; Cuseo, 2002; Mottarella et al., 2004; Habley, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Scholars in the field have focused their research on issues such as the mode of advisement delivery, the impact of academic advising on student success, and the perceptions of students about their advising experiences (Bitz, 2010; Cook, 2009; Cuseo, 2002; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Kuhn, 2008; Thelin, 2004).

A large body of literature indicates that students with a strong sense of connectedness to the institution have been found to be more likely to complete their college degree than students who feel less engaged (Goodenow, 1993; Hagerty et al., 2002; Hausmann et al., 2007; Himes & Schulenberg, 2016; Hoffman et al., 2002; Wilson & Gore, 2013). Connectedness is the overall fit of a student with the university, specifically with respect to the students' perception that their environment makes them feel accepted, included, and supported (Wilson & Gore, 2013).

Faculty, staff, and academic advisors all support students in the areas of teaching, development, and counseling (Himes, 2014). However, academic advisors often have the

increased responsibility of assisting students in assimilation to the culture of an academic institution (Williamson et al., 2014). Although many individuals within an institution can contribute to the overall connection and success of the student, the key component appears to be the repetitive interaction by faculty, staff and academic advisors who have an investment in some aspect of a student's academic experience (Tinto, 2012).

Quality academic advisement is also integral to the achievement of the teaching and learning mission of higher education (Harrill et al., 2015). Effective academic advisors can support students by creating an educational environment where learning and personal development are encouraged (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Many students face academic barriers, particularly at the community college level (Harrill et al., 2015). Academic advisors can increase a student's chance of overcoming barriers by providing them with the additional help to succeed in courses and navigate their way through college procedures and policies (Dadgar et al., 2014). Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) identified how academic advisors' caring characteristics and behaviors can help build trust, influence students' satisfaction, and create a successful holistic academic experience.

Although academic advising is a long-studied component of student support services in higher education, analysis of the profession, including how it is conducted, what the purpose is, and who provides the service, is relatively new (Kuhn, 2008; Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004). This gap in the research may be attributed to the evolution of the higher education system in this country. Academic advising as it exists today did not exist in early U.S. higher education.

Furthermore, most studies come from the context of 4-year institutions where the student population differs dramatically from that of the community college sector.

Without a more nuanced understanding of advising and its role in fostering students'

sense of connectedness than what the current research provides, community college

practitioners are limited in knowing how and when to most effectively deploy scarce

advising resources (Hatch & Garcia, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how students experienced and perceived

their academic advising experience within the context of a primary role advising center at

a 2-year suburban community college. A *primary role advisor* is also known as a

professional advisor, meaning that their sole purpose and function is to provide academic

advisement to students. This is in contrast to a *faculty advisor*, who fills this role in

addition to their teaching and research obligations.

Conceptual Framework

Substantial research has demonstrated that students' perceptions of connectedness

can directly correlate to their persistence or success at an institution (Astin, 1975; Kuh &

Hu, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Wilson & Gore, 2013). If students feel connected to the

institution, an academic department, their faculty, and/or their advisors, they may be

more likely to be academically successful (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: Student Perceptions of Academic Advising

College students need support from effective academic advisors to negotiate the

challenging and sometimes confusing process of educational planning and decision making. As Tinto (1993) stated:

It is part of the educational mandate of institutions of higher education to assist maturing youth in coming to grips with the important question of future planning and career choice. The regrettable fact is that some institutions do not see student uncertainty in this light. They prefer to treat it as a deficiency in student development rather than as an expected part of that complex process of personal growth. The implications of such views for policy are not trivial [because] unresolved intentions over an extended period can lead to departure both from the institution and from the higher educational enterprise as a whole. When plans remain unformulated over extended periods of time, students are more likely to depart without completing their degree programs. (p. 41)

However, much of the established research on student success, including Tinto's (1975) student attrition model, has focused on 4-year institution environments. While many of the same constructs may apply, some clear differences characterize university and community college populations. For many students, community colleges are the primary means of entry into the higher education system. Because of their convenient locations, open-access admission policies, and relatively low costs, community colleges tend to enroll students who are more academically, economically, and socially disadvantaged than do other postsecondary institutions.

According to the Community College Research Center (CCRC) in 2018, 55% of Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges, compared with 44% of Black undergraduates, 45% of Asian undergraduates, and 41% of White undergraduates. In addition, 37% of dependent students whose families earned less than $20,000 a year

attended public 2-year colleges in 2015–2016. For families earning $100,000 or more, it was 18% (Chen, 2020).

Despite the open access to education, success for students who attend 2-year institutions remains low. Among students who started college in fall 2018 at a public 2-year college, 62% were still enrolled at any institution in fall 2019. Just under 54% returned to the same college. The one-year persistence rate of students who started full-time was 70%; for part-time starters, it was 51% (Chen, 2020). These statistics indicate that community colleges have a lower graduation rate than other sectors, even with providing a low-cost, high-quality undergraduate education. This lower graduation rate may be due to the types of students community colleges tend to serve, which are high school graduates from low-income families or first-generation college students. These groups have been shown to suffer a higher rate of life circumstances such as financial constraints, transportation issues, and child care needs, which may stall their educational progression or derail it completely (Chen, 2020). Although these statistics include some students who enter the community college with goals other than degree attainment or transfer, it is clear that many community college students do not persist toward completion, despite the institutions' substantial efforts to support student progress.

Community colleges are not the only institutions of higher education that struggle with unsatisfactory rates of student persistence, though they are perhaps the most dramatic example. Many researchers have tried to explain why students might not earn a postsecondary degree, even after indicating a desire to do so and enrolling in college (Bean, 1980, 1982; Manski, 1989; Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1993).

Referencing Tinto's (1975) student attrition model, Bean and Metzner (1985) found that nontraditional students are affected more by the external environment and to a

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lesser extent by social integration than are traditional students. There are also differences between 4-year environments and community colleges in academic advising programs. According to the CCRC (2013), community college advising is often characterized by (a) high student–advisor ratios, which results in rushed advising sessions; (b) fragmented uncomprehensive efforts scattered across the campus; (c) no assigned advisors, resulting in conflicting information and long waiting periods for advising; and (d) an emphasis on first-semester students with little follow-up for students after they complete enrollment (Chen, 2020). Orozco et al. (2010) found that community college students perceived a relationship with a supportive advisor as important, but few reported developing such a relationship with an advisor.

Community college students, particularly those who are undecided about their choice of major, need support from knowledgeable academic advisors to engage in effective educational planning and decision-making, and if this support is received, they may be more likely persist to degree completion (Orozco et al., 2010). By examining students' feelings about their advising experiences, perceived support from the advising interaction, and the relationship between advising and their feeling of connectedness to the institution, this study adds to the body of knowledge about the various approaches to academic advising and how community college students experience this support service.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Tinto's *theory of student departure* (Tinto, 2012). Tinto asserted that a student's decision to stay at or depart from an institution was largely impacted by interactions and relationships between the student and other members of the institution (Tinto, 1975). This study aims to explore students' perceptions of effective advising strategies and barriers, which may have contributed to

their retention and persistence.

Tinto (2012) identified many factors that may contribute to student departure, such as such as economic, psychological, and societal. The organizational characteristics of the institution must also be considered when examining causes of attrition (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). The model of student departure created by Tinto (2012) acknowledged that students enter college with differences in educational background, skills, and abilities. A student's decision to pursue and/or drop out of college is initially influenced by their attributes, socioeconomic status, and grade performance prior to enrolling (Natoli et al., 2015). Their purpose for enrollment and the end goals for their educational journey may also vary. Higher education administrators must be aware of the reasons behind students departing from an institution, and provide resources for students to overcome barriers, establish career paths, and achieve their academic goals (Braxton et al., 2000).

For higher education institutions, student departure not only has a negative impact on students who withdraw but also is detrimental to the stability of institutional enrollments, budgets, and public perceptions of institutional quality and effectiveness (Braxton et al., 2004). If institutions do not graduate their students, perceptions of poor quality can drive student enrollments down. This is particularly problematic as state support for higher education declines and institutional budgets become increasingly dependent on revenue generated from student tuition and fees. Performance-based funding models for higher education are also being adopted by many states, and retention and completion rates are emerging as key measures of success (Kelchen, 2018).

With retention and attrition among the greatest problems in higher education, institutional approaches to improvement must include student success and satisfaction

both in and out of the classroom (Siekpe & Barksdale, 2013). Faculty can serve as mentors by linking classroom instruction with career planning and student activities. This can also promote a culture of collaboration designed to promote continued student success (Dadgar et al., 2014). Most of all, strategies to improve the overall college experience must start at the beginning of the student's academic journey (Tinto, 2012).

According to Stuart et al. (2014), a student's persistence in college aligns with Tinto's theory. Students who are well integrated into the college, both socially and academically, are most likely to participate and persist than students who are not integrated. Academic and social integration are defined as academic experiences occurring within an institution, and outside the classroom between students and other campus individuals (Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016). The level of student integration can be an indicator as to whether the student will complete requirements for graduation, or withdraw before earning a degree (Natoli et al., 2015).

Student's ability and willingness to integrate into the culture of the institution has been identified as a critical piece of the retention puzzle (Tinto, 2012). Universities are always searching for new advising strategies to develop connections with students in an effort to increase engagement (Braxton et al., 2000). Therefore, Tinto's departure theory provides an important foundation for current research in student success initiatives. Higher education institutions should continue to encourage ongoing social integration to positively influence a student's goal attainment (Siekpe & Barksdale, 2013). Tinto's student departure and retention theories have provided a framework for higher education, specifying that it is the university's responsibility to provide support to guide the students to successful completion (Tinto, 2012).

Tinto's framework has been applied to numerous studies of student persistence in

postsecondary education. Although there is a large body of literature related to Tinto's theory within the 4-year institutional environment, there is less research at the community college level. This could be attributed to the assumption that community colleges provide students with fewer opportunities for integration and that the social aspect of postsecondary education may be less appealing to students attending 2-year commuter institutions.

One typical institutional response to Tinto's work has been to implement structured student support services designed to encourage integration. Community colleges in particular have taken this approach. The underlying belief is that if colleges provide enough structured opportunities for students to engage with the institution, students will become integrated into the college and persist at higher rates. However, as evidenced by the continuing low levels of persistence at these institutions, it is not clear that such efforts have been effective, therefore reinforcing the value of this study to the body of existing literature.

In summary, belonging and connectedness are measures of how successful institutions are at making students feel welcome as individuals and are at the core of the research questions for this study. The broad conceptual framework of this study is that the relationship between advisor and advisee is important because advisors can serve as a hub of connection for students, and community college students in particular. This connection served as the foundation for research questions and interview protocols.

Significance of the Study

Academic advising is an essential part of the college student experience and can have a strong effect on student satisfaction (Mottarella et al., 2004). Light (2001) concluded that "good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a

successful college experience" (p. 81). For example, according to the *2015-16 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report*, satisfaction with an advisor's knowledge, approachability, and concern for student success were all rated as highly important factors for satisfaction to participants (Noel-Levitz, 2016). Additionally, academic advising outcomes have been linked to student retention and persistence for decades (Cuseo, 2002; Habley, 1981; Hemwell, 2008; Lowe & Toney, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). It is especially important for students to build relationships with their academic advisors through frequent contact (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Bitz, 2010; Mottarella et al., 2004).

There is a great deal of research exploring students' experiences and perceptions of academic advising (Barnes et al., 2010; Fielstein et al., 1992; Hsu & Bailey, 2007; Lowe & Toney, 2000; Mottarella et al., 2004; Propp & Rhodes, 2006; Saving & Keim, 1998). However, little of this research focuses on students who have had a primary role advisor in a centralized advising center. Therefore, studying the student experience of a primary role advisor within an advising center is important, as this research will to add to the body of research of the student experience within this model. Additionally, studying perspectives of the students is essential in understanding how the students contextualize their advising experiences within the whole of their academic experience.

Further, studying advising in this context is important, because there is a large body of research that supports the importance of out of class contact between faculty and students (Astin, 1975; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lamport, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976; Tinto, 1993). Since a shared advising model places responsibility for academic advising with primary role advisors only for certain student populations, it is important to address if students perceive a lack of opportunity to develop meaningful relationships in other

campus interactions.

Connection to the Vincentian Mission

Historically, community colleges have served highly diverse student bodies. Much of the student enrollment comes from underrepresented communities. Many of these underrepresented students may already face multiple barriers to success. The Vincentian mission aims to provide education for all, especially those lacking economic, physical, or social advantages. Understanding this population's perceptions of academic advising can foster the connection between the services provided and the mission inspired by St. Vincent de Paul.

Research Questions

The primary focus of my research is to examine student perceptions of their academic advising experiences with a primary role advisor at a 2-year suburban community college. The following research questions were explored:

- What are students' perceptions of barriers to effective academic advising?

- What are students' perceptions of effective advising strategies or practices?

- How did students' interactions with their advisors impact their sense of connectedness to the college?

Design and Methods

The study utilized a case study approach to understand the lived experiences of the subjects. Gaining the students' perspective of their advising experiences allowed for an in-depth understanding of the institutional and systemic strengths and weaknesses. This research study employed purposeful sampling to obtain its participants, so that sufficient data could be gathered in order to respond to the study's research questions. This process of purposeful sampling is important in qualitative research. As Maxwell

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(2013) stated:

> In this strategy, particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately
> to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals,
> and can't be gotten as well from other choices. Selecting those times, settings, and
> individuals that can provide you with the information that you need to answer
> your research question is the most important consideration in qualitative selection
> decisions. (p. 98)

Identifying Participants and Sampling

When selecting the study participants, the goal is to identify a group who all had a similar experience with the phenomenon being researched (Cresswell, 2014a, p. 206). Therefore, the sample was purposeful, consisting of six individuals. To be eligible to participate, the six students needed to be enrolled as degree-seeking students and have completed at least two semesters, following Creswell's (2014b) suggestion of obtaining a heterogeneous group as participants. They also must have had at least one prior experience with a professional academic advisor.

In addition, this study focused only on students who were liberal arts majors with a GPA ranging from 2.1–3.2. This criterion was set to exclude both lower-performing and higher-performing students. By interviewing participants who met the above outlined criteria, many themes became evident in this context. To recruit participants, an email was sent to all advisees who utilized the services of a full-time professional advisor, at least once, between April 2020 and April 2021. This email asked these advisees to indicate their interest in and willingness to participate in a research study by submitting a Google Form.

After obtaining initial feedback from students who were interested in

participating, academic records were reviewed to identify those who meet the pre-determined criteria. Once the list of interested participants was narrowed down, a follow-up communication was sent via email to all eligible students who expressed interest detailing the next steps. Six subjects were selected to participate in the research study. Prior to the research process beginning, all necessary consent forms were distributed to the students and signed by all participants.

Data Collection

The use of multiple data sources is important in case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant met with a different full-time member of the professional advisement staff at the research site for an advisement meeting. The advising session was recorded with consent to allow for observation. Following their recorded advising session, each participant then took part in a semi-structured interview process. The interviews were also conducted via Zoom, using the transcription feature to support the coding process. In addition, documents and artifacts such as follow-up emails and notes made in the students' degree audits were reviewed and examined for thematic connections.

Definitions

Academic Advising:

> The process of creating a partnership between advisor and advisee with the goal of teaching students to maximize the benefit of their college experiences (Miller, 2012; O'Banion, 1972).

Centralized Advising Model:

> There are three major delivery modes of advising: centralized, decentralized, and shared (Pardee, 2004). Centralized advising is a delivery mode of advising in

which all primary role and faculty advisors are housed in a central academic or administrative unit (Pardee, 2004, para. 3).

Connectedness:

Involves the overall fit of the students with the university and specifically with the students' perception that they have a supportive environment where they are accepted, included, and supported (Wilson & Gore, 2013, p. 178). Several studies have indicated that students' perceptions of connectedness can directly correlate to their persistence or success at an institution (Astin, 1975; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Wilson & Gore, 2013).

Decentralized Advising Model:

Decentralized advising involves primary role or faculty advisors who are housed in individual departments or units (Pardee, 2004).

Faculty Advisor:

An academic advisor whose primary responsibility to the institution involves teaching and research (Self, 2008). While they are the original type of advisors, for faculty, advising may constitute only a small part of their job duties (Hemwell, 2008).

Persistence:

Students who continue to return to higher education (Tinto, 2012).

Primary role advisor:

Staff members who have been hired and trained with the primary focus of academic advising are considered primary role advisors. This term, which became popular in the early 21st century, replaced the term *professional advisor*, which was the most common term used during the 20th century (Himes & Schulenberg,

2016). Their workload can vary and include teaching, assessment, or other duties, but the majority of their time would involve advising-related work (Self, 2008).

Retention:

Upon returning to higher education, students return to the same institution (Tinto, 2012).

Shared advising model:

The shared model is one in which some professional advisors meet with students in a central advising center, while other faculty advise students based on the students' majors (Pardee, 2004).

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the context of the problem and defined the purpose of this study, which was to explore how students experience and perceive their academic advising experience within the context of a primary role advising center at a 2-year suburban community college. Also discussed were the theoretical and conceptual framework, the research questions that guided the study, as well as definitions of terms that are important to the context of the study. A brief description of the design was included, as well as sample selection and data collection methods. Due to the limited research on the application of Tinto's model in the community college environment, this study fills a gap in current research and provides data on the perceptions of students in this context.

CHAPTER 2

There is extensive research on academic advising as an important field of study in higher education (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Bitz, 2010; Cuseo, 2002; Lowe & Toney, 2000; Habley, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that shapes the study; reviews the history and evolution of academic advising as a profession in higher education; defines the various models and modes of advisement delivery; and investigates the body of research related to student perceptions of academic advising.

I used various databases to identify sources for this study. I searched *Academic Search Complete*, *EBSCO*, *JSTOR*, and *ProQuest* for the following search terms: *academic advisor*, *academic advising*, *academic adviser*, *connectedness*, *student success and academic advising*, and *student perceptions and academic advising*. I limited each search to peer-reviewed academic journals written in English. There was a large number of results in each search (over 1,000), so I limited the search to articles and books published in the last 20 years. However, with the understanding that some foundational and historical research had been written outside my 20-year range, I also searched for any additional sources that were referenced by multiple studies.

Additionally, I reviewed the last 15 years of journals published by the Global Community for Academic Advising, formerly the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), for all articles relevant to student perceptions of advising or centralized advising models. I also used the NACADA book review to identify relevant books on the topic. Lastly, I reviewed the last 10 years of the *Journal of College Student Development*, *Research in Higher Education*, and the *Journal of Higher Education* for advising-related articles focusing on student perceptions or experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto (1975) developed the most widely accepted model of student persistence called the *student integration model*. This model has been subject to rigorous empirical testing, as evidenced by more than 400 citations and more than 170 dissertations (Braxton et al., 2000). Tinto's model of student departure addresses the factors that keep students connected to an institution, as well as those that influence a student's decision to withdraw (Tinto, 2012). In addition, Tinto's theory emphasizes the importance of establishing relationships with members of a college community (Tinto, 2012). Positive student interactions with classroom faculty and staff, including academic advisors can increase a student's integration within an institution, increasing their chances for academic success (King, 1993).

The intentions of students who initially commit to a college or university may change over time. A student's prior educational experiences, personal attributes, and characteristics may influence their decision to remain enrolled (Tinto, 2006). However, Tinto asserted that what students experience after they enter college is more important to student departure than what occurs prior to admission. Therefore, a relationship between the students and academic advisors can prevent student departure and promote student retention (Tinto, 2012).

Student retention is a campus-wide concern, and institutional actions to address supporting students should be coordinated with this in mind (Tinto, 2012). Furthermore, Tinto (2012) stated that in order to promote student success and retention, institutions of higher education must carefully plan and diligently follow through on initiatives. Therefore, the key to retaining students begins with a commitment on the part of any higher education institution to create an inclusive educational and social community

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(Darling, 2015).

The style of academic advising used in higher education plays an important role in the student retention process, as does the advisor and student relationship (Braxton et al., 2000). Advising styles can include coaching, supporting, delegating, counselor, teacher, or the parenting approach (Al-Asmi & Thumiki, 2014; Darling, 2015). It is important that advisors tailor their advising style to the needs of the individual student, and not use a one-size-fits-all approach (Braxton et al., 2000). Tinto's theory of student retention also heavily emphasizes the importance of advising styles (Al-Asmi & Thumiki, 2014; Tinto, 2012).

Both classroom faculty and academic advisors need to understand the principles of college student departure theory, and the role they as individuals can play in institutional retention (Braxton et al., 2000; Gaines, 2014). Student integration primarily depends on the quality of relationships with campus personnel, academic performance, and overall satisfaction with the academic experience (Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

According to students, a rift is created when there is a lack of personal interest from faculty and staff (Tinto, 2012). A student's decision to depart from a college or university can be caused by the perceived a lack of connection with faculty members, staff, advisors, and peers (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Tinto (2012) posited that social integration between a student and an institution of higher education must occur for a relationship to be established. This important connection should be made at the first contact, which occurs at recruitment and admission.

O'Keeffe (2013) stated that interactions with faculty and staff are sometimes difficult and uncomfortable because students perceive them to be inaccessible and unfriendly. Students feeling excluded and lacking a sense of belonging in higher

education are key causes of student attrition (Tinto, 2012). Faculty and advisors should not assume a student knows when to seek support, but should require students to meet with advisors throughout the duration of their college career (Donaldson et al., 2016). Although resources may be limited, preventing this from being feasible, particularly at public institutions, an effort must be made to create a welcoming and structured environment where students feel a part of a successful academic plan (O'Keeffe, 2013).

While positive interactions between college personnel and students can help retention rates, student withdrawal and departure are also directly influenced by relationships with faculty and staff (Braxton et al., 2000). Negative experiences in and out of the classroom and lack of social integration can cause students to consider departure from the college experience (Braxton et al., 2000). The role academic advisors play in the students' social integration should not be underestimated (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). In order to understand how to help students develop a positive institutional connection through the delivery of effective academic advising, it is important to recognize how much the expectations and roles of advisors have changed.

History of Academic Advising as a Profession

Academic advising has been a part of the higher education system in this country since its inception. However, the way it is defined and how it is delivered has evolved, just as the nature of higher education has evolved. There is not one correct approach to the delivery of academic advisement services, especially when institutions are so different demographically. Many different models have been used throughout the growth of higher education. Having a historical overview of the profession of academic advising can help evaluate current processes and make necessary changes to meet the needs of our current student population. Himes and Schulenberg (2016) outlined four "eras" of the

development of academic advising in U.S. higher education.

According to Cook (2009), the history and development of academic advising in the United States parallels and reflects the history and development of higher education and student personnel work (p. 18). At the beginning of higher education in this country, because of the very small population of students as well as limited curriculum options, the president and teaching faculty were sufficient to meet the needs of their students. They were able to attend to the students' academic needs as well as provide student support services. During this first era, students were not likely to develop relationships with any of the faculty or staff members at the institution (Kuhn, 2008). However, toward the end of this period, some institutions began to create official advisor/advisee relationships by pairing students with a faculty member as a general advisor (Cook, 2009). The role of advisor continued to change and evolve in the mid-19th century, as the population of students and role of the institutions changed (Cook, 2009). The beginning of coeducation necessitated the position of deans of women who were intended to serve as moral advisors for female students (Nidiffer, 2000).

The shift to the second era of academic advising began in the late 19th century. This era of advising, and the longest period, lasted from approximately 1870 to 1970 (Grites, 2013). During this era, the idea of placing the lower division general education study in a *junior college* was developed. This concept is credited to Henry Tappan, president of the University of Michigan in 1851. Numerous other educators including William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago and David Starr Jordan of Stanford suggested following a modified European model wherein the universities would offer the higher-order scholarship and junior college would offer lower-level academic and vocational education. Harper was involved in the formulation of the first public 2-year

college which was opened in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois (Drummond, 2002).

This was also the first opportunity that students would be given to make choices about their curriculum and their academic path (Kuhn, 2008; Thelin, 2004; Thelin & Hirschy, 2009). Allowing students this flexibility in curriculum selection also led to a change in the relationship between faculty and students (Kuhn, 2008).

During this time, students might have been assigned, or might have self-selected a faculty mentor, or they may have been appointed a group of advisors whose responsibility was to guide course selection (Cook, 2009; Hawkins, 1960; Kuhn, 2008; Rudolph, 1962). Daniel Gilman, president of Johns Hopkins University, outlined what he believed to be the ideal relationship between a student and their faculty mentor:

> "It is the adviser's business to listen to difficulties which the student assigned to him may bring to his notice; to act as his representative if any collective action is necessary on the part of the board of instruction to see that every part of his course of studies has received proper attention." (Gilman, 1886, as cited in Kuhn, 2008, p. 5)

By today's standards, this definition of the relationship would not be ideal. However, this statement does indicate the departure from the one-dimensional view that universities and their representatives should stand in loco parentis for the student, and nothing more (Morison, 1946; Rudolph, 1962; Veysey, 1965). Despite the movement away from that idea, it was evident that during this time in the history of higher education, the advisor-advisee relationship was primarily structured around curriculum and course selection (Kuhn, 2008). This structure of the advising relationship continued for some time, into the 20th century.

By the mid-20th century, as the needs of students changed, universities and

colleges began establishing formal mentorship or advising systems, which were designed to address more than the students' class choice (Cook, 2009; Hansen, 1917; Nidiffer, 2000; Veysey, 1965). More and more institutions were looking for ways to connect with students and ensure smooth transitions into higher education. This was the beginning of the retention initiative.

Cook (2009) stated that in the 1940s and 1950s faculty members were still the "primary academic advisors for students" (p. 18). In the 1960s, while faculty advising was still the primary delivery system for academic advising, two new delivery systems were introduced: the "centralized advising center and peer and para-professional advising" (Grites, 1979). Advising was also defined separately from counseling. According to Mueller (1961), the term *advising* was reserved for simply helping students with academic planning, and counseling was designated a more "extensive" endeavor.

This third era of advising was characterized by the inception of formal research on academic advising, the development of academic advising theory, and the implementation of multiple models of academic advising (Grites, 2013). By the mid-1950s, the need for academic advising had in increased significantly in response to the growth in student enrollment. However, with the additional advising responsibilities, compensation and the rewards for faculty were nearly nonexistent. This led many institutions to begin employing non-faculty, primary role advisors (Cook, 2009). However, in some instances this was not well received and caused tension between these new staff and faculty. Some felt that the role of advisor should not be separated from the role of faculty (MacIntosh, 1948; Roberston, 1958). The concern was that advising centers were primarily created in order to deal with growing student enrollment and faculty disinterest in advising, rather than in response to the students' best interests

(Cook, 2009).

This debate precipitated one of the first formal reports on academic advising in the United States (Robertson, 1958), which examined 20 campuses across the nation and determined the following: "advising a) should not be mandatory, b) is an extension of teaching and advisors should be teachers, c) needs a published, clear philosophy on each campus, and d) is a college responsibility" (Cook, 2009). The report also documented a growing trend of "mutual suspicion, mistrust, and hostility that existed between faculty and professional advisors" (Cook, 2009).

The demand for academic advising services only grew in the 1970s as the growth of community colleges, open admissions policies, and federal financial aid allowed more diverse student populations to have access to higher education (Cook, 2009). Although the demand was increasing, the delivery of the service varied. Academic advising began to take various shapes, based on the demographics of the institution, models of delivery for advising, theories of advising, and types of academic advisor (Kuhn, 2008). The expansion of services highlighted a need for more research and examination of the role of academic advising in higher education. In 1972, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education issued a report, which recommended that "emphasis should be placed on advising as an increasingly important aspect of higher education" (p. 57). Additionally, in 1972, two foundational theoretical pieces were written on the importance of academic advising in the life and success of college students (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972). Both articulated that students should play a more active role in the decision-making process, and that academic decisions should be made using a holistic view of the student's life and goals.

By the late 1970s, academic advising had become a uniquely defined act separate

from other aspects of student services. In 1979, NACADA was officially established with

429 charter members (Cook, 2009; Thurmond & Miller, 2006). NACADA members

continued to develop and publish work on theoretical models academic advising (Cook,

2009). Several national surveys explored the notion of academic advising, and in 1986,

the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) published

standards for a variety of student-centered programs and services within higher

education, which included separate standards for academic advising (Cook, 2009).

Advising research conducted in the late 20th and early 21st centuries continued to focus

on several aspects of advising, including the various models and styles of academic

advising, types of academic advisors, and how advising relates to student achievement

and retention (Cook, 2009).

The fourth era of academic advising saw practitioners working to formally

identify the role of advising in higher education. Advising professionals also worked to

demonstrate their value to external stakeholders (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). During

this era of increased student enrollment and diversity of students, focus was shifted to

efforts to increase students' retention and completion (McPhail, 2011).

Formal advising research expanded by borrowing theory and methodologies from

other established academic disciplines such as education, sociology, and philosophy

(Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). Researchers aimed to solidify the role of advising by

exploring it using three different approaches: clarification of the specific purposes of

academic advising, thorough examination of advising practice using diverse theoretical

perspectives, and intentional contributions to scholarship in academic advising (Himes &

Schulenberg, 2016). Although there was growth in research related to advising by

incorporating other fields, some believed that it was time for a distinctive theory of

advising to help legitimize the profession (Lowenstein, 2013; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008).

The growth of academic advising research in this era led to the creation of a formal concept of academic advising. Identified were three components of the practice of advising: pedagogy, curriculum, and student learning outcomes (NACADA, 2006). This desire by practitioners for an exclusive theory of practice also led to the creation of formal advisor competencies, which have been utilized as the foundation for future research into the practice of advisor development (Cate & Miller, 2015).

This era saw primary role advisors begin to engage actively in generating research (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010). Additionally, added emphasis on research-driven practice became a significant focus of professional development for academic advisors (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010). There was also consensus regarding professionalization, and that being an active researcher should be included in the duties of a primary role advisor (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010; Himes & Schulenberg, 2016; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2010).

Academic Advising Types, Models, and Approaches

Not all institutions of higher education are the same, nor are the needs of their students. Therefore, academic advising programs have varied widely from institution to institution (Crockett & Levitz, 1982). As advising was being established as a professional service, Crockett and Levitz (1982) identified several factors that should be considered when creating a model of advising: the needs of the student, current organizational structure, goals and outcomes, resources, and caseload (pp. 40–43). Winston et al. (1984) stated that most importantly, "academic advisors should want to advise, be trained to advise, and be evaluated for their work" (p. 24).

There are three primary components that distinguish advising models from one another. The first is to examine who is delivering the advising, whether it be classroom faculty or primary role advisors. Also, of importance is what organizational model of advising is used at a particular institution and what advising philosophies and practices are in place.

Academic Advising Types

Until the fourth era of academic advising, most institutions relied solely on faculty advising as the primary mode of academic advising delivery (Carstensen & Silberhorn, 1979; Crockett, 1982). However, as higher education evolved and became more complex, the faculty/mentor and student relationship changed and became more complex as well (Hemwell, 2008). Faculty were given increased responsibility, and curriculum changes made the task of advising more challenging. Issues such as lack of general university knowledge, lack of information regarding policies and procedures, and lack of compensation for advising duties are common considerations when examining the challenges of a faculty-based model for advising (Crockett, 1982). The decrease in the number of programs that relied exclusively on faculty members for academic advising may have been attributed to these issues (Hemwell, 2008).

However, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, more universities began to adopt a model of academic advising that included centralized or primary role advising. The 1998 ACT survey indicated a rise in popularity of primary role advisors in the late 1990s (King, 2008). According to the ACT National Survey (2004), within 2-year public, 2-year private, 4-year public, and 4-year private institutions, 64% of all primary advisors were full-time primary role advisors, 20% of primary advisors were faculty who had advising duties in addition to teaching and research responsibilities, and 5% were part-time

primary role advisors (Habley, 2004, p. 64). Within public 4-year institutions such as the

institution researched in Habley's (2004) study, 74% of primary advisors were full-time

primary role advisors, 16% of primary advisors were faculty who had advising duties in

addition to teaching and research responsibilities, 6% were part-time primary role

advisors, and 1% were para-primary role advisors such as graduate students or technical

assistants (p. 64).

The major advantages of primary role advisors are that they are free of agendas

and loyalty to an academic department, and more likely to have professional development

and training in academic advising practices (Crockett, 1982). However, Crockett noted

that primary role advisors may generally lack knowledge about academic content,

struggle with large advising loads, or lack knowledge about graduate and career

opportunities (p. 45).

Other types of advisors mentioned in related research include peer advisors (other

students) and para-primary role advisors (Crockett, 1982). These types of advisors did not

make up a significant percentage of academic advisors, and while they were found to

help alleviate advising load, these types of advisors may have struggled to provide

developmental advising and may not be trained to deal with complex problems (Crockett,

1982).

A 2011 national study of academic advising found that while full-time faculty and

primary role advisors are still the most common types of advising personnel, most types

of institutions listed at least five types of advisors utilized on their campus (Carlstrom,

2013a). These types of advisors included full-time faculty, adjunct (part-time) faculty,

full-time primary role advisors (now commonly referred to as professional advisors),

adjunct (part-time primary role advisors, paraprofessional advisors, graduate students,

and per advisors (Carlstrom, 2013a). Additionally, the results of this study indicated that 63% if participants listed belonging to multiple types of these roles. Data also suggested that primary role advisors were more common at medium and large public and private institutions, whereas full-time faculty advisors were more common at small and private institutions (Carlstrom, 2013a).

Organizational Models of Academic Advising

Advising models are defined as the organizational structures of academic advising within an institution (King, 2008). Habley (1988) was the first to develop a categorization detailing the academic advising patterns found in higher education institutions at the time. Following are the seven organizational models as he described them.

In the *faculty-only model*, all students are assigned to a classroom faculty member for advising. Most commonly, the assignment is made based on the student's major, but sometimes the students can be assigned randomly to level the advising loads of faculty in departments with fewer majors. Unlike other models, this model is unique as the organizational model and delivery system are congruent (Pardee, 2004). All other models may utilize a combination of faculty, professional advisors, or even peers.

The *supplementary advising model* assigns faculty advisors to all students, but an office assists the faculty in some way, such as training or serving as a referral source (King, 2008). In the *split advising model*, the initial responsibility of advising students is split between faculty in academic departments and professionals in an advising office. A main advising office/center is responsible for a particular population of students while faculty is responsible for another. The most common example of this model is where the advising office handles students who are undeclared or undecided, then transfers that responsibility to the academic department when (and if) a student declares a major. The

same model is often used with students who may have specific needs or circumstances, i.e., athletes, students with disabilities, etc.

In the *dual advising model*, there is a shared responsibility for advising each student. Faculty members provide input relating to a student's academic major or discipline, and advising office staff provide advisement that relates to a student's general education requirements, academic policies and procedures, scheduling of courses, and other administrative responsibilities. Typically, an advising administrator or supervisor manages the advising office staff that are also responsible for undecided students (King, 2008).

In the *total intake model*, the initial advising responsibilities for all incoming students are assigned to an advising office. This continues until a "culminating event" has occurred (Habley, 1983). These events vary by institution and can include the completion of a certain number of credits, maintaining good academic standing, fulfilling specific departmental or general education requirements, or completing a certain set of prerequisite courses needed for admission to a major. Once this event has occurred, the student is assigned to a faculty member based upon the student's major (King, 2008). The initial advising office may have varied responsibilities within the institution, such as academic advising policy or curricular instruction, but this varies.

In the *satellite model* academic advising is coordinated and administered by academic subunits on campus. This model involves advising offices that are maintained and overseen within subunits of an institution (i.e., individual colleges; King, 2008). Within this model, advising responsibilities may shift from advising offices to faculty, or they may be centralized within smaller academic units (King, 2008). Finally, in the *self-contained model*, "all advising from orientation to departure takes place in a centralized

unit" (King, 2008, p. 245). This model is the only truly centralized form of advisement for all students. According to the 2011 NACADA national survey, 28.6% of schools used this model (Carlstrom, 2013b).

Components of these models are still being used on many campuses. However, over time, additional factors have surfaced, complicating discussions about today's advising structures (Miller, 2012). These include changes in practice; use of new technologies (particularly in the current pandemic environment); advisee groups with differing needs; and increased accountability, specifically related to assessment of student learning outcomes and benchmarking.

Pardee (2004) expanded on the work done by Habley (1983) and further defined these models as decentralized, centralized, and shared. Pardee defined the decentralized model as one in which both the professional and faculty advisors are located in their own departments. The centralized model is one where both professional and faculty advisors are housed in one administrative or academic area. Finally, the shared model is one in which some professional advisors meet with students in a central advising center, while other faculty advise students based on the students major (Pardee, 2004). According to Miller (2012) the shared model is the most common model for 2-year institutions, and the model that the research site for this study utilizes.

Approaches to Academic Advising

Crookston (1972), a pioneer in advising research, first outlined a theory of developmental advising, which has largely shaped the field for the last 45 years. In his developmental model, he described a relationship where "the academic advisor and the student differently engage in a series of developmental tasks, the successful completion of which results in varying degrees of learning by both parties" (p. 13).

O'Banion (1972), another early theorist in advising research, asserted that the goal of academic advising was to "help the student choose a program of study which will serve him in the development of his total potential" (p. 12). To accomplish this, he outlined a process of advising which explored life goals, vocational goals, program choice, course choice, and scheduling choice. This process was to take place in that particular order, as to contextualize program and course choice in the holistic picture of "who and what" the student wanted to be.

These two theorists developed the foundation for most of the later research on academic advising. Much of the additional research on academic advising styles continued to focus on subcategories, based on a broadly defined developmental perspective. Inconsistencies in advising literature have caused an ongoing debate regarding the most effective approaches to promote effective academic advising strategies (Himes, 2014; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Advising approaches vary within higher education institutions (Himes, 2014).

Many institutions will promote a prescriptive, or "cafeteria" style of advisement, through which student inquiries are discussed in an authoritative manner (Donaldson et al., 2016). *Prescriptive advising* includes one-way communication in which the advisor assists the students with logistical details of course selection and registration (Anderson et al., 2014). A prescriptive style of advising in which the student is addressed in an assertive way might work for some students, but others might benefit from a different advising approach (Donaldson et al., 2016). Students who are involved in prescriptive advising may expect to utilize their academic advisor as a resource only for scheduling and feel satisfied with the advisor because the advisor meets the student's expectations (Donaldson et al., 2016).

Academic advising at the community college level is often prescriptive, and can be challenged by high student-advisor ratios, rushed advising sessions, fragmented and inconsistent delivery, conflicting information, long waiting periods for advising, lack of assigned advisors, and little planning or follow-up beyond the first semester (Darling, 2015). This study will address students' perceptions of these challenges in this environment.

Based on Tinto's theory (1975), advising support should be provided in an intensive way to assist students with life and career goal exploration in alignment with academic program choice to create a clear academic plan (Gordon & Steele, 2006; O'Banion, 2012). However, this ideal form of advising requires time and resources. Due to budget constraints and large student volume, a typical advising session at the community college may only last 10–15 minutes, and the topic of the session may be limited to developing a course schedule only for the upcoming semester (Jaggars & Fletcher, 2014). Considering that a higher percentage of students who enroll at community colleges are academically underprepared as compared to their peers at universities (McCabe, 2003), there is a clear need for community colleges to offer more robust student support through academic advising programs.

Developmental advisement is another approach, and it provides a basis for shared responsibility between the student and the academic advisor working together toward student achievement of academic goals (Donaldson et al., 2016). Developmental advising supports students in the journey to achieve their educational and personal goals through the utilization of college resources (Grites, 2013). A strong developmental academic advising plan can promote student interaction with faculty and staff to enhance student integration into the academic and social systems within a university (King, 1993).

Developmental advising as an approach has received positive feedback from students.

However, many institutions do not employ this method of advising due to limited

resources and the time-intensive professional development needed for academic advisor

training (Anderson et al., 2014).

    Intrusive advising has begun to appear more frequently in current research

(Alvarado & Olson, 2020). Using this approach, academic advisors encourage student

involvement in the advising process and may require academic advising ongoing

enrollment (Donaldson et al., 2016). Academic advisors use their training and counseling

skills to personalize each individual student advising appointment (Aiken-Wisniewski et

al., 2015).

    Intrusive advising allows a student to transition from focusing only on course

selection to engaging in dialogue about future academic planning and the resources

needed to finish an academic program (Donaldson et al., 2016). By adapting each

advising appointment to be specific to a student's needs, advisors can be proactive in

addressing barriers to success, rather than being part of a reactive process (Anderson et

al., 2014).

    Choosing one singular advising approach can become complicated by the many

roles an academic advisor may be required to perform. While most academic advising

scholars and practitioners generally agree that a developmental advising approach is most

beneficial for students, most acknowledge that the majority of their advising follows the

prescriptive approach (DeBard, 2004). Moreover, while students are more likely to more

favorably perceive a developmental advising approach, students most value the advisor's

ability to provide a personalized and efficient advising experience (Gravel, 2012; Harris,

2018). Students tend to value advising that provides accurate information regarding

important institutional information or degree requirements above all else (Smith & Allen, 2006). Some students have also reported the advising approach used by their advisor is less important than other variables, such as the depth of the advising relationship and the ability to develop a connection (Mottarella et al., 2004).

In an effort to foster a feeling of connectedness to an institution, intrusive advising proves to be one of the more effective advising approaches, as advisors can intervene at critical points in a student's educational progress (Rodgers et al., 2014). More recent practical and theoretical literature focuses on the increased racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of college students. Culturally relevant strategies are needed to address the needs of diverse populations such as adult learners, students of color, students with disabilities, and first-generation college students (Stebleton, 2011). However, research on the impact of these diverse advising approaches on student retention is not in step with the growth of diverse student populations.

Considering the variation in postsecondary institutions, the type of advisement delivery and approach should logically be different across institution types. Even within institutions that follow a shared model (Miller, 2012), it is likely that different individuals at the same institution may use different advising approaches given their diverse roles (Zarges et al., 2018). These varied roles, structures, and approaches make research on advising a challenging undertaking.

Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Academic Advising

Current research on students' perceptions and experiences of academic advising is well documented. Research on student perceptions and experiences of advising is important in order to understand how students value academic advising in the context of their academic experience (Barnes et al., 2010; Fielstein et al., 1992; Hsu & Bailey, 2007,

Lowe & Toney, 2000; Propp & Rhodes, 2006; Saving & Keim, 1998). Perceptions of positive academic advising experiences have been linked to increased student persistence (Baier et al., 2016).

Many student perception studies focus on the students' perceptions of a specific style of advising such as intrusive, prescriptive, or developmental advising (Hale et al., 2009; Lan & Williams, 2005; Smith, 2002; Weir et al., 2005). For example, the student preference for the developmental advising approach was initially documented in the Academic Advising Inventory created by Winston and Sandor (1984). However, in another survey, it was found that non-traditional students placed less value on developmental advising approaches than did traditional students (Fielstein et al., 1992). These results could indicate that the older student population had less of a desire for a connection and a relationship.

Braun and Mohammadali (2016) collected survey data from 89 undergraduates. They found that the type of advising preferred by students could be linked to students' inclination to be an active participant in the advising relationship. This meant that students who had less of a desire to participate may not have been as satisfied with developmental advising as students with a high propensity to participate. Findings from this study support the theory that advisors should be adaptable and able to modify their advising approach after getting to know students' needs (Braun & Mohammadali, 2016).

Students' perceptions of effective academic advising strategies include required meeting regularly throughout their college experience, rather than a one-time meeting for students at the beginning of their enrollment (Darling, 2015; Turner & Thompson, 2014; Vianden & Barlow, 2014). Unfortunately, advisors may be unable to monitor a student's progress toward meeting goals throughout the year due to a large number of advisees or

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extra work assignments (NACADA, 2017). Advisement sessions must take place consistently for students, regardless of how long they have been in attendance (Vianden & Barlow, 2014). An academic advisor's ability to monitor a student's success, personal development, and career decisions can positively shape a student's academic future (Lukosius et al., 2013).

A qualitative study of first-year community college students found that while some may have initially objected to being required to meet with an advisor, many ended up valuing being assigned an advisor with whom they had to meet (Donaldson et al., 2016). Participants expressed that they felt it helped them to develop connections with someone who had something in common with them, and that their advisors truly understood their needs and cared about their success. However, some students in this same study revealed that academic advisors did not offer any knowledge or availability of specific advisement tools. When entering college, students expect advisors to explain the resources available, the website and online software, tutoring resources, and other tools to assist them in assimilating to college.

A single-campus qualitative study of first-year students' experiences of advising (Walker et al., 2017) revealed four major themes: difficulty making the distinction between roles of high school guidance counselors and college academic advisors, advisor communication, student desire for a relationship, and advisor accessibility. The results of this study demonstrate students desire for "individual attention and personal experiences with their advisors" (p. 52). Additionally, the results of this study also suggest that students' perceptions of their advisor's informational knowledge (trusting that they are giving accurate information) are influenced by their advisor's communication skills and style. This study included students working with both primary role advisors working in

advising centers as well as non-academic support advisors (such as veteran and athletic support centers).

Although few studies have been done on students' experiences with specific advising models, Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) explored student experiences with a shared advising model using phenomenological methods. The results of this study highlighted the importance of building personalized relationships, establishing advisor trustworthiness, and apprehension of the unknown when changing advisors.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the theoretical framework guiding this study was expanded upon. Also described was a brief history of the four eras of academic advising in higher education (Cook, 2009; Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). The chapter defined the types of academic advisors, types of organizational models for academic advising, and academic advising approaches (Crockett, 1982; Habley, 1998; King, 2008). Literature relevant to students' perceptions and experiences of academic advising was also reviewed (Darling, 2015; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). There is a great deal of research pertaining to student satisfaction with advising, and that it is a valued service (Baier et al., 2016; Donaldson et al., 2016), but research is lacking on specifically how students' advising experiences impact their perception of overall institutional connectedness. For this reason, this study is relevant and will fill a gap in the literature.

A decrease in student retention rates can often be attributed to a lack of strong institutional relationships between students and academic advisors (Lukosius et al., 2013). If connections with students are not developed, higher education institutions are at risk of losing enrollment, which is costly not only to the institution but also to the student (Siekpe & Barksdale, 2013). As outlined in the previous chapters, the purpose of this study is to examine student perceptions of their academic advising experiences with a primary role advisor at a 2-year suburban community college. The advisement experiences of students can determine what constitutes effective academic advisement toward an overall goal of success and retention (Williamson et al., 2014).

Higher education institutions utilize different strategies to determine rates of student retention, emphasizing how academic advising can support retention (Darling, 2015). Regardless of what strategies are used to determine student retention, institutions are slow in improving their advising programs. Tinto (2012) stated in order to improve retention and graduation, an institution must establish conditions within its system to promote positive outcomes of advising and retention. According to Ellis (2014), an investigation into levels of advisement can help support which aspects of quality advising impact student persistence and success in higher education.

Research Questions

In this study, the following research questions were explored:

- What are students' perceptions of barriers to effective academic advising?

- What are students' perceptions of effective advising strategies or practices?

- How did students' interactions with their advisors impact their sense of connectedness to the college?

Rationale for Qualitative Research as Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this study (Creswell, 2014a). By gathering views and perspectives of the study's participants, research methodology can be combined with disciplinary expertise (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research is a commonly used method for understanding the meanings people have constructed, and how a person can make sense of experiences they have in the world (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research relies on the understanding of reasons and opinions of research participants, knowing these feelings can change with time (Lub, 2015).

Creswell (2014b) explained qualitative research as an approach to discovering and understanding the participants' meaning while interpreting the difficulty of a situation. Within the challenge of conducting original research, Yin (2016) emphasized three important objectives for qualitative research: transparency in the process, adhering to the evidence, and giving special attention to detail. Qualitative research involves evolving questions and procedures, data analysis to include themes, and the researcher interpreting the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014a).

Case Study Approach

A qualitative methodology using a case study approach was used to understand student perceptions of academic advisement as a part of their experience in higher education. The use of case studies enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how the study participants experienced advisement and their successive responses to such (Yin, 2016). Further, case study as a research practice allows scholars to "capture various nuances, patterns, and more latent elements that other research approaches might overlook" (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 171).

In *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Lune and Berg (2017)

detailed two key components regarding the case study approach. This includes viewing the case from various angles to generate a deeper and more comprehensive meaning, guiding the research based upon the principle of "what is this a case of?" (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 171). They further highlighted that each case study addresses a larger phenomenon that is important for the researcher to keep in in mind when conducting a case study. The larger phenomenon in this study is student retention and the factors that connect students to their institutions.

For this study, I observed and interviewed six subjects, over a 3-week period during the summer of 2021. My focus was to understand students' perceptions of effective advising strategies, as well as weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. This provided me with an in-depth look into advising perceptions from several viewpoints, the most important being the participants' lived experiences. The major advantage to using cases studies is that the researcher can glean a level of detail and information from the subject that may not be available through other approaches (Lune & Berg, 2017).

Research Site

The research was conducted at a professional advising office within a 2-year suburban community college in the Northeast. The college offers over 70 associate degree and certificate programs and has approximately 13,000 students enrolled as per Fall 2020 data. The most popular major is humanities and social science. In AY 2017–2018, 1,378 students graduated with a humanities and social science degree, which represented 44.19% of the total graduates. According to the Carnegie classification, the undergraduate setting for this institution is described as: Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-High Traditional. This study was limited to the students who

were advised by a member of the professional advising staff, rather than a faculty advisor.

The advising model used at the institution is a shared advising model. This model is the most common delivery mode for advising. It involves some students meeting with advisors in a centralized advising office and other students meeting in decentralized academic units (Pardee, 2004). At this institution, students with declared majors are advised by faculty members from their respective departments, while liberal arts and undecided students are advised by a member of the professional advising staff in a centralized advising office.

At the time of this study, the advising center employed six full-time advisors. All six advisors hold degrees in disciplines such as higher education, counseling, or a related field. The full-time staff is supplemented with part-time advisors and faculty advisors during peak periods. There is also a director who oversees the operation. Due to the high student volume and the ratio of students to advisors, services are provided on a walk-in basis, and caseloads are not assigned.

The Institutional Review Board at the research site was presented with the proposed study and gave written consent. Since I am also the director of the advising office, a bias in the research setting may be present. To address this, before each interview and observation, it was made clear to the participants that my role in the study was entirely unrelated to my role as an advising administrator, and open and honest communication was encouraged throughout the process.

Population and Sample

When selecting the study participants, the goal in finding participants is to identify a group who all had a similar experience with the phenomenon being researched

(Cresswell, 2014a, p. 206). Therefore, the selection of the sample for this research study was purposeful, and consisted of six students. To be eligible to participate, these six students needed to be enrolled as degree-seeking students and have completed at least two semesters, following Creswell's (2014a) suggestion of obtaining a heterogeneous group as participants. They also must have had at least one prior experience with a professional academic advisor.

In addition, this study focused only on students who were liberal arts majors. Since the research site utilizes a shared advising model, students who are in discrete programs are primarily advised by their academic departments. Students who are in the liberal arts programs are advised by the members of the professional advisement staff, or primary role advisors. Research also has indicated that for students who have not yet decided upon a major as they transition from high school to college, academic advisors serve as primary connections to the institution. The relationship between the academic advisor and the student facilitates these students' satisfaction, success, and retention (Alexitch, 2002; Habley & Morales, 1998; Yarbrough, 2002).

Participants in this study had a GPA ranging from 2.1–3.2. Students who were underperforming (lower than 2.0) would likely be advised by another office and would not have had experience interacting with the professional advising staff. Students who have a GPA higher than 3.2 may be considered high performing, and therefore perceive themselves as self-sufficient, possibly negating the need for assistance with academic planning (Griffin, 2006).

These criteria were important for this study's sample because the study focused on the perceptions of students' academic advisement experiences, including any perceived barriers to effective advisement, and also positive strategies that were utilized.

By interviewing participants who met the above outlined criteria, many themes became evident in this context.

However, in order to recruit participants for this study, student data first needed to be gathered. As of March 2020, with the move to remote services due to COVID-19, all professional advising interactions have been tracked. Any student who had a meeting with a member of the professional advising staff since March 2020 has had their name, student ID number, date of the interaction, and advisor name entered on a spreadsheet.

To determine which students should be contacted with a request to participate in the study, I first needed to determine which students on this cumulative spreadsheet met the criteria. First, all the data on the spreadsheet were shared with a member of Information Technology Services (ITS) at the research site, with a request to have the data cross-referenced with registration information. Any student who was already registered for the upcoming semester was excluded. The goal was to conduct research and collect data in preparation for the upcoming term. If students were already registered, then it was implied that their current advising needs were met.

ITS was also asked to remove any student who had completed only one semester. The research study aimed to examine students' perceptions of their advising experiences, which many do not have until they are registering for their second semester. At the research site, many new freshmen have their schedule made for them, so the opportunity to experience advisement is not the same for a new incoming student and a continuing student. This is why the criterion of completing two semesters was important to the design of the study, although the total number of credits earned was not. ITS was also asked to exclude any students who were not liberal arts majors, and who had a GPA outside the identified range of 2.1–3.2.

Once the cumulative list was refined, the recruiting process began using a purposeful sampling approach. Qualitative research relies on non-random sampling techniques because these techniques provide deep information about the subjects (Maxwell, 2013). Patton (1990) described the benefits of purposeful sampling in this way:

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 169)

To achieve the goal of recruiting participants, an email was sent to all advisees who utilized the services of a full-time professional advisor, at least once, between April 2020 and April 2021, who were not yet registered for Fall 2021 courses. This email gave a brief description of the study and asked these advisees to indicate their interest in and willingness to participate in a research study by submitting a Google Form. This form asked for basic information, such as name, student ID, major, how many credits have been completed to date, and any relevant demographic information. This made it easier to sort through the students who were willing to participate, since the information was recorded in a spreadsheet format.

The email was sent to 422 students, who had not yet registered for the Fall 2021 semester. Of the 422 students, 32 students filled out the Google Form indicating an interest in participating in the study. Academic records of the 32 prospective subjects were then reviewed to confirm eligibility. Two students were excluded from the next phase because they had registered for Fall 2021 courses already, after the data had been

extracted. A follow-up communication was sent to the remaining 30 applicants who expressed interest, explaining the study in detail. Also included was a link to an appointment calendar to schedule a meeting with one of the six professional advisors. Once the six appointments were full, the remaining 24 students were notified via email that the study was closed, but that the advisement office would still be happy to assist. Instructions on how to obtain assistance were included in that communication.

Prior to the research process beginning, all necessary consent forms were distributed to the students and signed by all participants (Appendix C). This consent form made clear that participation in this study was voluntary. Subjects had the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews, subjects had the right to skip or not answer any questions they preferred not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal did not affect the subject's grades or academic standing. It was also made clear that subjects would not receive compensation for their participation in this study.

Every effort was made to ensure the confidentiality of all participants in this study. No real names were used in any quotations or reports of the findings. Pseudonyms were used, and any obscure or identifying details were omitted. All audio files and transcripts were kept safely in a secured file on a password-protected computer to which only I had the login credentials. Once the data were fully analyzed, audio files were deleted.

There were potential biases when using this type of purposeful sampling to select participants. Response bias, in which the participants may feel pressured or the need to give responses that they believe would be preferable to the researcher, was a possibility. It was also feasible that students who volunteered to participate in this study could have been motivated to share their experiences because they may have been either extremely

satisfied or extremely dissatisfied with the advising at the institution. To address these potential biases, interview questions were designed to be open-ended, to prevent the participant from simply agreeing or disagreeing, and to guide him or her to provide truthful answers.

Data Collection

When conducting case study research, it is important that multiple data sources are used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, collected data include recorded observations of individual advising sessions and subsequent recorded interviews with the six research participants. In addition, documents and artifacts such as follow-up email communication between the student and advisor, and notes made in the students' degree audits were reviewed and examined for thematic connections.

Observations

As the first part of the data collection process, with student and advisor permission, observations of advisement sessions within a professional advisement setting were conducted. Each subject met with one of the six full-time professional advisors employed at the research site on a specified date and time of both parties' choosing. The advising sessions were conducted via Zoom, with permission, so that they could be recorded for me to study. The transcription feature in Zoom was utilized to convert the audio file to text.

The purpose of each advisement meeting was to discuss Fall 2021 course selection. When reviewing the content of the advisement meetings, I focused on the approach of each advisor and the content of the advising session, as well as the varying needs of the students throughout the advisement meetings. In order for me to remain unbiased, I practiced reflexivity to ensure that any professional expertise did not

influence the observations. Reflexivity refers to acknowledging one's role in the research.

A qualitative researcher is part of the research process, and the researcher's prior

experiences, assumptions, and beliefs will influence the research process. Excluding any

students that have had contact with me is another way to prevent bias. This was addressed

in the initial review of student records, since every previous student and advisor

interaction is tracked and recorded.

Interviews

Interview data were important for this study in order to obtain in-depth

information about participants' experiences and perceptions of their academic advising

experiences. Maxwell (2013) concluded that interviews allow the researcher to collect

rich data that are detailed and offer a full and revealing picture of what has transpired.

After the observations were conducted, I contacted the six participants via email,

with a link to my appointment calendar, to schedule follow-up interviews. Each student

selected a date and time, and a Zoom link was sent in advance of the meeting. The semi-

structured interviews were recorded using Zoom, with the consent of the participant, so

that I could refer to the content. The transcription feature in Zoom was also utilized to

convert the audio file to text. The interviews varied in length from 30–45 minutes. The

participants were asked questions related, but not limited, to: their academic advisement

and other faculty/staff experiences in the college environment; expectations and lived

experiences of support systems in college; perceived barriers and roadblocks to success;

and the impact of advising on their sense of belonging to the institution. Each participant

was interviewed one time without a need for a follow-up meeting. The interview

questions are attached (Appendix D); however, these were designed to be semi-structured

in order to lead the conversation. I used all questions as listed and in the same order, but

spent more time on some questions than others with each participant, based on their

initial responses.

Documents and Artifacts

The collection of documents and data took place during the same time frame as

interviews and observations. The collection of documents and artifacts was analyzed and

interpreted, as the documents collected help to reveal additional information and support

other data collected (Saldaña, 2016). The artifacts used for this study were follow-up

summary emails sent by all six professional advisors to their advisees and notes entered

into the student's degree audit after the advisement meeting. The emails provided

information about institutional and departmental policies and procedures and suggested

academic plans for students. The notes gave insight as to the advisor's style and

approach, which were expected to vary, and did. Additionally, the advisement handbook

and advisement website available to all students at the research site were used as artifacts

in this study.

Data Analysis

As Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized, data analysis is much more than

analyzing text and data; it includes organization of data, conducting read-throughs,

identifying themes, showing data, and interpreting data. Miles et al. (2014) recommended

to concurrently collect and analyze the data, as doing so helps the researcher to cycle

back and forth between new data and data previously collected and analyzed. Gibbs

(2007) also encouraged the use of this process, as it forces the researcher to analyze the

data while remaining close to it. Interpretation of qualitative data in this study involved

the conversion of interviews and observations from audio to textual form, using the

transcription feature in Zoom. All text files were then uploaded into Dedoose, a coding

software program, to assist with organization of data.

Upon completion of the collection phase, continuous analysis of the data was done and I began to code the data. In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes or "translates" data. Interpreted meaning is assigned to the data for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes (Vogt et al., 2014, p. 13).

This process consisted of coding the data collected from the interviews, observations, and artifacts. In this research study there were multiple cycles of coding. According to Miles et al. (2014), first cycle coding involves assigning initial codes to "chunks of data" (p. 73). During this cycle, descriptive coding was applied. Miles et al. described descriptive coding as assigning "labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase, the basic topic of a passage. These eventually provide an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing" (p. 73).

The second cycle of coding involved looking at the data again and working with results from the first cycle coding to identify broader thematic connections and patterns. During this next cycle, the data were coded until exhaustion, with codes turned into themes and subthemes. The code book that was developed was also informed by the research questions, review of related literature, and my professional expertise in the field. Themes help to describe each participant experience, and how the data from each case related to the research questions. The data were analyzed to search for categories and specific themes within the data, also referred to as thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2016). The five themes that emerged and were examined are: access to a primary role advisor, consistency of advisement service, depth of advisor knowledge, what students want in an advising experience, and impact on connectedness to the institution.

To maintain the trustworthiness of the data, I used triangulation, member checking, and peer review. When identifying initial themes, I triangulated by comparing transcripts of the observations, one-on-one interviews, and artifacts collected, i.e., notes entered in the student record and follow-up emails sent to students by the advisor. I member checked the data with participants by emailing each participant transcripts of their interviews, which were generated using the transcription feature in Zoom. I asked if they had any feedback and if they felt the interview accurately represented their views and feelings. Three participants responded. All stated that they felt the interview was an accurate representation of our conversation. Additionally, throughout data analysis and initial theme development, I reviewed initial themes with the professional advisors who participated in the observations to ensure that the emerging themes matched the data presented.

Trustworthiness of the Design

Reliability and validity are concepts used to evaluate the quality of research. They indicate how well a method, technique, or test can be measured. Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure, and validity refers to the accuracy of a measure. Unlike quantitative researchers who apply statistical methods for establishing validity and reliability of research findings, qualitative researchers aim to design and incorporate methodological strategies to ensure the "trustworthiness" of the findings (Sandelowski, 1993). Creswell and Poth (2018) stressed the importance of using multiple data sources, which include interviews, observations, field notes, documents, and artifacts, to help establish trustworthiness, reliability, and validity.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I relied on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 300).

Credibility is defined as an accurate representation of the "truth" as defined by the participants. This form of trustworthiness requires recognizing that qualitative researchers do not look for a singular truth (or *Truth* with a capital "T") but strive to accurately reflect the truths (or *truth* with a lower case "t") as expressed by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 295). In this study, credibility was ensured by using triangulation, which consisted of my review of transcripts of the observations, one-on-one interviews, and artifacts. Also used to establish trustworthiness were peer debriefing and member checking.

Role of the Researcher

It was also made clear to participants that for the purposes of this study, my role as the researcher was unrelated to my professional role. Creswell (2018) emphasized the importance of researchers being aware of their own values, ideals, and biases, as they can influence the study's findings and be viewed as a limitation. With this in mind, it was important for me to acknowledge any personal beliefs and biases on the basis of experience as a professional academic advisor.

There are many biases that were important for me to acknowledge and work to mitigate throughout the course of the study. For the past two decades, my professional life has centered on providing students with access to quality academic advisement. Over the course of my career, I have developed strong feelings about the aspects of advisement that should be most prioritized, valued, and delivered. My personal feelings have not always aligned with what my institution has been able to provide, due to limited resources, organizational challenges, and budgetary constraints. With that in mind during data collection, I was very careful to not lead the students to any particular conclusions about their experiences with our services, by keeping the questions open ended. Additionally,

the professional staff conducting the advisement meetings for observational purposes were reassured that in no way would this impact their performance assessment. As the director of the Advisement Office, I have a very open and honest relationship with all the staff members who directly report to me. There is a level of trust that is present, and it is an important part of the team dynamic. I was able to collect data for this study in a very authentic way because of this trust. As I moved through the process of data collection and analysis, I kept a log of the thoughts that came to mind about my interactions with students, and the answers they gave to my questions. I also made notes during the observation process about aspects that I felt positively about, and that I would like to see incorporated into our advisement work in general. I connected with a colleague in an adjacent student service department who had also conducted qualitative research to talk about my experiences. It was reassuring to know that she also encountered inherent biases in her research and that this is a normal part of the human component of the research process.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the design of the study was explained, providing a rationale for qualitative research using a case-study approach. Also described were the research site and participant selection. A review of data collection procedures and data analysis procedures to be employed were also examined. Additionally, the establishing of trustworthiness of the data was discussed through variety of methods, such as triangulating data, peer review, and member checking. Finally, any known limitations were addressed. The subsequent findings and recommended further research are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, I reintroduce the purpose and methodology of the study. I then present an overview of each participant's experience and identify and discuss five themes, which emerged from the study.

The research was conducted at a professional advising office within a 2-year suburban community college in the Northeast. The college offers over 70 associate and certificate programs and has approximately 13,000 students enrolled as per Fall 2020 data. The most popular major is humanities and social science. In AY 2017–2018, 1,378 students graduated with a humanities and social science degree, which represented 44.19% of the total graduates. According to the Carnegie classification, the undergraduate setting for this institution is described as: Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-High Traditional. This study was limited to the students who were advised by a member of the professional advising staff, rather than a faculty advisor.

At the time of this study, the advising center employed six full-time advisors. All six advisors hold degrees in disciplines such as higher education, counseling, or a related field. The full-time staff is supplemented with part-time advisors and faculty advisors during peak periods. There is also a director who oversees the operation. Due to the high student volume and the ratio of students to advisors, services are provided on a walk-in basis and caseloads are not assigned.

This qualitative study used a case study approach to explore and address its research questions. I collected data through a series of observations and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with six participants who were enrolled as liberal arts students at the research site. All participants had completed at least two semesters, had a GPA ranging from 2.1 to 3.2, and had at least one prior experience with a professional

academic advisor. Participants were asked to self-identify their age, gender, and

race/ethnicity (Table 1). All names used are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Major	Credits
Kennt	19	male	White	liberal arts	25
Kiara	20	female	Latina	liberal arts	39
Dina	20	female	Latina	liberal arts	20
Danley	21	male	African American	liberal arts	31
Tim	24	male	White	liberal arts	48
Brittany	23	female	African American	liberal arts	38

Note. Participants were asked to self-identify their demographic information using any

terms.

Participants

Kennt is a 19-year-old white male who has worked with two different advisors

during his time as a student thus far. He expressed having a quality experience with his

first advisor, who knew a lot about course options and helped to explain the purpose of a

liberal arts education. However, he shared that he had a hard time figuring out the process

to connect with an advisor. His second advisement interaction was not as positive. He

expressed that he wished advisors would "try to get to know the students as people a little

bit better, and following up and asking more in-depth questions about the student. Not

just about the semester and what classes to take."

He also said he felt like the conversation was rushed, but did acknowledge that he

registered late, and that it was a very busy time in the office. He felt his specific planning

questions were never addressed, because there was no time to focus on anything beyond

the upcoming semester. He stated that the meeting he had with the advisor as part of this

study was the best he had so far, due to the knowledge that the advisor had and the variety of questions he was asked. He also said that he enjoyed this advising session because it was virtual, and that it was an actual appointment, rather than walking in and having to wait for someone.

When asked about his ideal advising scenario, he expressed that he wanted an advisor who seemed to know his goals and helped him make choices based on those goals and his interests. He said he wanted someone who "cared about how he was doing in general, not just in school." He also shared that he would like more of a relationship with one advisor, rather than having to see a different person every time, but that he understands the demands on the advisement office, and that at this school, that just wasn't possible.

Kiara is a 20-year-old Latina female. She also had seen two different advisors prior to the research being conducted and the advisement meeting recorded. She explained that she was very much undecided on her career path when she first entered college and said that the advisor she met with to help her as a new student was able to explain her options. However, the second advisor she met with was not as knowledgeable, and she wished that she could have talked to the same person the second time, saying that "it was kind of annoying to have to tell my story all over again."

In the conversations with her about advising, she highlighted the importance of the advisor being knowledgeable and having good communication and listening skills. She mentioned wanting her advisor to be able to talk about specific faculty and whether or not they were liked by students, but that the advisor said it wasn't part of their responsibilities. A self-described "shy person," she really liked the option to communicate through email and not having to meet someone in person every time she

had a question, especially during COVID. She liked that she received communications about events on campus and opportunities for clubs, even though she wasn't sure she would take advantage.

Dina is a 20-year-old Latina female. She felt good about her overall advising experiences at the time the study was conducted. She had one person she had seen at the advising office more than once, though she met with someone different in her first semester. She said she always left the advisement office feeling confident and described the advisor she had seen more than once as "a very warm person and really knew his stuff." She liked when he confirmed she was on track, and she said that he seemed very accessible via email, but wasn't always free if she just dropped in to the advising office. She also said that she thinks she just "got lucky," because most of the time, students wind up seeing a different advisor each time.

What she said was most helpful about advising was help with developing a plan that allowed her to complete her requirements in preparation for transfer to another college, while still maintaining balance with her outside responsibilities. She is a working student who helps contribute to a multi-generational household, and she expressed feeling overwhelmed at times about the work-life balance. She described one stressful experience, in her first semester, where she registered for a class and was then told by financial aid that it didn't meet a requirement for her degree. She had to go back and forth between offices to get it resolved, but despite this, it did not seem to impact her overall positive feelings about advising. She said that while the situation frustrated her at first, "it only happened once and it was a miscommunication, no big deal."

She also said that she felt accepted, included, and supported by the college and that her involvement with student activities helped her to feel like she was a part of the

community. She did say that she wished there were more activities in the evening, because her job makes it difficult to participate.

Danley is a 21-year-old Afro-American male. He transferred from another local college and was working on pre-requisites to be eligible to apply to the nursing program. Regarding his previous advising experiences, he described one advisor as very "technical" and stated that this advisor just gave him a list of classes without asking him any questions. Danley wished that the advisor had taken took a little bit of time to get to know him, but that he realized the "guy was in a rush" because the office was very busy. However, he said that he really liked the person that he worked with prior to the research study and met with her more than once. He described her as friendly, welcoming, and knowledgeable. He stated that, "she was really nice and made me feel comfortable. She knew about all of the requirements I needed to apply to nursing, not just a list of classes."

He also emphasized that this advisor in particular asked how he was doing and that he really liked the "personal touch" the advisor brought to their conversation. He said they talked a lot about coursework and planning, but not much about his plans after completing his associate degree. He said that while he knows how busy advisors can be, he wished that they made a little more time to talk about future goals and career planning in the meetings, even if they are brief.

Tim is a 24-year-old White male. He had taken a break from college for a while to explore other options after "struggling" the first time he attended, but is now back and entering his final semester. He described his previous advising experiences as "fine," but that they might not have been helpful because he wasn't in the right frame of mind. When he attended previously, he felt very lost about the purpose for being enrolled. Even though the advisors he met with were "nice and supportive," he didn't feel connected to

the college at all, so advisement wasn't going to help; in fact, he said "nothing would have helped." He explained that he "just wasn't ready to be a college student and needed to go work for a while to figure out if school was for him."

Upon returning, he was most pleased with advisor he met with as part of the research study and said he was happy he agreed to participate. He stated that she went over very thoroughly which courses were still needed to complete his degree, and emailed a summary the meeting, which was helpful to refer to if he wanted to make changes to his schedule. He expressed having regrets about not taking advantage of the resources and services available to him when he attended previously. He felt that if he had, he might be clearer about his next academic steps after completing the associate degree.

Brittany is a 23-year-old African American female. In previous semesters, she had struggled while attempting to complete challenging science courses needed to apply to a competitive program. Her focus for the upcoming semester was to repeat classes so that she could bring up her GPA. She shared that her advising experiences had always been positive, and that she also found it helpful to connect with faculty members, especially in her area of interest, which is biology. She said both her professional advisor and faculty meetings always makes her feel supported, even in the short amount of time she has with advisors and faculty. She described one professional advisement interaction in particular by stating that her advisor, "wants to engage and listen and ask questions about me, so that's how I feel connected, at least how she's made me connected with the college. She cares about making sure I know which classes to take going forward, but she's also interested in my experience with the classes that I've already taken, so it's nice."

She also described not feeling like she could accomplish her goals without an advisor to guide her through the process. She talked about wishing that her advising sessions did not have to happen in a cubicle but that her advisor made the space feel and welcoming. When talking about ideal advising, she placed a lot of the responsibility on student and how important it is to be ready for the session. She also said that all advisors should treat the students like a "person" and not just a number. She knows how busy they can be, but she thinks it's important to always keep that in mind, even if a relationship can't be developed.

RQ1: What Are Students' Perceptions of Barriers to Effective Academic Advising?

Theme 1: Access to a Primary Role Advisor

One of the major themes discussed by participants was access to advisors. Participants discussed this theme in a variety of ways, and several sub-themes, or questions, emerged through their discussion: ease of understanding the process of meeting with an advisor, length of wait time to see an advisor, duration of actual advisement meeting, and use of virtual advising.

The ways students knew about advising services and accessed their advisors was an important discussion point. During the interviews, many students expressed initial confusion about how to meet with an advisor. There was general sense of frustration as new students, about not being clear on what steps needed to be taken. Kennt said that in his first semester,

> no one communicated, and it was like really confusing to figure out what to do.
> They kept telling me to check my email, but nothing was there. Eventually, I
> called the office and they just told me to come in.

Kiara had a similar experience as a new student and said,

they just like expect you to know what to do. They kept telling me to check my

portal, but I didn't even know what that meant. I eventually got an email telling

me what the walk-in hours of the office were, but it would have great if there was

like more info on the website or something.

Brittany relied on her information network to find out where she should go to meet with

an advisor as a new student. She said,

since I had friends that also attended and were older than me, I asked them what I

was supposed to do. They told me I could just look at my degree requirements and

register, but as a new student that seemed too hard. I wanted to talk to someone.

Another common sub-theme that participants expressed feelings about was how

long they had to wait to see an advisor when using the face-to-face walk-in services.

Danley felt that the size of the school and the number of students each advisor was

responsible for had a negative impact on being able to see someone easily:

I understand that a community college is a big school and there are a lot of

students who need help. But having so few advisors and so many students makes

it frustrating. I know they have a lot to manage, but when you are sitting here

waiting for 30, 45 minutes, you are already off to a bad start and frustrated.

Kennt agreed that having to wait for an advisor had a negative impact on his

advising experience and said that

if you go when they are really busy, like right when the semester is about to start,

it can take forever. So, you better be prepared to wait. Plus, the building is always

so crowded, and the ticketing system is confusing, so you really have to watch the

screen for your number to be called.

Additionally, Dina equated her long wait times with a staffing problem and stated,

I mean, part of that I think is the fact they're understaffed, they got to be. I've had, at times, where I couldn't actually be seen by an advisor because they were so busy, and I had to leave to go to class.

Overall, participants' feelings about how long it took to see their advisor from the time they had their meeting were mostly negative.

Another area where participants talked about their perceived access to their advisor was in how long their actual meetings were. In my conversations with the participants, nearly every participant expressed feeling rushed at least once in their conversations. Many participants felt the scheduled meeting time was too short for the discussion they wished they could have with their advisor. Tim felt that his meetings should have been longer:

I wish the sessions were longer. I understand that there's a ton of people that are trying to get help. I just would love if they would ask me about me, my goals and stuff, ya know? Maybe that would have helped me when I was first a student here back in the day. Now it doesn't matter so much since I am graduating, but like asking the important questions, instead of, "Here are the classes you should take next semester?" Maybe that would have kept me on track, I don't know.

Kennt agreed and felt that the short meeting length because of student demand and being understaffed. He said, "basically you get 20 minutes tops, because I think all of the advisors are really busy, which can make it frustrating. You better come prepared your top questions or you probably won't get them all answered." Additionally, Dina also felt that her meetings were too short and that the experience felt rushed and left her feeling dissatisfied. She said "the meetings aren't actually scheduled because you just walk in and wait, but you can definitely tell that they are just trying to get you in and out. There's

no real time for deep discussion or anything."

Dina expressed that even though the advisement interactions were always friendly, the limited time she got to spend in the meeting had a negative impact on her experience.

Like all of the advisors there are nice, but I feel like part of the job is to not get to know the students because they know they don't have the time, where it should be the exact opposite. You can also tell that they are rushing because they are overwhelmed, which isn't fair to them or the students.

During the Zoom advisement meetings observations, students were happy that an appointment was an option as a study participant, but they also went on to talk about their prior experiences with advisor access, which were not as positive. Dina said "this is so nice that I got to actually set an appointment. All the times before I would have to just go and wait, and you never knew how long it would take, so this is great." Kennt also thanked the advisor and said, "I appreciate you sending the Zoom link. I wrote down some questions knowing we would have 30 minutes. In the past, I never knew how much time the advisor would give me and always felt kind of rushed."

Finally, students were provided with access to the "Advisement and Registration Guide for Liberal Arts Students" as one of their pre-advisement tools. While this resource addresses how to access an advisor, the instructions provided are to contact the advisement office via email, with no reference to in-person or Zoom availability. The directory does refer to the physical location of the advisement office; however, no mention is made of multiple modalities to receive assistance. This could also be perceived as a barrier to receiving advisement services.

Theme 2: Consistency of Advisement Service

A second theme that arose through the study was the theme of advisor

consistency. As mentioned previously, all subjects selected for the study were liberal arts

majors. Their only advisement interactions at the time of the study had been with primary

role advisors. Those services were provided on a walk-in basis, and students would wait

to see the next available advisor. So, if a participant saw the same advisor during each

visit, it was by chance, or if the person they requested happened to be free at the time the

student came into the office. The idea of seeing a different advisor each time was an issue

for students, and all had something negative to share about the theme of advisor

consistency.

All participants stated that having a relationship with an advisor and being able to

get to know the person would have made their experience better. Most participants

assumed that was how it would be, based on their high school experiences, and were

surprised to learn that services were not provided in that manner. All participants had a

similar experience and were clear that this was a barrier to effective advisement.

Dina said, "it would be so much easier to talk to someone she knew" and felt that

"if your advisor knows you . . . it's easier to talk to them rather than a complete stranger.

It's just hard with someone different each time." She also went on to talk about how the

lack of advisement connection was disappointing because of her previous experience, and

that it motivated her to take a more active role in her own college education:

> In high school, I was really close with my counselor. I mean she had lots of kids
>
> to deal with so it wasn't like I spent a ton of time with her, but I always knew she
>
> was there. She never made me feel like I was annoying or like I was taking up too
>
> much of her time. I guess I kind of assumed that college would be the same.

When I realized that I was pretty much on my own, it made me miss the

relationship I had with Ms. King. It also made me realize that I better get on top

of my own stuff because no one was going to do it for me.

Kiara also said she felt like having the same advisor would have added stability to

her experience and expressed that she hoped her advisor would be:

Someone I could get to know, and who would know me and my life. I don't need

to be their friend, but it is annoying to tell my story over and over to different

people. Most of the time it was just all business about classes and stuff. But I have

so much going on in my life, that it would have been nice to have an advisor that

knows the whole picture. Like just because I didn't do well in a class doesn't

mean I am not a good student. It is hard doing it all and a little more support

would have been good.

Brittany said she felt like having the same advisor would help her comfortable

and would help her focus on doing well in her courses:

I think having that relationship would help me come up with some kind of formal

plan. Knowing that someone understands my goals would make me more secure

in the path I was on. Instead of, "OK, I am taking this class, does it count toward

my degree? Can I transfer it to another school?" Instead of having those worries I

would know that my advisor looked out for my best interests and cared about my

success.

Kennt also expressed frustration about not getting the chance to work with one

advisor the whole time. He said that he wished he could have and expressed that:

If someone got to know me a little bit, even just briefly, it would have made me

feel like I had someone to go to, instead of just randomly getting whoever was

free when I went to the office. It made me not want to go for help, because I knew

I would be starting over with a new person each time. That kind of office should

be welcoming, especially when you are talking about a brand-new freshman.

Tim also expressed that the lack of assigned advisors prevented him from taking

advantage of the service as much as he should have. He also felt that the inconsistency

may have contributed to the academic difficulties he experiences when he first attended:

I haven't really had the best luck with advisors. Every time I came to talk to

someone it was a different person. Maybe if I could have seen the same person

each time, it would have made a difference for me when I first came here years

ago. I don't know, like maybe I would have felt like I had some guidance, but I

didn't. I was pretty much on my own. Now that I am getting ready to graduate, I

really see how important this would have been for me. Maybe not all students

need that, but for me, just knowing who the person is would have made a

difference. I would have been more willing to ask for help.

Participants who talked about their frustration with seeing a different advisor each

time had suggestions on ways to improve the process. If students are not going to be

assigned one advisor, then there should be better communication within the department.

There was a suggestion about improving the notetaking process, so that no matter who is

seeing the student, they could get some background on the previous visits. Also, they

suggested having the option to request seeing the same advisor during slow periods of the

year. It was made clear during the interview process that this was an important topic for

all of the participants.

In addition to the interview data, the topic of advisor consistency was raised

during the advisement meetings I observed. At the conclusion of three of the Zoom

meetings, the sentiment from the students was similar, requesting a repeat conversation, if necessary. All three advisors said yes, but this speaks to the larger issue of advisor consistency. Developing a relationship with an advisor should not be left to chance or based on participation in a research study.

Theme 3: Advisor Content Knowledge

A third theme that emerged when talking with participants was the depth and variety of knowledge they wanted from their academic advisor. This preferred knowledge base emerged into two different categories: knowledge about academics and knowledge about careers and professions.

A few participants expressed that they wished their advisors could talk more in-depth with them about their area of study, and not just about picking classes for the upcoming semester. The students who participated in this study were all liberal arts majors, which means they did not have an academic department responsible for their advisement, since they were not in a discrete program. However, most of the participants did have an idea of what major they were interested in or what career path they were heading toward. In Kiara's case, it took her a while to figure out what she wanted to study, and she wished that the advisors had more knowledge about the specific field:

> It would be nice if the advisors knew more than just what classes are needed for each program. I need to know things like do I have a chance to get in? What grades do I need to get accepted? Everything is all over the place, like if you need answers to questions other than the classes you need to graduate, you have to go to another office.

Danley shared Kiara's feelings, for the most part. As a student interested in nursing, he said that some of his earlier advising interactions left him needing more

information, and that he was basically just handed a list of classes. He said, "when I first got here from my other college, I was really confused about the process of applying to nursing." He stated that "although the advisor was nice, I had to do most of the research myself. I feel like they didn't know much more than what classes were needed."

Kiara felt that none of the advisors she worked with knew enough about the classes to answer her questions. She said, "the advisors were nice and tried to be helpful, but they really didn't know anything about the classes." She also said, "I guess I can't really expect that, though. Like, unless they took the class themselves, it isn't realistic."

Brittany had a lot to say on the topic since her area of study was competitive. She wanted her advisor to be able to talk about the teaching methods of the classes she was considering taking for her biology major, but she knew that it wasn't a fair expectation. She said, "it would be great if they could tell you, like how they taught the class and what the expectations would be, how they grade, etc." She also thought it would be helpful for advisors to have course outlines available:

> It would be super helpful if advisors had the syllabus for every class. I know not all professors teach the same, but like a general course outline. This way you know exactly what the course is going to require and what you are going to learn. It is really hard to decide about a class from just a few lines of a course description in a catalog.

Tim shared that he didn't really feel like anyone was there to help him with any kind of planning until he met with the advisor for this study. He also acknowledged that he hadn't asked for that kind of assistance until now, because he wasn't ready himself:

> I never really knew what I wanted to do after here, or if I would even finish, so it didn't seem like something I should bring up. But now that I am graduating, it

occurred to me that I have no clue what to do next. The advisor I met with was really helpful and asked me questions that no one ever had before. It got me thinking about the next step.

Many participants also wanted their advisor to know details about programs in other colleges, which they came to realize is not part of the knowledge base of the advisement staff. Brittany, a biology major, wished that her advisors knew something about requirements at other schools:

The one advisor that I was telling you about that I saw a few times was so nice, and he knew a lot about the biology requirements here, so I always felt that I was on track to graduate. But, when it came to me asking about what courses I would have to take at other schools, he didn't know. Just like general information. I guess it would be a lot to ask, for him to know about every school and every program, but a little bit more information would have been helpful. They basically just say "go online and find out."

Dina was frustrated that she had to go to another office to ask about her classes and how they applied to the next school she would attend:

I get that the transfer office is separate, but it was kind of annoying to have to go to another place to talk about that. I feel like the person doing the advising about my degree here should also be able to talk about the next steps? It isn't a big deal, it just makes it inconvenient to have to go somewhere else. The services should be combined, or at least in the same building.

Kiara also felt that her advisor was not able to help her plan to transfer. She said that she wasn't sure if it was part of the advisement responsibilities, but she wished all advisors were more prepared to help students with career exploration and not just

"picking classes for now":

> So, I don't know if this is an advisor's job or not, but I think advising should
> focus on more career exploration, especially with kids right out of high school
> that don't know what they want to do. Like for me, I am a liberal arts major
> because I really don't know what I want to study later on. It would be helpful if
> advisors could have talked about that with me from the beginning instead of just
> telling me what classes I need to take.

During the observed advisement meetings, all study participants asked questions of the advisors which demonstrated their desire for a conversation beyond course selection. Some asked specific questions about the content of the courses and about teaching styles of the various professors. Other students who were closer to completing their degrees had questions about transferring to other schools, and they also get counseling on which majors would be best to choose for the career field they are interested in.

What I found to be most interesting is that the students asked if it was acceptable for them to ask these questions. That was an indication to me that getting this kind of information from an advisement meeting is not what they had become accustomed to. This was consistent with what was shared during the interview process as a perceived barrier to effective advisement.

Theme 4: What Students Want From an Advising Experience

A fourth theme that emerged from the study was the that of an ideal advising experience and the desired components. The interview process asked students to describe how they imagined an ideal advising scenario or relationship. Their descriptions can be categorized into two main sub-themes: preferred advisor characteristics and content of an

advising meeting.

When asked what characteristics an advisor should possess, the participants were very clear about what would be meaningful and would have a positive impact on their experience. The underlying theme of most responses was the idea of advisors caring about them as people, and not just students, which most students said they had not experienced. Brittany stated that when, "they are friendly and really care about helping you, that is what counts the most." She also described her ideal advisor as "welcoming, easy to talk to, and knowledgeable about the college and my requirements." In his interview, Kennt indicated that the ideal advisor should do more than just recommend classes, and that he and the advisor should have the chance to get to know each other:

I think the advisor should try to get to know you as a person. I also think the

student should be able to know the advisor. If I am going to sit down with a

person who is basically a stranger and talk to them about my life, then I feel like I

should be able to know a little bit about them, too. Like a give and take.

Dina felt that it was important for her advisor to know who she was, not just to have a relationship but to get meaningful guidance:

I feel like it is important for them to know who I am and what my goals are.

Every time you talk to a different person; it's just so hard to connect. If I could

have seen the same person, they would know me and what my strengths and

weaknesses are. It may have made a difference in the kind of advice I got.

Kiara also felt that it was important that her advisor know and care about her life and her experiences in order to do the best job possible:

I think they have to care about life stuff. I get that their job is to talk about classes

and stuff, but if they have no idea what I am going through or what I am dealing

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with at that time, how can they know what is best for me? Caring about me as person is definitely something I think the ideal advisor should be able to do.

While talking about ideal advising, participants also shared their thoughts on what they felt should be the content of an ideal advising session. The topics they discussed included a discussion of degree requirements and course selection, transfer and career planning, and help with planning the right schedule.

Several participants shared that an ideal advising meeting should include not just a discussion of courses for the upcoming semester, but more long-term planning. Danley expressed that he felt it was really important to have a plan in place since he was applying to a competitive program. He said, "talking about coursework is important, but it all has to be planned out so that I know how I am going to be able to achieve my goals." Kiara said that it was important that the student come prepared, but that the advisor should be able to "answer questions about my major and know what options I have, not to just hand me a list of classes." Dina expressed that it was very important to talk about classes but not just about one semester:

> I know that I can only register for one semester at a time, but we should at least be able to talk about what classes I should be taking in the future. I would feel so much better if I knew what I needed to do to finish because I feel like I am much more focused when I have a goal. I never got the feeling that there was ever time for all that.

Brittany also expressed that it was important to plan, but that the student has to take part in that:

> If you as the student don't know what you want, then you can't really plan for the future. Even if you don't know for sure where you are going or what you are

doing, you gotta figure it out sooner than later. Otherwise you waste a whole bunch of time, and for me that isn't an option. So, once you know what you want, the advisor can help you get there with recommending classes and stuff, but they can't pick your path for you.

In addition to long-term degree planning, participants also talked about the importance of talking about career planning with their academic advisor. Tim said that he thinks that academic advising should be a place where he could have explored what he wanted to do, and that may have kept him more connected to the college:

I think it is just a missed opportunity that they don't ask things like "so, what do you want to do with your life? How can I help you figure it out?" etc. It is easy to just recommend a list of classes, but the deeper stuff may have helped me when I first started out and was struggling in college. Maybe I wouldn't have left, I don't know. I know there isn't a lot of time for life discussions, but there should be.

When talking about the most important advising topics, Kennt said, "I want to focus on which classes I need and then to plan for my future." Dina wished that advisors did a better job with career exploration and wished advisors could "do a better job talking to students about all the different things they can do in life. They can't suggest classes if they don't know what I want to be." Kiara wished she had been able to talk about her career options before she even registered for her first semester:

As a freshman the whole thing was so confusing, and kind of still is to be honest. I am right out of high school, have no clue what I want to do, and no one really asked me. My school counselor picked liberal arts because that is what she said undecided students do. Like, how am I am supposed to be decided? I am 17 and no one else in my family went to school, so I don't know how it works.

During the interview process, some participants also talked about the importance of discussing balancing work and life responsibilities. Brittany said, "as a working student who is taking really hard classes, I needed someone to tell me what was too much and what I could handle." Dina also felt that in ideal advising session, advisors should be talking about the balance of classes you take, so that "you don't wind up taking all the hard stuff at once."

When talking about ideal advising, participants shared about the personality traits they most desired in their advisor and what content they hoped ideal advising sessions should cover. Participants described their ideal advisors as welcoming, and caring and knowledgeable. They also talked about the importance of developing a relationship with the advisor. They then discussed three areas that they felt advising sessions should focus on: degree planning, career/professional planning, and help with balancing work-life responsibilities when scheduling classes.

As part of data analysis, I once again referred to the "Advisement and Registration Guide for the Liberal Arts Student," searching for information on what the advisement relationship should look like, and what the students should expect. This document tells students that they should view advisors as "their partners in success." However, from the perspective of the students, their advising experiences were not viewed as a partnership at all. In order for a partnership to be established, a relationship must be developed, along with an exploration of who the student is, both in and out of the classroom. This lack of exploration was seen as a barrier to effective advising practices.

RQ 2: What Are Students' Perceptions of Effective Advising Strategies or Practices?

Theme 1: Access to a Primary Role Advisor

Ultimately, despite some initial confusion, the participants all got the correct information about how to access an advisor as a new liberal arts student to the institution. Within the advising center for the site of the study, in-person services are provided on a walk-in basis, and the center does not have an appointment option. While some participants saw this structure as a barrier, others found it to be effective. Brittany found this system very easy to navigate and felt it increased her sense of access to her advisors. She stated that she appreciated that "you don't have to email back and forth with the office or call million times trying to talk to someone. You can just walk in when you have time and wait." Likewise, Kiara found the walk-in system to be student friendly and easy to use:

> You don't have to write or call anyone. You can just go to the Student Services Center and take a ticket from the machine to wait for your number to be called. The only problem is you don't know who you are getting, but still, it's more convenient than scheduling an appointment, especially when you have a crazy schedule.

Kennt had similar feelings and said, "the walk-in thing is fine, even though I am used to having my own counselor, like in high school."

With regard to the sub-theme about the duration of their advisement meetings when using the face-to-face walk-in services, Brittany acknowledged that some meetings felt brief but that she still felt like the advisor she had seen a few times made time for her:

> I don't know. I mean, he was always busy, but it was never like he kicked me out

of his office or anything. I never left feeling like there was something I didn't get to talk about, even though it might have been like a surface thing and we didn't get really deep about it. I always got my questions answered.

Kiara also said that due to the length of meetings, although she always got to touch on the topics that were important to her, but there was never time for anything really in depth. She said "anyone I've met with has been really nice and wanted to help me, but realistically, we just couldn't talk for an unlimited amount of time. I was always very aware that there was someone else waiting behind me in the lobby."

All participants expressed that longer meetings would result in more meaningful conversations, but that they were able to get their questions answered. Danley said that while some meetings could be short, depending on what needed to be discussed, certain meetings require more time and stated that "it would really just be based on what I needed to talk about. A quick question about a class could be 5 minutes." He followed up by saying, "but, if you are new to the school like I was and have no clue how it works, you might need much more time than that." Dina also reinforced the idea that certain types of students might need longer meetings than others, but that she was pleased:

> If you are just starting and you have no idea what the process is, 20 minutes isn't enough. New students need more time for things to be explained to them. They are already nervous about being new and feeling rushed isn't going to help. Maybe they need to get more people to do the advising so students don't have to feel this way. As long as you come prepared, you should be ok.

Overall, participants expressed that most often, advisement meetings were too short to develop any kind of relationship, or touch on any topic in an in-depth manner. Despite this, participants said that for the most part, even though the meetings were

shorter than they would have liked, they were still happy with the advisor interaction and got what they needed out of it.

One factor that seemed to have a positive impact on participants' perception of access to their advisor was how advisors used email, particularly in the context of COVID, and the advisors' need to be more accessible to students. Dina said that she liked being able to email the advisement office and said, "they would always respond. I knew I could always email the office and tell them I needed help, and someone would get back to me right away." Brittany also felt like she could always email the advisement office for help, saying: "It is actually easier than going in person. I had a quick question about how a class would apply to my degree and they were able to answer me the same day." Tim also said that the office "always emailed me back really fast," and he appreciated that, since he was a working student and often didn't have the time to visit the office in person.

Kennt said when it was busy, sometimes it took a while to get a response to his email, but "waiting a day or two is still easier than going to sit and wait in the office." Tim had strong feelings about the ability to communicate with advisors virtually:

> If you are taking a class online, you should be able to get all of your services virtually also. I don't want to have to go to the office in person if there is another way. I have no interest in sitting and waiting in a public space if I can just as easily get my questions answered through email. That's just me though; I'm sure not all students feel that way.

The participants also talked about remote, or "Zoom" advising, and how convenient it was to have this option, specifically in the context of this study. All participants expressed a desire to "always be able to get a Zoom appointment" in the future. Overall, they felt that this is a service that should be provided to students on a

regular basis, should they want it. Tim ended our conversation on this topic by saying,

"the option to see an advisor on Zoom is awesome."

During the advisement meetings I observed, students expressed how convenient

the ability to schedule an appointment via Zoom was for these particular meetings.

Specifically, Kiara said, "thank you so much for sending me your appointment calendar. I

know I agreed to help with the study, but you are also helping me by not making me

come wait in the center to be seen." Tim echoed this by saying:

> this is so awesome that we can meet on Zoom. I really appreciate knowing that I
>
> could get an appointment from home since I am taking the rest of my classes
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> online. I really didn't want to come to campus.

Overall, participants expressed that other forms of communication with their

advisor positively impacted how much access they felt they had to the advisor. This must

be kept in mind when designing services. It was clear from the observations and the

interviews that students perceived having access to advisors in multiple ways to be an

effective advising practice.

Theme 2: Consistency of Advisement Service

The majority of the participants felt that the lack of consistency was a barrier to

effective advising. However, there was some positive feedback on the subject, although

minimal. On this topic, Danley stated that even though he wasn't assigned a specific

advisor, he wound up seeing the same person more than once by chance, and he

remembered details about her which made him feel comfortable:

> She remembers what we talked about the last time, which surprised me. She
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> didn't take notes or anything; she just remembered me. She also seemed to take a
>
> real interest to make me feel like she cared about my success and went above and

beyond just which classes to take. She helped me research other nursing programs and gave me good suggestions about which professors to take. It really made a difference and made it easier for me to register for classes.

The observation of the advisement sessions reinforced the stated value of providing consistent advisement service from the student's perspective. All six participants were extremely grateful for the help they received during the meeting. Although they worded their requests differently, at the conclusion of the meetings, all six participants asked if it was possible to see that same advisor again for future semesters, or for any other questions that came up for the Fall 2021 semester. As expected, all advisors replied that this would be possible, and that they were glad the session had been helpful.

To reinforce their willingness to maintain an ongoing relationship, all six advisors documented the conversation that took place in the notes section of the degree audit. These notes are a valuable resource for students to refer to, as well as for any other staff member, should the student need assistance. All advisors also added the link to their Zoom appointment calendar in the notes. The students were told at the conclusion of the meeting that the link was added, and that they should schedule a follow-up appointment if they had any additional questions or concerns. It was also made clear to the students that appointments should be scheduled as far in advance of registration as possible, to allow for ample time to discuss their questions.

Theme 3: Advisor Content Knowledge

Participants were clear about the depth and variety of knowledge they wanted from their academic advisor. Most participants felt that they wanted more from their advisement experiences related to academic and professional content knowledge.

However, Brittany, who is interested in biology, had a different experience and a

different perspective. She felt that the advisors she had seen, one in particular, were extremely knowledgeable about the academic requirements of the program. She also felt that it wasn't the advisor's responsibility to know more than the academic requirements, and that it is the faculty's role to mentor the students about different career opportunities, etc. She said:

> It seems like [advisors] have one job and faculty have another. Honestly, with all these students, how is an advisor supposed to know everything about everything? They can't. As long as they made the right suggestions for me based on my future goals and what I want to do in life, then I'm happy. If I have questions about what I can do with a biology degree, then I will ask the person teaching my biology class.

Another area where many participants had split feelings was about the information advisors were able to share about specific professors and classes. Many felt that advisors should be able to recommend specific professors (some wanted to know who the "easy ones" were) or give more details about the courses than were available through the course description and the catalog. Dina felt that she did receive this type of information, but not until she met with the advisor as part of this study:

> I feel like she knew a lot about who was who, way more than other people I have seen. We talked about what classes to take, but also about what she knew about the professors and which ones might work best for me. She had some knowledge of the experiences that other students had in their classes and was able to reassure me that I would be ok with my schedule and also working. She knew I was worried about being overwhelmed and was able to reassure me. She also said, which makes sense, that my experience in the classroom is going to be different

than other students', and that she couldn't make any promises. I appreciated that she did share the information she had, though.

Danley said that he really liked that the advisor he met with for this study had experience with some of the faculty because he had actually been a student here himself before becoming an advisor. He stated, "I felt that since he was a student here, he was able to share his personal experiences with me, which was really helpful. He knows the classes that I'm taking and the professors, too." Kennt also felt that the advisor he saw for the study "knows about the department and the professors, and you could just tell he knew what was going on."

Danley also found his advisor helpful when planning for the TEAS exam (a test required for entry to the nursing program) and stated, "I'm pre-nursing, so she was especially helpful in explaining what would be on the entrance exam and the score I would need to get in. She also talked to me about nursing programs at other schools as a backup plan, in case I don't get in here."

Kennt felt his most recent advisor, whom he saw as part of the study, was able to help him explore options in applying to local schools. He appreciated that he could "talk to her about a lot of things, especially transferring, even though that isn't her actual job. She was really helpful, just with the classes, what professors to choose, you know, which scholarships to apply for, just different paths to take." He also pointed out that not all of his advisement experiences felt that thorough, and he was "grateful" that he found her as part of the research study.

Although it is not the responsibility of the primary role academic advisor to provide in-depth career and transfer guidance, the materials made available on the advisement webpage provide resources. There are direct links to the "counseling

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services" page, which provide detailed information on obtaining information. Although some students do not do research or review the website in advance of meeting with an advisor, some likely do. Having easy access to advisement-adjacent information could contribute to successful advising outcomes.

Theme 4: What Students Want From an Advising Experience

Participants also had strong feelings about an ideal an advising experience and the components needed. The interview process asked students to describe how they imagined an ideal advising scenario or relationship. While some participants had suggestions for improvement, some responses were positive, related to their previous experiences and the limitations of the current advising structure.

When asked what characteristics an advisor should possess, the participants were very clear about what would be meaningful and would have a positive impact on their experience. The underlying theme of most responses was the idea of advisors caring about them as people, and not just students.

While talking about ideal advising, participants also shared their thoughts on what they felt should be the content of an ideal advising session. The topics they discussed included a discussion of degree requirements and course selection, transfer and career planning, and help with planning the right schedule. Much of what they described as part of what an ideal meeting should be stemmed from the things that they missed as part of their previous experiences.

Although most participants did not feel that the content of their advising experiences or the characteristics of their advisors were currently ideal, Danley did have something positive to share regarding the ideal characteristics that an advisor should display:

Every time I spoke to someone, even if they just gave me a list of classes, because they know I wanted nursing, they always made sure to tell me it was competitive. If I want to have a chance to get in, all of them in their own way suggested that I don't take on too much because my grades need to be high.

After reviewing the Zoom recordings of the advisement meetings for this research study, I saw that advisors asked the very questions that students told me were important. Each student was asked to talk about their career interests and any short- or long-term goals. They were also asked to talk about their life outside of school, and to describe any concerns they had about their ability to balance school with other responsibilities. At the conclusion of the meetings, students were all very pleased, and in one way or another they eexpressed their gratitude for the assistance. This reinforces the need to design student services in a way that is meaningful to students.

RQ3: How Did Students' Interactions With Their Advisors Affect Their Sense of Connectedness to the College?

Theme 5: Connectedness

The final theme that emerged from the study was related to the theoretical framework of the study, connectedness to the institution. Participants were asked how connected they felt to the college and if their advising experiences had an impact on that connection. Some participants expressed that their experiences with advisement services did help them feel more connected, while did not feel that these experiences had an impact.

Those participants who did express that their advisement experienced helped them feel connected highlighted the importance of the interactions they had that made them feel supported and valued. Brittany expressed that her range of advisement experiences,

particularly with the one advisor she saw more than once, was a positive influence:

> Knowing that I had someone to go to, which kind of happened by accident, really
> helped me, especially with it being such a big place and kind of overwhelming.
> He was always there to help me and explain where I was in my program and the
> things I needed to think about to stay on track, especially because I really
> struggled with the hard science classes in the beginning.

Danley expressed that the content of most of his advising experiences positively impacted his feelings of connectedness:

> My feelings are mostly positive about advising and what I got from it. The
> advisor that I saw a few times was really helpful with nursing stuff, and I think if I
> didn't find her, I would have been lost, especially as a transfer student from
> another school where things were so different. The only thing that would have
> made it better is if I knew she was the person I was supposed to see from the
> beginning. Then it's like I know who my go-to person is and I always can get
> help.

Dina felt that her advising experience did help her feel connected to the college and to her studies, but that there were some things that she would change if she could:

> They always helped me with classes and stuff, so I always felt like I had a place to
> go where I could get my questions answered and felt like I had support. In that
> way it did make me feel connected. But I think this could be so much better in the
> future, like having the same advisor every time and not feeling so rushed. This
> would help to be able to talk about all the other things that we never got to cover.

Some participants expressed that their advisor did not impact how connected they felt to the college. Kennt expressed neutral feelings on how advisement impacted his

feeling of connectedness, mostly because of how inconsistent the service was, not the actual advisement itself. He said:

I think it is hard to say what kind of impact it had. I think if I had the chance to see the same person every time it would have definitely made a difference. The first person I saw as a new student was good, and really helped to explain the liberal arts, etc. Then after that it was basically just like a list of classes. If I could have had an advisor the whole time like the one you set me up with, I definitely think it would have made me feel more connected and more supported. I know they can't do this with the way things are set up, but they really should. It would be so much better for students.

Tim also had neutral feelings and said that advising was just part of what he had to do to get registered. He didn't feel it was a meaningful service:

Advising was just like another step in registering for classes. Most of them [the advisors] were nice and all, but it was mostly all business and just picking classes. Some of the time I never even went to them just because it took too much time. But then COVID happened and I could get my questions answered by email, which was awesome. So, I wouldn't say that advising made me feel more connected to the school, but to be honest, nothing really did.

Finally, Kiara expressed that her advising experiences did not positively impact her sense of connectedness:

I guess I would say my advising experiences were fine, but they don't stand out as a shining light during my time as a student here. They always tried to help and give me the information I needed, but it was always a different person and there was never enough time to talk about anything in-depth. I think that if I got the

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chance to get to know someone and they got to know me, it would have made a

big difference.

While not all participants felt that their advising experiences had a direct impact on how

connected they felt to the university or department, those who did highlighted the

importance of feeling valued and cared for, and of being provided with correct

information.

In conducting my observations of the advising sessions, it would not have been

possible to determine if the one meeting impacted the students' sense of connectedness to

the institution. However, all of the professional advisors I observed during their sessions

displayed all of the characteristics that the students explained that they placed value on

and prioritized during the interview process. They took an interest in the students not just

in the context of their academic life, but related to their personal lives as well. They

answered all questions that were asked with clear, concise information, and they were

able to confidently provide referrals to other on-campus resources when necessary.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I summarized the purpose and methodology of the study.

Additionally, I shared the structural narrative for all six participants. From these

descriptions, five themes emerged, with several sub-themes becoming evident as well.

These were access to a primary role advisor; consistency of advisement service; depth of

advisor knowledge; what do students want from an advising session; and impact on

connectedness to the college. I used the data I collected and analyzed to address the

research questions for this study.

Participants expressed the desire to have a relationship with the same advisor,

even if the connection was not deeply personal or significant. They also expressed a

desire to have consistency in that relationship by meeting with the same person each semester. Further, they felt that getting to know their advisor on a personal level would have strengthened the advising conversations. Topics discussed as important in an ideal advising session included degree planning, career/professional planning, work-life balance when scheduling classes, semester balance, and campus referrals.

CHAPTER 5

Research demonstrates that students' sense of connection to their institution is positively impacted through out-of-class interaction with faculty and staff and that this positive connection can improve student success (Goodenow, 1993; Hagerty et al., 2002; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Wilson & Gore, 2013). By examining students' experiences with a primary role advisor, I was able to gain perspective on my participants' perceptions of positive and negative advisement practices and strategies. Also examined was the participants' sense of connection to their institution and how it was tied to their primary role advisement interaction.

The themes that emerged from the data collection and analysis demonstrated which aspects of their academic advising experiences participants found most valuable, and which left them wanting more, indicating a need for improvement in the delivery of service. This chapter will provide an overview of these findings and discuss implications for future research and practice. Before discussing these findings, I will provide an overview of the study as it was conducted.

The purpose of this study was to explore how students experienced and perceived their academic advising experience within the context of a 2-year, primary role advising center at a public suburban community college. In this study, I examined the following questions:

- What are students' perceptions of barriers to effective academic advising?
- What are students' perceptions of effective advising strategies or practices?
- How did students' interactions with their advisors impact their sense of connectedness to the college?

This qualitative study utilized a case study approach to understand the lived

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experiences of the subjects. It employed purposeful sampling to obtain its participants, so that sufficient data could be gathered in order to respond to the study's research questions. Observations, interviews, and artifacts were used as data sources. The study focused only on students who were liberal arts majors with a GPA ranging from 2.1–3.2. Participants were also asked to self-identify their age, gender, and race/ethnicity. By interviewing participants who met the above outlined criteria, many themes became evident in this context.

From these descriptions, five themes emerged: obtaining access to a primary role advisor; consistency of advisement service; depth of advisor knowledge; what students want from an advising session; and impact on connectedness to the college. Each of these themes were discussed in-depth in Chapter 4, including the relationship between the research questions that guided the study and the data collected.

Participants expressed a range of emotions and descriptions when discussing their advising experiences, as they likely would when discussing all life experiences. Through my observations of advising sessions and conversations with all six participants, several concepts became clear. The common experience that all participants shared was the desire to have easy, hassle-free access to advisors who could give them correct and thorough information. There was also an overwhelming sense that working with one advisor would be preferable, and that the randomness of advising service was viewed as a barrier. The research supporting this notion states that with any new relationship, the first step is to establish a connection with the student advisee (Tinto, 2012). The support provided by an academic advisor becomes a part of a positive holistic academic experience, regardless of the type of student (Gordon & Steele, 2006). The academic

advisor can help set the foundation for a successful academic and personal growth during the student's higher education journey.

The subjects in this study emphasized that in order to make them feel the advisor cared, it was important that the advisor acknowledged both their personal and academic needs (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Therefore, if the academic advisor takes the time to get to know the student before diving into academic concerns, this demonstrates to the student that they are cared for. If the student feels the advisor cares about them as an individual, they will then feel more connected to the institution (Wilson & Gore, 2013).

Although some participants expressed wanting to have a more meaningful working relationship with their advisor, all expressed that they wanted an advisor who, at the very least, was easy to talk to, welcoming, and could remember details about them as students and individuals. According to the research, academic advisors should work to establish a supportive and caring atmosphere so students feel mutual respect and trust (Darling, 2015). Therefore, the student can identify a problem and feel confident that the advisement process will be a positive and productive experience (Gordon & Steele, 2006). As Darling (2015) explained, academic advisors can help students strategize and navigate their way toward succeeding in educational goals by establishing these relationships.

While some participants described having positive interactions with advisors, most did not describe their advising relationships or experiences as an integral part of their academic journey. While all participants said that being friendly and caring were important advisor characteristics, they described the ideal advising scenario as primarily transactional. Significant time did not need to be spent, as long as students could be sure they were getting information that was accurate from a trustworthy source. Students who

are involved in transactional advising relationships expect to utilize their academic advisor as a resource only for scheduling and feel satisfied with the advisor because the service meets the student's expectations (Donaldson et al., 2016).

Rather than supporting an advising model where students rely heavily on an advisor/advisee relationship to create a sense of connectedness, this study supports an advising model where a student's academic advisor is one point of support and connection who can also help them integrate into academic life by connecting them to other supports such as career advising, student life, and faculty mentorship (Tinto, 2006). This model of academic advising is also supported by Padilla's (1999) theory that students must navigate a "geography of barriers" in order to be successful. When describing their advising relationship, most participants described a relationship that lends itself to this theory. Academic advisors are well placed to be resources to assist students in navigating academic barriers. They can do this by introducing other campus resources and opportunities for connections to campus and by serving as a "hub" of support for students (Ender et al., 1982).

This study utilized Tinto's (2012) theories of student departure and retention to provide an understanding of how student success can be impacted by institutional relationships, particularly in a community college environment. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this study focused on connectedness and on students' perceptions about whether they are in an academic environment where they are accepted, included, and supported (Wilson & Gore, 2013). Some participants expressed that their advising experiences with a primary role advisor had a positive impact on their sense of connectedness. Those participants who did express that their advising experiences positively impacted their sense of connectedness mainly referred to the characteristics of

the advisor, in that they were friendly and helpful. They also emphasized the content of the sessions, and that students' needs were being addressed through those conversations.

When describing their advising experiences and talking about how they impacted a sense of connection, most participants described their advising experiences as valuable for making sure that they would meet their degree requirements, and they described the advising center as a centralized place on campus to find referrals to other resources. However, most participants did not express that they felt their academic advising experiences were an integral part of their academic experience and journey.

What the data from this study does indicate is that some participants were able to identify components of their college experience that helped them feel accepted, included, and supported. These students expressed what could be interpreted as higher levels of connectedness to their institution, and they generally described having a positive academic experience overall. On the other hand, participants that were not able to pinpoint experiences that helped them feel accepted, included, and supported expressed lower levels of connectedness to their institution. These participants were able to easily identify negative interactions and feelings about their overall academic experience. These data support the theory that increased levels of institutional connectedness are a positive indicator of student success, as delineated by Wilson and Gore (2013). However, the data from this study may indicate that the means by which institutional connectedness is measured should not be based on a singular factor, such as academic advisement, but rather on multiple relationships and experiences.

The results of this study are important because they further highlight quality academic advising as one important component of student success. While most participants did not see a direct correlation between their academic advising experiences

and an institutional sense of connection, many did express that the advisement interactions they had were important in helping them meet their goals during their time of enrollment. Overall, participants described their advising experiences as largely prescriptive and sometimes limited in duration, but emphasized that they were important for future semester planning and provided a place for campus support. Rather than revealing an intrusive advising model, where students depend on an advisor/advisee relationship to create a sense of connectedness, this study illustrates an advising model where a student's academic advisor is one point of contact in the campus community who can help them integrate by connecting them to other support services such as career counseling, transfer services, and student activities (Tinto, 2006).

Limitations

The goal of this study was to explore the advisement experiences and perceptions of students who utilized the services of a primary role advisor at a 2-year suburban community college. Although the sample size itself is not a limitation as the design of the study was intentional, the results of this study are transferrable only to students who experienced a similar advising model. However, according to the research, this is consistent with typical limitations in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, all students who participated in this study were liberal arts majors, and were advised by a primary role advisor in the centralized advising center on campus. The results are not transferable to those students in discrete majors who may have the opportunity to develop more of a connection with faculty who are responsible for advising in those areas and programs. It is possible that the students in some discrete programs of study would have had different perceptions of successful advising strategies and barriers to receiving support.

Also, the participants in this study had already completed a minimum of two semesters. Most were students who would share similar age demographics to a majority of students on campus. Students enrolled at the college who are considered non-traditional in terms of age may have different experiences than those of the participants. Additionally, all participants were students who had a GPA within a pre-determined range. So, the results are not representative of the advising experiences of students who had a GPA higher or lower than the criteria used for the study.

In addition to my role as the principal researcher, I am also the director of the advising center that was the research site. During the design of the study and the selection of the sample, I made sure that I had no previous advising contact with any of the participants. I provided verbal and written assurance to both student participants and primary role advisors that I was purely an observer, and that they should view me simply as a student conducting my own research. However, participants were aware of my professional role, and their behavior and answers may have been biased due to this knowledge. According to Creswell (2014b), all studies that contain a voluntary interview process as a data source are limited by response bias.

Recommendations for Future Research

To strengthen the transferability of these findings, similar studies with varying student populations would be worth exploring. Of specific interest would be the advising experiences of students with similar demographic characteristics, enrolled in at the same institution, in competitive, non-open access programs, such as the liberal arts majors. Asking the same questions to students who had an assigned faculty advisor in their program of study may provide a different outlook or perspective. They may have different interpretations of positive advising interactions, barriers to effective advising,

and institutional connectedness, and they may highlight different aspects of the advising relationship.

Within this study, all participants experienced difficulty with the steps they needed to take to access a professional advisor. The participants also expressed frustration because they lacked the ability to develop more than a surface-level relationship with the advisor. They felt that seeing and talking to different people each time they needed assistance caused them to feel less connected to the institution and more anxious about their academic decisions, wondering whether or not they were getting the correct information. Further research in this area should include exploration of how advising directors and administrators can reorganize and reallocate existing resources to address this primary student concern of relationship building and ensuring consistency in advising service.

Some participants in the study were disappointed that the primary role advisors they had worked with were not more knowledgeable about other campus resources or services. As centralized advising models continue to employ more primary role advisors who are not experts in the other student services, future research on the related roles and responsibilities is necessary. For example, most participants expressed that they wished their advisor could provide them with career counseling or help them figure out what to major in when they transferred and how to transfer. However, the research site had a dedicated career and transfer office. Further research on the role of primary advisors should continue to explore what services primary role advisors should be expected to provide, and how to better connect students to already existing resources.

The findings of this study indicate that not all participants felt that their advisement interactions contributed to their sense of connectedness to the institution. For

those who did have that sentiment, they attributed it to the advisor caring about giving correct information and being warm and friendly. Some participants in the study expressed that while their brief advisement interactions did not have an impact on connectedness to the institution, the advisor was helpful in reassuring them that they were on the right track to achieve their academic goals. Many of these items were highly transactional and prescriptive in nature. Future researchers should explore how these limited, but seemingly meaningful experiences impact student success.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The findings from this study have several practical implications for campuses utilizing primary role advisors within a centralized advising center. The themes that emerged during the data analysis were helpful in understanding what the students wanted, expected, and ultimately experienced from their advisement interactions. By exploring these themes, with the goal being to improve service to students, I was able to identify several recommendations for future practice.

Clear communication to students can play a critical role in their understanding of how to access an advisor and of the necessary steps that lead to successful enrollment. It appears from the data collected that there was a sense of confusion about the advisement process, particularly when these students were new to the institution. Some participants expressed frustration that no one reached out to them to tell them how to proceed. Once students got information on the process, some expressed dissatisfaction with the walk-in system in the centralized advising office at the research site. They expressed clearly that ability to schedule an appointment would be preferable. Some participants said that they had a hard time getting clear instructions when they called the office. Further, they

weren't sure if they should wait for an invitation, or if they should be the ones to reach out for help first.

To make the advisement process a smoother one, efforts should be focused on creating a comprehensive communication plan for all newly admitted students. Brand new students to an institution should not feel any confusion about where or how to obtain services. Feeling secure in the procedures that are in place may contribute to positive feelings about the institution, since advisement is one of the first interactions students will have, before getting to the classroom.

Students expressed a strong desire for the option to work with one academic advisor for the duration of their time at the institution. There was frustration in having to "re-tell" their story, and often students received different answers to the same questions each time they saw someone new. While it appears that changing to a caseload model would be in the best interest of the majority of students, it is often not feasible due to staffing shortages or other budgetary constraints. If this is not possible, then at minimum, there must be a system for documenting what took place during each advising meeting and having a centralized place for those notes to be accessed. Advisors should review any notes in the student's file before beginning a conversation. This way, students do not feel that they are completely starting from scratch, developing a new advising relationship. These same notes can be used by various advisors to ensure that they document not only academic information about their advisees, but also personal details about the students they work with. These data support the findings of previous research on advisor transitions, which recommends creating closure to the first advising relationship while creating a smooth transition to new advisor (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014, p. 443).

Throughout this study, all participants expressed a desire for an advisor who was both a generalist, familiar with a wide variety of academic and procedural knowledge, and a content area expert, able to talk in-depth about a specific field, course, or professor's teaching style. With this in mind, it may be productive to connect individual advisors to academic departments, serving in a liaison role, bringing relevant academic information from the department back to the students. Being trained to serve as subject matter experts in specific disciplines and sharing what they have learned with other advisors, they will also assist the center in its overall mission of supporting the students in academic decision making.

Many participants also expressed a wish for their academic advisors to have both the ability to discuss institutional academic planning and to provide career and transfer counseling. While many institutions have separate career centers, much like the one at the research site, there is great value in engaging in cross-training with academic and career counselors. This will enable academic advisors to incorporate this knowledge into course selection and degree planning conversations. It will also alleviate some of the frustration that students expressed about having to visit multiple offices on campus to get the information they are seeking.

The participants who stated that they had positive advisement interactions also expressed that they felt connected to campus, but that the advisement interaction wasn't necessarily the sole reason. The advisement simply helped to support their positive feelings about the campus in general. Additionally, several students said that they developed relationships with other faculty or staff on campus which also helped them to feel connected. Only participants who stated that they had no relationships with faculty or staff on campus expressed a very low level of institutional connectedness. These data

indicate that it isn't important *who* the student develops a connection to, but that positive interaction with various members of the campus community is an important element of students' perceptions of connection. When designing student services, administrators should ensure that there are ample opportunities for students to have out-of-class contact with a variety of faculty and staff members. The data support Tinto's (2012) theory of student departure and demonstrate the importance of the relationship between student retention and institutional relationships. These findings also support utilizing both primary role advising and faculty mentorship, which has been recommended by previous researchers (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the purpose and methodology of the study, and I discussed the limitations and the implications for future research and practice. The results of this study revealed that all participants had a desire for easy access to knowledgeable advisors who could give them thorough, reliable answers to their course planning questions. Participants also expressed a desire to work with just one advisor who could get to know them during their academic experience. However, few participants described their advising relationships as deeply important to establishing a sense of connection to campus, but rather as contributing to their overall positive feelings about the institution.

The data from this study indicate how important it is to implement practices that emphasize the importance of positive campus-wide interactions, even if they are transactional and not in-depth, based on the resources available. The evidence suggests that even prescriptive, brief interactions contributed to the students' overall sense of institutional connectedness and positive experience. However, these interactions were not

with a sole source such as advisement, but rather a combination of relationships with

faculty, staff, and peers.

APPENDIX A

Research Site Institutional Review Board Approval

NORTH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Institutional Review Board

Date: February 21, 2021

To: Amanda Fox
Principal Research Investigator

From: ███████████████, Ph.D.
North Institutional Review Board

Subject: IRB Approval

Dear Amanda Fox,

Please be advised that North's IRB has approved your proposed research project, **"STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT AT A PUBLIC SUBURBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE NORTHEAST: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY."** This approval authorizes the activities described in your application.

Be advised that changes in the scope or subjects of your research that may occur during the project's work will require approval of North's IRB. In addition, it is required that any intended publication of your study that advance conclusions identified with North, its students, faculty, or programs must receive IRB review prior to such publication.

Please accept the Board's best wishes for the success of your study.

For North's Institutional Review Board,

███████████, Ph.D.
Associate Vice-President & IRB Chair
Office Of Institutional Effectiveness & Strategic Planning
Tel. ████████ ext. ████
Fax. ██████████

APPENDIX B

St. John's University Institutional Review Board Approval

From: ███████████████████████████████

Sent: Wednesday, June 9, 2021 3:39 PM

To: Amanda L. Fox <███████████████████>; cozzab@stjohns.edu
<███████████>

Subject: IRB-FY2021-317 - Initial: Initial Submission - Expedited - St. John's

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066
Jun 9, 2021 3:39:44 PM EDT
PI: Amanda Fox
CO-PI: Barbara Cozza
Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership
Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2021-317** *Student Perceptions of Academic Advisement at a Public Suburban Community College: A Qualitative Case Study*

Dear Amanda Fox:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Student Perceptions of Academic Advisement at a Public Suburban Community College: A Qualitative Case Study*. The approval is effective from June 9, 2021 through June 8, 2022.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,
Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board, Professor of Psychology
Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

Participant Consent Form

My name is Amanda Fox and I am a doctoral student in the Instructional Leadership Program at St. John's University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation about students' perceptions of their academic advisement experiences. I am contacting you to ask if you would be interested in being part of this study. The research will attempt to understand the variety of advising approaches used, as well as the students' feelings about how advising contributed to their academic success. The following is more information about the research:

Participants Eligibility:

You must be an active student (attended within one academic year at the time of the study)
You must be matriculated in a Liberal Arts program
You must have completed a minimum of two semesters of coursework
You must not yet be registered for Fall 2021 courses
You must be willing to meet with a professional advisor for discussion for Fall 2021 classes

If you agree to participate in this study, it will require an interview with questions and possible follow-up questions that will range from 45 minutes to 1 hour. This interview will take place via Zoom, Skype, or any other video conferencing software. Participants will also be asked to participate in an advisement session observed by the researcher. This will also take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Recordings of both the interview and the observation will be kept by the researcher. You may review these tapes and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed.

There are no known risks in participating in this study beyond those of everyday life. Although you will not receive any direct benefits, participating in this study may contribute to improving the process, environment, and experiences of students as it related to academic advisement.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your grades or academic standing. You will receive no compensation for your participation in this study.

I will make every effort to ensure the confidentiality of all participants in this study. I will not use your name in any quotations or reports of my findings; I will use a pseudonym of your choosing; and I will omit or obscure any identifying details.

All information taken from the study will be coded to protect each subject's name. No names or other identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting data. The researcher will safely keep all audio files and data collected in a secured locked area or filed on a password-protected computer. Once the data have been fully analyzed, audio files will be destroyed.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact ████████████████ at North Community College, One Education Drive, ██████████, NY. You can also contact the faculty sponsor, Barbara Cozza, St. John's University at ████████████.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair ████████████ ████████ or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, ████████████ ████████.

Authorization

I authorize the use of my records, any observations, and findings found during the course of this study for education, publication and/or presentation.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study:

Subject's Signature_____   Date _____

___ I have received a copy of the signed, dated consent form. A copy must also be kept by the Principal Investigator.

| **Person Obtaining Consent**:_____ |
| Signature: Date: |

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Note: Students will be encouraged to answer questions in as much detail as possible:

1. Tell me about your first meeting with an advisor.

2. Did the reality of your advising experience(s) meet your expectations of what you thought it would be like?

3. How do you feel about your overall experience with academic advising since you have been a student?

4. What would you imagine to be an ideal session with an advisor?

5. What things do you think are important to talk about with an advisor?

6. Describe how your advising experiences have impacted how accepted, included, and supported you feel on this campus.

7. Describe any difficulties you have had in your advising experience(s).

8. How would you improve or what would you change about your advising experience at the university?

9. Overall, do you think the relationships you develop with faculty and staff impact your desire to stay enrolled or withdraw?

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