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The Lived Experiences of Higher Education Academic Advisors with Counseling Degrees in Addressing Their Role in Student Success

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The Lived Experiences of Higher Education Academic Advisors with Counseling

Degrees in Addressing Their Role in Student Success

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of academic advisors with a counseling degree in addressing their role in student success. If student retention rates are not addressed, higher education institutions are at risk of losing students, which is costly to the institution and the student (Himes, 2014). Most college students are in a state of change and need academic advising support to achieve success during a college transition (Tinto, 2012). Academic advisors can assist students in finding the right career for students' specific strengths. Academic advisors with counseling degrees address advising through the lens of a counselor utilizing counseling theory, techniques and approaches when engaging with students.

This qualitative study utilized Tinto's (2012) theories of student departure and retention to provide an understanding of how academic advisors perceived their role in student success. A higher education institution must establish conditions within its own system to promote positive student experiences and outcomes (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). The exploration of the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees aided in further understanding the advisors' role in student success. A primary research question guided this study. Individual interviews were used to collect data from academic advisors. Academic advisors were prompted to discuss academic advising experiences, the advisors' role in student success, and information needed to achieve successful advising sessions. Themes emerged relating to developing relationships, personalized advising sessions, and the advisors' experience with student success initiatives. Tinto (2012) stated that students need individualized academic and social support to properly transition into college. The findings of this study highlighted the experiences of academic advisors with a counseling degree from the counselor education lens coupled with the

professional academic advising perspective in supporting progressive academic advising

strategies that had a positive impact on student retention.

DEDICATION

To my husband Baron and my children Nick and Hailey. Your never-ending support is what kept me motivated throughout my dissertation journey. You are my heart.

To my father Johnny, my mother Donna, my brother Ijuanzee, and my sister Dayna. I am forever grateful that your love has guided me through constant self-reflection and improvement. You have always been my cheerleaders and believed in me.

To my grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles, aunts, uncles, and cousins. You are eternally my inspiration, my guiding lights, the source of my resilience and vision for greatness.

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Introduction

Academic advisors are often utilized in higher education institutions to enhance student engagement, and they serve many different functions (Steele & White, 2019). However, the role and function they play in student success is a little less clear. Student success is a crucial component of higher education institutions because it is considered as an essential criterion for assessing the quality of educational institutions (National Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2015). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2004) outlines its statement of core values in academic advising as a holistic approach to advising that includes both understanding the institution and the needs of its students. Hunter and White (2004) added that academic advising can help students to shape meaningful learning experiences, thus encouraging achievement of educational, career, and life goals. An academic advisor can be a faculty member, or a separate employee labeled an academic advisor (Meuhleck et al., 2014). The academic advisor is to know the student's specific risk and success indicators and how those indicators might impact success and persistence (Darling, 2015). Academic advising is a decision-making process in post-secondary institutions where students discuss information with an academic advisor (Drake, 2011).

There are several definitions of student success in the literature. Kuh et al. (2006) define student success as "academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance." York et al. (2015) provide a multi-

dimensional definition of student success concentrating on academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success as the most important six components of student success. Student success has also been defined as students' persistence and academic resilience (Finn et al., 1997). This focus on student success is measured through the grades and grade point average (GPA), measures of evaluations by far the most widely available in institutions. For the purposes of this study, student success will be defined as the student's persistence and academic resilience measured by GPA, course completion, retention, and matriculation to degree completion.

Perhaps no single higher education issue has challenged the academic advising community more than low retention rates of undergraduate students (Act Policy Report, 2015; Nutt, 2003; Smith & White, 2019). Retention efforts have been one of the most studied contemporary subjects within the field of higher education (Seidman et al., 2012). Academic advisors have faced the changing societal climate that has fueled a focus on retention in their individual institutions. The amplified emphasis placed on a student's individual financial contributions through grants, scholarships, and rising tuition costs cause stress that affects mental health, which in turn can impact the students' ability to complete undergraduate programs (Seidman et al., 2012). Alongside affordability concerns, other factors such as mental health wellness, food insecurities, and anxiety are experiences of college students and the challenges associated with adapting to college level workloads and responsibilities are also reasons for decreased retention rates. These identified factors are concerns that academic advisors must face when considering why students are unable to complete their undergraduate studies and how best to provide support and guidance.

Counselors are also familiar with students who are confronting difficult personal and transitional issues. At one end of the advising-counseling continuum, academic advising is conceived as a collaborative process in which advisors help students to develop and realize their educational, career, and personal goals (Ayoubi, 2017). At its most fundamental level, the National Association of Academic Advising (NACADA) upholds the foundation that advising is informational and explanatory and progresses through developmental and mentoring phases (NACADA, 2017). At the other end of the continuum, counseling helps students build resilience to personal problems from the past and present that interfere with their academic success. Typically, students discuss with counselors the concerns or difficulties they are experiencing, and the counselor helps the student mobilize his or her own resources to resolve the problems. In addition to current views that counseling deals with wellness, personal growth, and career development, and conditions that may be related to emotional, mental, or physical problems (Sharkin, 2004). Advisors are often not trained counselors, and counselors usually do not have extensive knowledge about curricula or academic policies. The intersectionality of these two professions are not always clearly defined and combining counseling and academic advising experience is a unique perspective for higher education professionals.

Phenomenological in nature, this study used personal interviews conducted with purposeful and snowball sampling of college academic advisors with a counselor education and supervision graduate degree. The method of data dissemination was through textual and structural coding, and development of emergent themes. The goal was to acknowledge and understand the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees in their role of university student success goals, and to better understand the resources and student engagement approaches academic advisors utilized to support a student's success. Student success has always

been a focus for colleges and universities, but previously this has been considered primarily the responsibility of the student. Colleges and universities have prioritized student success as an institutional responsibility (Steele & White, 2019). Colleges and universities identify student success as relating to raising retention and graduation rates, eliminating the achievement gap, and supporting career and social mobility for students post degree completion (Kalsbeek, 2013). Being aware of the experiences academic advisors have as it relates to their role with student success will guide counselor educators and university administration to further develop and expand systemic programs for counselor education graduate curricula that support academic advisor development. The goal of this study was to understand the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees regarding their role in student success.

Statement of the Problem

A major challenge facing higher education is student retention. The inability to retain students leads to lower graduation rates and larger societal concerns, including a threat to national economic stability because of an underprepared workforce that may be unable to fill the positions of the aging population (Atwater & Jones, 2004; Kalsbeek, 2013). As universities put increasing pressure on student retention and success, academic advising has become an increasingly visible and important part of the university. On a daily basis, academic advisors see how academic, career, and personal issues are intertwined in students' lives (Dadgar et al., 2014; Farrell & Langrehr, 2017). Much of the time, a student's presenting problem is academic in nature, and it may gradually reveal itself to be a personal issue that is affecting academic success. The Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) states many students are challenged to balance life stressors and become overwhelmed when they attend college or university (Barrett, 1994; CCMH, 2016). These stressors such as family, work, financial obligations, and course load,

could cause emotional distress. Identifying and using coping skills to reduce their stress may be a challenge and could negatively impact their academic performance (ACT Policy Report, 2015; Sharkin, 2004). The academic advising process can unveil more than academic issues for the student. The student also shares concerns that include addressing students' personal concerns and their adjustment to campus life. The training and preparation of counselors, unlike that of student affairs administrators, are generally from a holistic student development perspective. Student affairs administrators are people who work in the field of student affairs as practitioners or professionals (i.e., academic advisors, career advisors, directors, assistant deans, and deans) to provide services and support for students and drive student learning outside of the classroom at institutions of higher education (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education[SAAHE], 2012). Academic advisors with a counseling background are not only knowledgeable about university policies and guidelines, student engagement, high impact practices, and appropriate courses needed for graduation to fulfill curricular requirements, they are also trained to address the numerous personal and mental health aspects vital to student success and personal well-being (CACREP, 2016).

Dykes-Anderson (2013) found that 74% of students with mental illnesses who do not receive counseling services dropped out of higher education institutions before graduation. To assist these students and contribute to their success, college and university counseling centers have been tasked to provide combined clinical services that address both mental health issues and the risk for academic failure. Identifying academic and life challenges early in students' enrollment can assist at-risk students, contribute to their success, and prevent them from withdrawing from school (Dykes-Anderson, 2013). Experienced advisors have supported students with complicated and extensive personal, real-life challenges that they bring with them

to college and often collide with their academic studies. Counselors are also familiar with students who are confronting difficult personal and transitional issues. Students need information, guidance, goals, self-efficacy, and support to pursue their degree programs successfully (Gordon & Steele, 2015). Academic advisors are often not trained counselors, and counselors usually do not have extensive knowledge about curricula or academic policies. Academic advisors with counseling degrees can provide an institutionalized front line of support and assistance with a holistic student-centered approach.

The percentage of students with mental illnesses attending postsecondary institutions has increased over the last twenty years, and this has put a strain on both campus resources and options available to colleges or universities to help these students attain their goal of graduation (Jones et al., 2018). It is a practice at some colleges and universities to merge academic advising and counseling functions so that students can benefit from a holistic approach to their mental health concerns and their academic achievement (Gordon et al., 2000). There has been a longstanding differentiation and separation between the roles of mental health counselors and academic advisors on college and university campuses, and this separation of functions might not be the best way to support students who have mental illnesses or mental health concerns. Currently, for many institutions of higher education, the academic advising office and the counseling office are in different locations and under different leadership within the same college or university (Garrod, 2017).

Academic advising is conceived as a collaborative process in which advisors help students to develop and realize their educational, career, and personal goals. At its most fundamental level, advising is informational and explanatory and progresses through developmental and mentoring phases. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related

Educational Programs (CACREP) state counselors help students overcome personal difficulties and challenges from the past and present that may interfere with their academic success (American College Association [ACA], 2014; CACREP, 2016). Academic advisors with counseling degrees are trained and educated to support students with both curricular and mental health concerns (CACREP, 2016). They also aim to empower students to develop their own resources to resolve challenges in regard to wellness, personal growth, academic performance, and career development.

While academic advisors across the country are increasingly employing research-based advising practices, gains in the profession continue to be met by barriers such as large advising loads, program structures that prevent students from meeting with the same advisor at each visit, and faculty or university priorities that limit attention to advising (Gordon et al., 2000). Despite these barriers, academic advisors continue to work to create positive learning partnerships between themselves and the students they serve. Academic advising is often the catalyst for frequent and consistent contact with students, but it is much more than a process of simply advising students about which courses to take and university policies. Academic advising offers multiple chances to develop rapport with students and, in many situations, the occasion to discuss any aspirations, goals, and personal issues that may be impeding their success. Tinto (1993) referred to ongoing, personal contact of faculty and staff with students as an essential component in long-term retention. Furthermore, Tinto (1993) asserted that students who fail to gain goal clarification are likely to question why they are in college and are at risk for dropping out of college. The advising process provides an opportunity to guide students in setting and achieving their goals by working together on exploring where they are in the process, what they want, and what are the options available to them.

Hossler (1990) stated that academic advising is the most often cited student service in terms of its positive impact on student persistence in retention research. Hossler (1990) stated that retention is an important goal of academic advising. As evident from the research, academic advising connects the student to the institution as well as faculty-student contact can have a major impact on student motivation, involvement, and retention (Beal & Noel, 1980; Creamer, 1980; Drake, 2011; Gordon, 2000; He et al., 2016; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1993).

Colleges and universities are responsible for creating contexts for learning and development that help students make a smooth transition into the collegiate environment and on to the new set of responsibilities they will experience post-graduation. Universities allocate resources at several transitional points that are related to academic choice making for the students. Without successful academic transitions, students may find themselves suspended from their academic program, unable to major in the subject of their choice, or struggle academically. Myers and Dyer (2005) state that since academic advising plays a significant part in the retention of students, strategizing to find ways to retain students once they have enrolled and are actively taking classes is a pressing issue for colleges.

A significant problem in our nation's higher education institutions is the number of students who enter college but leave prior to achieving their goal of degree completion (Habley, 1981; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Thomas & Borrayo, 2016; Tinto, 1975, 1993). The National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2019) reported the results of a longitudinal study that the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2011 overall was 53 percent. It is nearly an equal percentage of students who will leave higher education settings prior to completion than who will graduate (Cuseo, 1996; Habley et al., 2014; Thomas &

Borrayo, 2016; Tinto, 1993;). It is important to note that retention rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall, and graduation rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who complete their program at the same institution within a specified period of time (NCES, 2019). According to Tinto (1975), early studies approached the problem of student attrition by isolating variables and studying their association with decreased student retention. Researchers failed to address the multiple explanations of the impact on student retention and the complex interactions between the student and the university. Another weakness of past studies was a lack of distinction among varying forms of departure.

Habley (1981) pointed out that academic advising is the one service that allows for consistent interaction with students throughout their academic career. To take this one step further, when counseling and advising are linked with the academic departments, it also allows for a consistent and reciprocal relationship between and among the academic advisor, faculty, and student. In addition, this concept provides for effective collaborative relationships between the academic advisor, faculty, and the student. Collaboration also conveys to students that there are multiple members of the university who care about them and are invested in their success. Given the positive outlook that can develop from this interaction, allocating sufficient resources and attention to academic advising would seem a wise investment. As a profession and with the support of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), academic advising has moved toward providing guidance to students that focuses on meeting their learning and development needs.

Need for the Study

Researchers identified student-faculty interaction as a primary source of the student engagement process (Drake, 2013). Interaction with faculty and student personnel and the perceived levels of care and concern for students, were recognized as the strongest contributors to the identification of returning and departing students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Noel (1985) identified academic advisors as the second group of higher education professionals central to a successful campus retention effort. Retention is the process of retaining students in a higher education institution until certificate completion or degree attainment at the same institution (Tinto, 2012). The academic advising and retention link has been studied previously, but a gap in the literature remains concerning the experience of academic advisors within the context of the student success and retention agenda. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) presented a synthesis of research findings demonstrating various dimensions in which students are changed by their experiences as a college student.

Tuition is one of two primary components of public institutions' total educational revenue. Appropriations from state and local governments are the other. At the institutional level, the most evident impact of decreased retention rates is the lost tuition revenue (Gaither, 1992). For colleges and universities, losing students also affects enrollment counts and decreases the state contribution based on full-time equivalency (FTE) enrollment formulas. Additionally, graduation rates are now considered a primary factor in institutional rankings (Reisberg, 1999). If a college fails to graduate its students, it creates negative public perceptions, which in turn translate into lower attendance rates, less tuition and FTE-based revenue. These issues have proven troubling to higher education administrators and recent developments in funding trends increase the potential impact even higher. Funding for public colleges and universities is

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undergoing significant changes with performance budgeting, and the completion of degrees is emerging as a key measure. A total of twenty-eight states used tuition to generate more than 50 percent of their total educational revenue in the 2017 fiscal year, according to the Executive Officers association's annual 2018 State Higher Education Finance report. This is a slight increase from twenty-five states in 2016. Furthermore, the State Higher Education Executive Officers state a net tuition revenue slipped as a share of total educational revenue across the country in 2017. Tuition accounted for 46.4 percent of total education revenue, down from 47 percent in 2016 and below an all-time high of 47.8 percent in 2013. Today, thirty-seven states have either enacted or approved some form of performance-based funding (PBF) model for their public higher education systems. These policies hope to direct state funding to the most cost efficient institutions, and reward those institutions that are in alignment with specified outcomes (Kelchen & Stekrak, 2016). This growing trend requires institutions to demonstrate accountability to the governing bodies making the funding decisions (Fong et al., 2017). The performance budgeting for colleges and universities may adjust the budget questioning from what states should do for the universities and colleges to what those institutions should do for their states.

The proven benefits associated with degree completion and recent changes in funding for higher education demonstrate the significant loss of potential funding associated with retention of students. Institutions lose funding, which limits potential for instructional practices, research and service. In order to prevent future loss, it is imperative that researchers within higher education continue to investigate the reasons that contribute to decreased student retention and explore institutional strategies that have proven successful in improving retention rates. With decreased student retention, the student loses the opportunity for greater economic prosperity,

with lower career opportunities and a lower social mobility opportunity. Effective academic advising is considered a significant process within an engaging and positive educational environment, yet its influence has not been isolated as the primary and sole source in a retention model (Muehleck et al., 2014). Embracing the benefits of excellence in academic advising, colleges and universities can increase effective strategies to support retention and progressive movement towards students completing their education and career goals (ACT, 2015; June, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research was to understand the experiences of the academic advisors with counseling degrees in their role in student success. This study aimed to understand how the participants viewed and understood the academic advising services they provided for student success. In order to address the problem described above, the primary research question was what the lived experiences of academic advisors were with counseling degrees regarding their role in student success. The findings from this research aimed to also provide additional insight into the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees to enhance training, educational preparation, and professional advances for academic advisors and student affairs administrators.

Definitions of Terms

Academic advisor - Can be a faculty member or a separate employee labeled an academic
        advisor (Meuhleck et al., 2014). The academic advisor is to know the student's specific
        risk and success indicators and how those indicators might impact success and
        persistence (Darling, 2015).

Academic advising - Academic advising is a decision-making process in post-secondary institutions where students discuss information with an academic advisor (Drake, 2011).

Appreciative advising - An intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help student optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials (Bloom et al., 2008).

Colleges - Higher education institutions are facilities that provide credits towards a certificate or degree program beyond a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate.

Developmental academic advising - Developmental academic advising is a process that produces an advisor/advisee relationship that assists students in reaching educational, career, and personal goals through the introduction to and use of post-secondary and community resources (Raushi, 1993; Winston & Sandor, 1986).

Higher education institutions, post-secondary institutions, institutions, colleges and universities - are synonymous terms in this study.

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

Prescriptive academic advising - Prescriptive academic advising is considered a process where the advisor provides the student with information specific to enrollment and course selection, but a relationship is not developed between advisor and advisee (Mottarella et al., 2004; Winston & Sandor, 1986).

Retention - Upon returning to higher education, students return to the same institution (Tinto, 2012). Retention is the process of retaining students in a higher education institution until certificate completion or degree attainment. In this study the terms retention and graduation are synonymous.

Student affairs administrators - People who work in the field of student affairs as practitioners or professionals (i.e. academic advisors, career advisors, directors, assistant deans, and deans) to provide services and support for students and drive student learning outside of the classroom at institutions of higher education (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2012).

Student success - Students' persistence and academic resilience (Finn et al., 1997).

Conclusion

This chapter is outlined to provide an introduction of the characteristics of college academic advisors, types of academic advising, student success and retention strategies, integration of counseling and academic advising, and the role of an academic advisor with a counseling degree in student success. Academic advisors with counseling degrees bring knowledge and awareness of the importance for integration of both the NACADA core competencies and the ACA Code of Ethics, in conjunction with the CACREP standards. This unique combination of standards provides a wide perspective of considerations for student success by the academic advisor. Research on academic advisors who are members of the counselor education and supervision community is limited, but information regarding academic advisors in general is ample. To best understand the specific population, one must first have foundational knowledge of academic advisors. In the following chapters, an explanation of academic advising models and student success strategies are outlined, along with an explanation of student success and retention specifically designed for college undergraduate students. Information is provided on the role of academic advising for student success according to the NACADA and the standards established for the merging of academic advising and student success experiences.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The increased attention focused on retention efforts at higher education institutions is an effort to increase and maintain graduation rates. Retention and graduation rates within four-year public institutions indicate whether the university is successfully engaging and meeting the needs of the student population. Prospective students factor in retention and graduation rates as a part of their decision making to identify top choice schools. Public universities have lower retention and graduation rates than private institutions, primarily due to their mission to serve the public through education and research, target non-traditional or first-generation students, and recruit many students that rely on financial aid (Eisenberg et al., 2016). Although retention and graduation rates are reputably lower for public institutions, it remains essential for these universities to be aware of their ranking among comparable universities, as both measurements are indicators of student satisfaction and university support.

Different measurements define retention and graduation rates. Retention rates refer to the percentage of first-time-in-college (FTIC) freshman students that return sophomore year. Existing literature defines graduation rates as the measurement of FTIC freshman students that complete their program within six years (NCES, 2018). The most recent 2016 data states that the national retention average for a four-year public university is 81 percent, and national graduation rates are at 60 percent. Studies show that freshman retention rates are significant as they can provide a snapshot of the health of a university (Eisenberg et al., 2016). Low retention rates

indicate a need for recruitment and admission to create new retention strategies for advisors and students. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AACU) state other factors, such as a hostile university environment, lack of student engagement initiatives, and the challenges encountered by economically disadvantaged and marginalized students, may also lead to lower retention and graduation rates (AACU, 2010).

Universities that demonstrate higher than average retention rates show students satisfaction, both academically and socially, and choose to continue their education in the university environment. Higher than average retention and graduation rates express the institution's ability to select motivated and prepared students, provide dynamic support services to students, and remain transparent to students and families about expectations (AACU, 2010). The Association of American Colleges and Universities argue that "the single most important step colleges and universities-especially public colleges and universities can take to lower the student and family cost of college attendance is to improve retention, thereby, increase the four-year graduation rate." Given the importance of retention and graduation rates as a measurement for prospective students, universities need to prioritize attrition rates by implementing policies, initiatives, and student support services (i.e. academic advising and counseling services) that ensure students remain engaged and invested in their education. Retention for returning sophomore students has a direct link to graduation rates. Academic advising is an important part of a college student's educational experience and can have significant implications on persistence and decision-making leading to matriculation towards graduation (Bontrager, 2004).

Emotional distress is experienced by approximately one in four students while attending college (Ebdon, 2005). Students with mental illnesses are an at-risk population for increased attrition. It is vital for higher education administrators to investigate effective techniques and

strategies, and to identify student affairs professionals, such as academic advisors, who will aid in increasing student success. Academic advisors play an integral part in helping students stay in college and be successful (Wiseman & Messitt, 2010). NACADA has established that there are different roles in advising which include counselors (Nutt, 2003). Raushi (1993) suggested that offering short-term, solutions-focused quality advising in conjunction with mental health counseling impacts both students and the campus community. Quality advising that fosters a caring and positive student experience will promote student and advisor development.

The purpose of this literature review was to examine scholarly literature relevant to academic advisors and the role of an academic advisor in student success efforts. Further, the concerns and how the benefits of academic advisors with counseling degrees may help students accomplish their academic achievements must be considered. The three main concepts addressed in this literature review are (1) identification of the role of academic advising, (2) student success strategies and techniques utilized by higher education institutions, and (3) contemporary issues in student development and advantages to academic advisors with counseling degrees to aid in student success.

Academic Advisors as Counselors

College marks a major change in the academic arena accompanied by significant psychosocial change as well. It is critical for college counselors to consider these challenges when understanding the developmental path and needs of the college student population so that counselors can be cognizant of other factors that may be influencing clients presenting issues as well as their progress. The field of counselor education and supervision has a long-established structure, format, and definition. The definition of counseling has been upheld and recognized. Within the last ten years, the definition remains to reflect "Counseling is a professional

relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals" (ACA, 2014; ACHA, 2019; CACREP, 2016).

Despite the importance of a common language for academic advising, a comprehensive definition that is used consistently within higher education has yet to be established and widely used. Without a common definition, interpretations and assumptions about academic advising or advising practitioners may be made regarding the responsibilities and role of academic advising. A definition of advising gives power to practitioners and scholars in the field. O'Banion (1972) described advising as "a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment" (p. 62).

There are some student success programs that include a variety of higher education administrators as an essential support system for students such as academic advisors, career counselors, advocates, and mentors (Fleming, et al, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2006; Lefevor et al., 2018). Kelley-Hall (2010) examined a student support services program that incorporated a counseling model in the student's engagement experience with the university which require a student to meet with their academic advisor twice a month to review their academic status, discuss personal issues that may have arisen, and provide an opportunity for the advisor to refer students to additional services from which they may have benefited. The students found that their academic advisors were an integral component of the program, since they helped them navigate both personal problems and academic obstacles. More traditional academic advisors often support students with class selection, ensuring that students are completing graduation requirements; these advisors provide and foster encouragement, and direct students to appropriate support services for a variety of issues. The students from that program study have

reported feeling that the support and guidance they received from their advisors was an important

and crucial part of their success in college (Coles, 1998).

The majority of college students with mental health problems choose not to disclose their

issues and, thus, do not receive help and support (Martin et al., 2010). Martin and colleagues

found that students' primary reason for not disclosing was the perception and fear of being

stigmatized and discriminated against. Nearly a decade ago, 90% of college students were not

seeking help at college counseling centers (Gallagher, 2011). While this is not to say that every

college student needs to seek help, it is likely that more than 10.6% of students could benefit

from the services. Gallagher's (2011) study does reveal some shocking statistics regarding

increases in student mental health. It is important to remember that the students the directors

were reporting on were already clients at the counseling centers. One must wonder to what extent

and severity students outside the counseling center were experiencing mental health problems.

These concerns continue to be on the rise, as reported by the 2015-2016 Center for Collegiate

Mental Health (CCMH) that a 50% increase in college students seeking mental health treatment

from the previous year's report. These treatments are described as 150,483 unique college

students seeking mental health treatment; 3,419 clinicians; and over 1,034,510 appointments.

Among the potential influences on attitudes toward seeking mental health services in

college is the level of perceived stigma (Komiya et al., 2000). Komiya and colleagues (2000)

assessed perceptions of stigma around receiving mental health treatment among college students.

Findings indicated that higher perceptions of stigmatization were related to less favorable

attitudes toward seeking mental health services. Studies have shown that many college students

do not seek help from their college counseling centers because of a perception of stigma by their

peers (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2018; Lefevor et al., 2018; Vogel et al., 2006).

Stigmatization was shown to be a great factor in why college students with mental health problems do not seek help from their college counseling centers.

According to the CCMH Annual Report, nearly 55% of college students seek counseling at a university counseling services for mental health concerns. Between fall 2009 and spring 2015, counseling center utilization increased by an average of 30-40%, while enrollment increased by only 5% (Jones et al., 2018). Counseling services provide students with an outlet to discuss and receive support for issues that many college students may experience.

Additionally, the 2016 CCMH Annual Report states ninety-five percent of college counseling center directors surveyed said the number of students with significant psychological problems is a growing concern in their center or on campus. Seventy percent of directors believe that the number of students with severe psychological problems on their campus has increased in the past year. The availability of professionals who provide counseling support to students is very important to overall student well-being and success in college (Baker & Stern, 1995; Fleming et al., 2018; Mahoney, 1998).

Engagement and partnership with academic advising regarding student mental health support has become increasingly important to students' success, with many researchers classifying it as a pivotal aspect of overall student support (Kolenovic et al., 2013). Academic advisors utilize terms such as career counseling, engagement, teaching, and development to describe attributes of academic advising (Himes, 2014). Various types of social engagement support for students can include peer tutoring, structured social activities, and assistance developing relationships on campus (Chaney et al., 1998; Grant-Vallone et al., 2003). Referral of this support offered to students is provided by the academic advisor. Counseling support can include enhancing students' self-efficacy by providing mentoring, counseling services, academic

advising, and encouragement (Baker & Stern, 1995; Kolenovic, et al., 2013; Mahoney, 1998). The academic advisor with a counselor education degree and background provides and addresses these areas of support for students relating to social, academic, counseling, mentoring, encouragement, and assistance with developing relationships on campus.

The standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) and the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) address the importance of counselors' professional dispositions and behaviors in the delivery of ethical and effective services. NACADA's (2017) core competencies: conceptual, informational, and relational reflect that of three advising components as necessary for effective practice: conceptual, informational, and relational. Research on the institution-related interventions (Kuh et al., 2011) for college students has suggested that there is a complex relationship between student-related factors (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993).

The critical role of student support personnel is suggested as an important influence in the academic relationships established for students (Bain, 2004; Light, 2001). Academic advising represents an academic relationship (Drake et al., 2013). In addition to specific academic guidance, academic advisors with counseling degrees often support the holistic experience of the student, which may include counseling the student on experiences with roommates, careers, and other salient student issues. Academic advisors interact with students on an institutional and systemic routine to review academic matters and overall engagement with the university, and their general wellness (NACADA, 2017). Therefore, academic advisors have the opportunity to directly guide students through the intricacies of their academic journey, including their overall success, engagement with the university, and decisions and situations related to remaining enrolled or not.

Academic Advisors

According to Darling (2015), advising strategies are designed with the purpose of enabling students to be successful and to address any barriers early on which influence success. Swecker et al. (2013) defined academic advising as instances of mentorship, information sharing, counsel, or suggestions of paths to follow being directed with advice from an institutional representative in regards to personal, social, or academic matters to a college student. Academic advisors perceive an institution's social and academic integration with a student's experience as an important part of a college student's educational experience, and can have significant implications on major and career decision making (Swecker et al., 2013). King and Kerr (2005), further explain, "Academic advising is perhaps the most important way that first-year students interact with a representative of the institution" (p. 320). The researchers further describe academic advising as "the hub of the wheel that establishes lines to all other support services on campus" (p. 320) and consider it as a primary guide in supporting students' successful transition to college, promoting a sense of engagement, and achieving their educational and professional goals. Academic advisors who are trained as counselors can provide a developmental approach and unique lenses to guide the student's academic advising experience. This perspective can foster student success to result in retention and positive engagement for the student's college career.

Tinto (2012) emphasized quality academic advising reflects an institution's commitment to a student. A positive learning experience between a student and academic advisor enables student satisfaction and persistence toward graduation (Tinto, 2012). Campus leadership and academic advisors need to understand the importance of incorporating the advising strategies within a university to promote student success (Darling, 2015). Tinto (2012) stated, "To improve

student's retention and graduation, the institution must begin by focusing on its own behavior and establishing conditions within its own walls that promote those outcomes" (p. 6). Academic advising is imperative to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education in promoting theory of student retention (Tinto, 2012). Although academic advising is recognized as a pertinent piece in college retention, the complex process and pedagogical potential continue to be overlooked by institutional leadership, faculty and academic advisors themselves (McGill, 2016).

Academic Advising and Career Counseling

Career exploration is an important and necessary process for college students for many reasons. Primarily, it assists students with beginning to make connections between what they are learning in the classroom to the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in a career. Additionally, career exploration can prompt and foster students developing enhanced self-efficacy and independence (Cunningham & Smothers, 2014). Providing academic advising and support to assist students with major and career decisions should be an important element in any effort to increase persistence and graduation rates (Tinto, 2004). Considering the current trends in higher education involving the national completion agenda and its implications for academic advising and student success, the importance in integrating career and academic advising is imperative. Integrating career and academic advising provides an opportunity to interject the counseling perspective for the academic advisor. Academic advisors with counseling degrees have knowledge and experience with career counseling practices and techniques. This lens provides opportunities to engage with the student in individualized goal-focused conversations. It provides a platform for the academic advisor to more clearly connect the curriculum of college majors with the direction of careers following graduation for students. These outcomes that

support increased retention and graduation rates have prompted many higher education leaders to invest university resources in training and collaboration, as well as revising organizational structures toward integration of academic and career advising (Harbour & Smith, 2016).

Academic Advising Models. Crookston (1972) reported that academic advising could be split into two categories: prescriptive advising or developmental advising. Crookston states the developmental mode is concerned with the overall outcome for the student, and, it also focuses on building and employing the student's skills and abilities in decision-making, evaluation, problem-solving, interpersonal interactions, and rational processes in reaching the overall outcome for the student. In 1977, NACADA began actively acknowledging and encouraging the developmental advising model (Pardee, 1994). However, the weaknesses with the developmental model include length of time, caseload size management, training required, and increased out-of-class expectations (Hollis, 2009). Hollis described developmental advising as a process that depends on a strong relationship between the advisor and the advisee.

Additionally, the appreciative advising model lays the framework for increasing advisor interactions with students (Bloom et al., 2008). By applying this model to advising, practitioners focus on utilizing students' strengths and unique characteristics to accomplish agreed-upon educational goals. When students begin to understand that focusing on desired outcomes can provide powerful results, their attention shifts toward the favored goal (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). Academic advisors can create a sense of hope through well-chosen language. Using terms consistent with a presumption that a student will complete their educational goals sets the expectation of persistence for the student. The use of these positive phrases by academic advisors supports a focus on the achievement of goals and the consistent message of expected graduation.

The Appreciative Advising framework has been adapted to enhance interactions with students in a number of different higher education settings including: first-year seminars, admissions, orientation, learning communities, tutoring, etc. (Bloom et at., 2011; Bloom et al. 2014; Walters, 2015). In addition, the nature of the framework allows it to be utilized with a wide variety of student populations: first generation, at-risk, undergraduate, graduate, students with disabilities, student-athletes, international, etc. (Crisp, 2013; Kamphoff et al. 2007; Palmer, 2009; Saunders & Hutson, 2012).

Developmental Advising. Hollis (2009) described developmental advising as a process that depends on a strong relationship between the advisor and the advisee. The process of academic advising within this context is known as developmental advising. Mottarella et al. (2004) suggest that students perceive the developmental approach to advising more favorable of other advising approaches due to the academic advisor's intent to establish rapport and demonstrate care for and support of the student. According to Crookston (2009), "Developmental advising is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision, but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluating skills" (p. 78). Crookston also noted that the key to successful developmental academic advising is the relationship established between student and advisor. Additionally, it is noted that this approach is of significant importance for an advisor to demonstrate commitment to a student's holistic development.

Prescriptive Advising. Prescriptive advising typically views the faculty member as the authority who directs the student with little or no input from the student, whereas the Developmental Model of advising involves a mutually-based decision-making process and is

more of a mentoring model of advising (Pardee, 1994). Other researchers, however, made note of advantages in the prescriptive model. Fielstein (1989) reported that over 50 percent of students rated some prescriptive activities as high priority, including course selection, graduation requirements, and planning an educational pathway. Additionally, many students have been conditioned to the prescriptive model of advising, as this was the only approach they have known (Pardee, 1994; Smith & Allen, 2006). Academic advising has seen an evolution from prescriptive advising, to developmental advising, to the current concept of advising as a teaching experience. Prescriptive advising is based on an advisor as an authority figure whose primary responsibility is to dispense information about classes and schedules and prescribe solutions for problems that the student encounters (Fielstein, 1989). Lowenstein (2005) discussed advisor goals including helping a student to create logic in their education, view the curriculum as a whole, make educational choices based on a developing sense of self, and enhance learning experiences by relating them to previously learned knowledge. The prescriptive model supports the ideal of academic advising as teaching and aims to focus on the integration of information with a students' sense to allow the student to integrate and adapt in the professional world.

Appreciative Advising. Appreciative advising provides a framework for advisors to build engagement through the six phases of an appreciative approach of supporting students. Academic advisors use positive, attentive, and active listening and questioning strategies to enhance engagement. These six phases are discover (building rapport), dream (discovering strengths), design (encouraging the student to share their dreams), deliver (create an educational plan), disarm (support their educational journey), and don't settle (challenge the student to do better). Built on story sharing and reconstructing attitudes (Bloom et al., 2008), appreciative advising proves a particularly useful strategy for building trust. Using the appreciative approach,

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advisors share select aspects of their personal stories—including their experiences, successes, and challenges—to help establish rapport. Advisors relate authentic and asset-based narratives relating to family and community. For example, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), students on academic probation receive assistance through a motivational and empowerment model incorporated into appreciative advising (Kamphoff et al., 2007). Through the UNCG Strategies for Academic Success program, advisors utilize positive affirmations rooted in appreciative advising with an emphasis on goal setting. The program supports retention and student success while improving the overall academic experience. When the model was first implemented, the percentage of UNCG students eligible to return to the institution after being placed on academic probation increased from 40 to 58 percent over a 4-year period.

College Student Development and Contemporary Issues in Mental Health

While it appears that a new generation of millennial students are bringing new mental health issues with them to college, it is also important to consider what this population is experiencing while at college that may affect their current mental health problems or aid in the creation of new ones. Increased societal pressures during college, pre-existing psychological issues, and a change in the psychosocial presentation of college students are potential influencers of mental health issues (Watkins et al., 2011). College is a large transition for many students, academically, socially, and emotionally. Warwick et al. (2008) note that the transition of beginning college can be an especially stressful situation. College can bring about adjustment challenges (Enochs & Roland, 2006).

In a time when college aged students are showing greater prevalence of severe mental illness and depression than any other age population (CCMH, 2016), and presenting at campus

counseling centers with more severe diagnoses (Gallagher, 2011; 2012), exploring this specific population is greatly warranted. College students are at an increased risk for mental health issues, and therefore have an increased need for mental health services. Counseling centers are coping with rapidly increasing demand for services, particularly by students with threat to self-characteristics, who utilize 20-30% more services than students without these characteristics (CCMH, 2016). Consequently, counseling centers have diverted more resources to crisis and triage appointments rather than traditional individual counseling services. Furthermore, the college-aged student population has the highest prevalence of any mental illness (25.8%) compared to adults aged 26-49 years (22.2%) and aged 50 and older (13.8%) (NIMH, 2017). Additionally, the American College Health Association's (ACHA, 2019) National College Health Assessment (NCHA) report states within the last year 70% of college students felt sad, 65% felt overwhelming anxiety, 45% felt depressed, and 13% considered suicide with 2% reported suicide was attempted. Years of constantly rising demand lead to longer and longer wait times and a growing pressure to address these needs so students can access services more quickly.

College counseling center directors reported anxiety was found to be the highest mental health issue of concern among college students, followed closely by depression and stress (CCMH, 2016). The mental health services needed for college students is apparent, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for college counseling centers to manage the need solely. It is important for institutions to respond to growing demand in an informed, intentional, and transparent manner such that counseling centers and the students they serve understand the type and level of services that are funded. Creative interventions could be crafted from the student development perspective to help promote wellness for college students and give academic

advisors with counseling degrees the training to identify such need, support students, and refer as necessary. Gerlach and Gibson's (2020) research highlights an emerging theme of counselor practice and knowledge for academic advisors with counseling degrees. This theme exposed the practice of the academic advisors utilizing their counseling skills to build rapport, find resources, fostering autonomy, and establishing trust. Academic advisors with counseling degrees can assist in increasing both supports directly to students in need and by referral to counseling service utilization to contribute to increased college student feelings of support, emotional well-being, happiness, and academic performance.

A significant level of intellectual and ethical (Perry, 1999), psychosocial (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1968), and moral (Kohlberg, 1973) development takes place during the college years. Regardless of which developmental stage a student is in, they will likely be more prone to certain developmental challenges. During these times of development, certain challenges may become more concerning mental health issues. For instance, Westefeld et al. (2005) note, "Aspects of the college culture and the development of the college student may increase the risk of suicide….The combination of college-age developmental changes and specific suicide risk factors is what may ultimately lead to college students taking their own life" (p.932). Therefore, as Westefeld et al. (2005) and others (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995; Perry, 1999) have suggested the developmental changes and challenges during the college years can put college students at an increased need for counseling services.

College is a large transition for many students, academically, socially, and emotionally. Warwick et al. (2008) note that the transition of beginning college can be an especially stressful situation. College can bring about adjustment challenges (Enochs & Roland, 2006). This means that even though the initial college year can be an exciting time and an opportunity for growth, it

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can also be a time of adjustment. During this potentially difficult time of transition, college

counseling services can be of critical support.

Loss of relationship. Recent separations from home relationships, relationship losses,

and the stress of transition point to the importance of forming new relationships when beginning

college. Loss of relationships can have a psychological impact on the development and

psychological health of college students (Jordan, 2001). Therefore, college students may greatly

benefit from counseling services during this potentially challenging developmental period. The

transition to college life weakens relational ties and some are lost completely. Some "long-

distance" romantic relationships result in breakups; everyday contact with parents is reduced to

semester break visits, and close childhood friends may become "pen-pals" for the next few years.

Unfortunately, these reductions in strengths or losses of relationships occur when students are

most vulnerable in times of difficulty and transition, such as going away to college. Thus, for the

college student's healthy development, it is important to form new relationships and make social

adjustments in college (Chickering, 1969; Frey & Beasley-Fielstein, 1984; Williams & Galliher,

2006).

Commuter students. Commuter students value social and interactive campus activities

more than residential students; perhaps, because of a reduction in these natural social interactions

by not living on campus (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Supporting this are findings that commuter

students have fewer interactions with faculty and other students than do residential students

(Pascrella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) argues that, in addition to student

engagement, environmental factors on and off campus influence student commitment to

universities. This principle is even more relevant for students who choose to commute and or live

off-campus. In addition to external factors, students who commute are less likely to belong to

social communities and integrate into campus culture (Braxton et al., 2004). Recently, more attention focuses on the influence of family, community integration, and student belonging have on commuter students (Pokorny, 2017). These factors provide some explanation as to why the commuting student population is more at risk of attrition. U.S. News & World reported that "among the ten universities with the most freshman commuters, an average of about 76% of first-year students lived off-campus or commuted" this past year (Moody, 2019). Figures such as this help illustrate the impact commuter students have on student retention in higher education.

Mental health concerns. Having discussed the developmental challenges and issues that college students may face, it is also important to address some of the mental health issues that can result from or be exacerbated by these developmental challenges. The major mental health issues that will be discussed are student depression and suicide, societal pressures, eating disorders, and issues of gender inequality. Being aware that many college students do not seek counseling because of perception of stigma (Hepworth & Paxton, 2007; Martin et al., 2010), this barrier to help-seeking may be especially detrimental to first-year students because they appear to be in the greatest need for such services (Barrett, 1994).

Depression

The ACHA (2007) notes that depression is the second most common diagnosis and treatment at campus counseling centers. The spring 2012 ACHA report revealed that 10.9% of college students self-reported having been diagnosed or treated for depression alone, by a professional. Yet, only a total of 10.6% of college students seek campus counseling for any mental health problem (Gallagher, 2012). And, most recently reported, an increase of now 20% of college students diagnosed or treated for depression (ACHA, 2019). Therefore, it seems possible that students may be diagnosed and treated for depression by family doctors and other

physicians who are not offering counseling as a form of treatment. In many of these cases, treatment may come only in the form of medications for depression. These statistics support that a large majority of students are being diagnosed but are choosing not to seek services.

The ACHA (2019) also found that 21% of college students reported that their feelings of depression made it difficult to handle their academic performance and 30% reported it was difficult to handle career related issues. Students' awareness of the connection between depression and academics and seeking help are two different things. Low academic performance can lead to financial problems (such as loss of a scholarship) and academic probation. College students may begin with a diagnosis of depression, but soon this root cause can cast a shadow on multiple areas of life. Choosing to seek help earlier may help offset some of these additional problems.

Suicide. College student depression is also an especially important topic because of its strong relationship to student suicide (Garlow et al., 2008). An estimated 12% of college students experienced suicidal ideation, with 25% of that percentage having more than one experience of ideation. In many cases, an identification of college students at risk for suicide can aid in the type of support provided and programs developed for students. This creates an opportunity for college counseling to play an active role in supporting student's mental health needs. Counseling can be of significant support that transcends beyond medication for students (Wilcox et al., 2010).

When discussing college student depression, it's critical to also address the issue of suicidal ideation. A reported 11% of college student suicidal ideation has been prominently associated with symptoms of depression (Garlow et al., 2008). Today, 13% of college students described experiencing suicidal ideation and 10% had attempted suicide or exhibited self-injurious behavior in their lifetime (ACHA, 2019). Also, students with current suicidal ideation

had significantly higher depression scores than those students without current suicidal ideation (Garlow et al., 2008). It makes sense that the percentage of college students who utilize campus counseling for all kinds of mental health concerns is on the rise (Gallagher, 2011).

In 2008, only 15% of students with moderately severe to severe depression, and only 16% of students with current suicidal ideation, were receiving psychiatric services (Garlow et al., 2008). Knowing the dominant role that stigma plays in reducing help-seeking, tied with these statistics, helps to see just how many students may need help, but choose not to for concerns of stigma. These findings reveal the vulnerability of the college student population and the importance of mental health treatment and outreach to these students. The need for mental health services, yet the apparent comparatively low number of students actually seeking services, shows the importance of studying this issue in hopes of eventual change.

Eating Disorders. Another potential college student mental health issue is body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. College women are dieting at an alarming rate, with 83% indicating the use of dieting to lose weight (Ackard et al., 2002). The transition of moving to college and searching for new relationships and connections may increase the desire to be accepted by peers, and as a result body dissatisfaction may become an issue. Dieting frequency has been linked to depression, low self-esteem, insecurity, and relationship issues (Ackard et al., 2002). As both a strong self-identity and healthy relationships are necessary pieces of positive student development (Chickering, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995), lacking these factors can be detrimental to the student's personal development. Eisenberg et al. (2011) revealed that 13.5% of college women and 3.6% of college men met positive criteria for eating disorders. Of these students, only 20% had received mental health treatment in the past year for the disorder. Unfortunately, 80% of the students who met criteria for eating disorders had not sought mental

health treatment. This study shows that while eating disorders are affecting college students, especially women, at an alarming rate, few are seeking treatment.

Food Insecurities

The latest U.S. government estimates indicate that food insecurity affects 50.1 million Americans, representing 14.9% of U.S. households; and, it is one of the highest recorded levels of Americans struggling to obtain enough food since data collection started seventeen years ago. College students are not immune to food insecurity; and, it is suggested that a need to better understand the extent, implications, and possible solutions for this issue on college campuses (Chaparro et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2011; Shive & Morris, 2006). Students are unlikely to be able to lead healthy lives and reach their full academic potential if they lack access to adequate food or are unsure of whether they can afford the foods they need. Food insecurity has many consequences including nutrient deficiencies, impairments to mental and physical health in adult women; depression in women; adverse health outcomes for infants and toddlers; behavioral problems in children; decreased educational achievement; and depression and suicidal symptoms in adolescents (Nord & Prell, 2007).

The adverse effects of food insecurity on learning and academic outcomes can include stress, depression (Gao et al., 2009), fatigue, difficulty concentrating (Radimer, 1990; Zekeri, 2007), and nutrient deficiencies (Jyoti et al., 2005). Institutions can enhance support for students experiencing food insecurities and further investigation of methods to more accurately assess college student household income and size will assist in better understanding the link between student socioeconomic status and food insecurity. Many colleges are implementing food assistance programs on their campuses, such as food pantries. Little data exists to measure the effectiveness of such programs. Additionally, although many colleges are implementing these

programs, a stigma continues to be present regarding students self-disclosing the need for assistance.

Academic Stress and Anxiety

The consequences of stress are that it could lead to a person feeling incompetent and emotionally challenged, especially when the stressor is constant (Jackson & Finney, 2002). The inability to manage stress can lead to symptoms such as feelings of 23 loneliness, anxiety, insomnia, and continuous worrying (Ross et al., 1999), and depression (Dixon et al., 2008; Farrell & Langrehr, 2017). According to the ACHA National College Health Assessment (2017), 31.7% of students reported stress as the number one factor that negatively impacted their academic performance in areas related to receiving a low grade on an exam, project, course, or receiving an incomplete or dropped course.

Fong et al. (2017) indicated that "although some degree of academic stress can indicate interest in the task and a response to appropriate task difficulty, many students experience overwhelming amounts of anxiety that ultimately affect their performance" (p. 8). Fong et al. (2017) stated that academic stress can be perceived as a threat appraisal which can prompt negative behavior, such as procrastination, or it can be perceived as a challenge appraisal that can lead to positive coping responses, such as increase in study hours and preparation. Stress has been studied extensively among college students (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Thomas & Borrayo, 2016) and has been found to affect academic persistence (Thomas & Borrayo, 2016; Zajacova et al., 2005) and college adjustment (Dyson & Renk, 2006). Ross et al. (1999) contributed college stress to the following: interpersonal development and management with family and peers; matters related to academics, such as homework, grades, or, projects; and environmental adjustments with a transition to college and adjustment to unfamiliar situations.

College stress can also be attributed to financial difficulties, balancing employment with college, maintaining interpersonal relationships, academic responsibilities and pressures, conflict within family, and difficulty managing time for obligations (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Academic literature also states that there is an emerging homeless population among undergraduates between the ages of 18 through 24 that requires attention by university leadership (Heagney & Benson, 2017). The contextual variables of family support and responsibilities and concerns about finances can impact students' academic persistence. Prioritizing financial obligations over academic responsibilities has been found to lead to lower academic achievements among college students (Tseng, 2004).

Academic responsibilities can include academic tasks such as studying for exams, writing papers, and completing homework. Some students eventually adjust to college; however, others find the transition challenging and stressful (Towbes & Cohen, 1996). Previous research has also found academic stress to predict poor academic performance (Felsten & Wilcox, 1992; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003), especially for freshmen students (Struthers et al., 2000). College stress has been found to lead to academic non-persistence decisions among female students (Dixon et al., 2005). Students who reported having higher levels of stress also reported lower intellectual testing scores (Dixon et al., 2005).

Student Success

DeBerard et al. (2004) found that the state of a student's wellness does impact their academic achievement but does not affect a student's desire to persist in college. The results suggested that negative psychosocial and health habits may affect students' grades but not necessarily their persistence to obtaining a degree. Another research study conducted by Pritchard (2003) focused on the influence of students' emotional and social well-being on grades

and retention. The results suggested that emotional well-being is a predictor and does impact a student's determination to continue attending college.

Student departure and retention theories are based on key literature associated with student persistence among faculty, staff and academic advisors within a higher education institution (Tinto, 2012). In addition, student retention affects a university's school reputation and financial well-being (Siekpe & Barksdale, 2013). The subject of retention in higher education remains an important subject and concern. This subject is addressed in recent research as the "completion agenda" (Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 2012). Funding and resource allocations are often attached to the clear and reportable data related to retention and graduation rates (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013).

It is imperative for all departments and programs in the college system to find ways to retain students. The issue of retention is important to all constituents within a college system, especially academic advisors, whose main purpose is to assist students in planning and reaching academic and career goals. No studies were found in the literature focusing on how an academic advising program was used to explore advising perceptions of academic advisors with counseling degrees in comparison to academic advising programs. The lack of studies in this area further supported the need for this study because some colleges and universities may be able to implement helpful techniques in already created areas, such as academic advising departments, or integrate in counselor education and supervision program curriculum.

Student Success Theoretical Model

These areas include the quality of the service provided along with the development of interpersonal relationships (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Service quality can include recruitment and orientation as a mandatory event for all beginning college students, emphasizing the

importance of sustained student services throughout and beyond the first year (Dadgar et al.,

(2014). A relationship between faculty, staff, and a college student should then transition into a

developmental process in the form of academic advising (Niranjan et al., 2015). Students need

support during their entire college career (Niranjan et al., 2015; Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

Therefore, support is crucial to building a student's capacity to learn and navigate through

academic and non-academic challenges of college in order to follow a path to successful

completion (Dadgar et al., 2014).

Academic advising strategies utilized in higher education play an important role in the

student retention process, as well as the student and academic advisor relationship (Braxton &

McClendon, 2000; Braxton et al., 2001). Advising styles can include coaching, supporting,

delegating, counseling, teaching, or the parenting approach (Al-Asmi & Thumki, 2014; Darling,

2015). The appropriate style depends upon the student and the relationship they have developed

with the academic advisor (Braxton et al., 2000). Student commitment and intentions are subject

to change over time. A student's prior attributes, experiences, and dispositions may contribute to

their college career decisions and lead directly to student departure (Tinto, 1987). Therefore, a

student may choose to leave a university knowing the difficulty of navigating their way through

different stages of becoming fully engaged with a university and with other members of an

institution (Tinto, 2012).

Student interaction with staff, faculty and academic advisors enhances a student's

integration within a university by contributing to Tinto's theory of retention (Darling, 2015).

Academic advising may not be the most commonly used tool of student services, therefore

improving advising sessions to enhance engagement could significantly increase retention (Kot,

2014). Therefore, the key to effective retention is the commitment of an inclusive educational

and social community within a university promoting a collaborative relationship between a student and the academic advisor (Darling, 2015).

Tinto Theoretical Model of Student Departure

The most recent research with a focus on models of student growth, persistence, and satisfaction are based on theories of departure and retention (Tinto, 2012). Tinto's theoretical model of student departure describes the conditions of why a student chooses to withdraw from an institution (Tinto, 1975). Tinto has applied the stages of departure to transitions students will make when they enter college and engage as a member within a new community (Tinto, 2012). Tinto (1987) emphasized the importance of what students endure after college entry is more important to student departure than what occurs prior to admission. Academic collaboration and engagement between the students and academic advisors can prevent student departure and promote student retention (Tinto, 2012). The actions of a university and college should be coordinated in a collaborative manner to ensure a campus-wide approach to student retention (Tinto, 2012). Darling (2015) emphasized how social connections between the student and advisor are imperative for student success.

Furthermore, Tinto (2012) stated a university must behave in an intentional, systematic and structured manner to enhance student success and retention. Research explores that to know about student retention and doing something about it are not the same (Tinto, 2012). In addition to the importance of the first student contact, there are two main areas, which increase student engagement with a university. Advising strategies play an important role not only in student development and support systems but also in Tinto's theory of student retention (Al-Asmi & Thumki, 2014; Tinto 2012). It is imperative that university faculty, higher administration

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administrators, and academic advisors understand the tenants of college student departure, and how these processes impact university retention rates (Braxton et al., 2000; Gaines, 2014).

The student-advisor relationship primarily depends on the quality of engagement with campus personnel, student performance and overall satisfaction of the academic experience (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). According to students, there is a disconnect that exists when there is a lack of personal feedback from university faculty and staff (Tinto, 2012). A student's decision to depart from a university can be caused by the student perceiving a lack of connection with faculty members, staff, peers and academic advisors (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Tinto (2012) emphasized how social integration between a student and a university must occur for a relationship to be established. This connection must be established at the first contact between a student and a university, which occurs at recruitment, admission, and orientation (Tinto, 2012).

O'Keeffe (2013) stated students' interactions are sometimes difficult and awkward with faculty and staff due to students perceiving them to be inaccessible, not personable, and unfriendly. Students who feel rejected and unengaged, coupled with not being able to find a sense of belonging in higher education, is a key cause of decreased student retention (Tinto, 2012). Faculty and academic advisors should not assume a student knows when to seek academic or career advice, but should require students to make advising appointments throughout their college career (Donaldson et al., 2016). Therefore, personnel and senior administration at universities must seek to create a welcoming and structured environment where students feel a part of a successful academic experience (O'Keeffe, 2013).

Role of Academic Advisors

The role academic advisors play in the students' social integration within a university should not be underestimated and can be measured (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). According to

Colvin (2013), institutions are encouraged to acknowledge increasing retention as a vital process to produce a greater number of graduates. Student advising strategies can promote a developmental practice to inform and guide students to success by instilling ways to navigate and control educational experiences (McGill, 2016). Professional academic advisors are defined by many institutions as a master's degree holder in a subject area or counseling or related field (NACADA, 2016). The main role is to guide students through the policies, procedures, and requirements of course planning. Professional academic advisors also actively engage with students who are academically struggling. The primary focus for academic advisors is to promote student success, but an additional angle was discovered to also be needed. The additional areas needed for support emerged as mentoring, career exploration, wellness, university engagement, and retention.

The obligation to fulfill educational needs to the student includes effective academic advising toward graduation and, ultimately, a career plan (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). When the academic plan is established by the academic advisor and the student, the student becomes an effective individual in society and can more likely persist to graduation (Tinto, 2012). A recent study by Pather and Chetty (2016) indicated student retention has been impacted within the past two decades by the extent of how a student's religion, race, economics, and cultural diversity has been accepted. Pather and Chetty (2016) also noted students' socio-economic status, academic experiences, and demographics are often overlooked in advising sessions rather than placing emphasis on the importance of a student's background characteristics.

Many times, academic advisors assess the personal characteristics of students in depth by referring students to counselors trained in assessments measuring aptitude, intelligence and decision-making abilities (Gordon & Steele, 2015). This again, is a beneficial lens that is the

perspective of an academic advisor who has a counseling background. An academic advisor with a counseling degree is trained to take a holistic approach to supporting the student by going beyond informing or explaining curricular or campus procedures to students, they may offer information in the context of students' needs, values, goals, wellness, and personal situations.

Retention Strategies

Across the board, studies revealed developmental-type interactions among college personnel and students contributed to higher student retention and graduation rates. Research supports the use of developmental advising for aiding student retention. Developmental academic advising is considered a holistic-type advising that focuses on students' personal and academic needs as defined by Crookston (1972). Darling's (2015) research found that first time college students were more likely to be retained and to do better if they knew and met with their academic advisor regularly. Tinto (1993) described retention as an outcome of an engaging and successful college experience. Nutt (2003) wrote that academic advising is central to successful efforts in educating and retaining students, providing a personal connection to the institution that is key to student retention and success. Drake (2011) discussed reliable academic advising as being a vital link in retention. These critical factors aid in increased retention rates among students (Beal & Noel, 1980; Drake, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Tinto's model of attrition (1993) indicated that students who are advised using a prescriptive model are less likely to successfully navigate the educational environment and graduate. The literature on student retention suggests that a critical factor in students choosing to remain in college is engagement with a significant person at the university (Chickering, 1969). Quality academic advising is beneficial for a university and academic programs holistically (Crookston, 1972; Drake, 2011; Gordon & Steele, 2015; Kuh, 1997; Tinto, 1996; Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

Academic advising is an important part of a college student's educational experience, and can have significant implications on major and career decision making. Habley (1981) identified components related to the process of forming and maintaining student perceptions of advising practice. The conceptual and informational components are based on student expectation and desire for effective advisor communication. Ultimately, academic advisors need to be both knowledgeable about student personal and educational needs and the ways to address those needs. Upcraft et al. (2005) state two of the most important influences on student learning and development are: (1) meaningful interaction with a variety of campus community members and (2) effort put into academic pursuits. According to Kuh (1997), institutions can best foster these influences by creating meaningful collaborative partnerships among professionals across campus.

Advising approaches such as developmental academic advising can aid students in these transitions and help them create strategies for success. Considering studies viewed in this chapter, the issue of retention and need to further seek solutions for aiding in retention are apparent. Studies examining retention efforts in colleges and universities attempted to address retention from different perspectives. Academic advising within colleges that had higher retention rates were studied, developmental versus prescriptive academic advising techniques were considered, and faculty and student interactions were examined. Increasing the engagement between a student and an academic advisor by implementing an advising model that is intrusive in practice enhances the opportunity to reach students who may never have come in for advising before. These intrusive advising practices for retention efforts drive an improvement in outreach to students via email, text, phone, and in-person (June, 2010). Since higher education institutions

recognize retention is an issue, it is important to explore solutions to aid in more students remaining in college until degree completion.

The Completion Agenda

Institutions and educators have always wanted students to succeed, however, it was primarily left up to the student to take the ownership for their success. In the past ten years, a shift in this perspective has led to a movement called student success to make a greater impact on completion rates, equity, and social mobility institutional responsibilities. Institutional leadership now takes an intentional and purposeful approach to developing strategies to impact an increase on national retention and graduation rates, decreasing the achievement gaps, and decreasing student debt by completion of an undergraduate degree in four years.

Lipka (2019) reports in a recent publication from The Chronicle of Higher Education that the national completion rates are slowly increasing, but have exceeded 60 percent over all. And, this presents the question of what does this mean for universities, university leadership, faculty, and staff? Universities are answering the call with action and direct ownership within the process to address this complex and vast problem. A new approach to student success combating this problem is to focus on both the student's academic achievement, and the whole student to identify opportunities for overall wellness and engagement.

Summary

College students are in a time of great physical, intellectual, psychosocial, ethical, and moral development. Furthermore, amongst these developmental processes, college students are also faced with challenges that may impede or halt healthy development. All of the above strive to paint a picture of the intense transition that takes place during the college years. Based on these facts, the importance of mental health support for students becomes more evident. Prior to

the modern wellness movement and the development of intentionally designed healthy campuses, health services primarily dealt with common physical illnesses. With the increased focus on holistic wellness and the need for student affairs to document their effectiveness in contributing to college's missions, the importance of student health, counseling services, and wellness has increasingly become a priority (Gordon, 1995; Jackson & Weinstein, 1997; Keeling, 2001; Swinford, 2002). The role of the academic advisor with a counseling degree can be twofold in providing support for students, and connects at the intersection of academic success and personal wellness for students. Students are seeking to be successful in their academic journey as well as to become individuals whose values and beliefs are reflected in their academic, social, and personal goals. The day to day challenges that college students face can be complex and intertwined with personal and academic elements, which presents a precise opportunity for positive impact for the role of an academic advisor with a counseling degree. This holistic approach aids in helping students set goals so they can improve their personal functioning, identify barriers that may impact successful accomplishment of their goals, develop strategies to accomplish these goals, and assess whether or not the strategies are successful (Gordon, 1995; Jackson & Weinstein, 1997; Keeling, 2001; Swinford, 2002).

Now that national health objectives have been set it is imperative that health service personnel assess their student body to implement programs to meet the objectives. Current research does appear to support the overarching concept of wellness as an important contribution to students' education and overall well-being. There is significant opportunity for academic advisors with counseling degrees to serve as a vital resource to the university and to its student body. If student affairs administrators work collaboratively with academic affairs administrators to implement the national objectives and build healthier environments it could create a student

body that is more motivated to learn, better equipped to cope with stress, improve academic

achievement, and enhance individual student development (Jackson & Weinstein, 1997).

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter contains the research design, primary research questions, data collection and analysis, role of the researcher, and trustworthiness for this study. The objective of this study was to understand the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees regarding their role in student success. This study aimed to better understand the significance of persistence through the lens of the academic advisors' experiences with their knowledge of counseling skills and techniques in effort to understand their role in student success. This research may open the door for additional studies to provide a broader perspective of advisors' roles in higher education for student success initiatives.

Research Design

The intent was to discover and explore the lived experiences of the academic advisors' role in student success; therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this study. As such, this study was interested in the comprehensive experience of an academic advisor with counseling degrees, and was best suited for exploring the use of a descriptive phenomenological research method. Qualitative research is a commonly used method for understanding the meaning people have constructed, and how a person can make sense of experiences they have in the world (Seidman, 2012). Qualitative research is reliant on the understanding of experiences, perceptions, and opinions of research participants.

Creswell (2007) explained qualitative research as an approach to uncover and expose an understanding of the participants' experiences while interpreting the complexity of the

phenomenon. Qualitative research involves evolving questions, procedures, and data analysis to include themes for the researcher interpreting the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2007). The study examined a phenomenon of student success as addressed by academic advisors in their engagement with students. A qualitative methodology used in-depth, individual interviews as the best method to capture the total experience of the participants.

In qualitative research, the interview process includes the interviewer phrasing their requests in a conversational tone to engage the participants in a narrow range of topics allowing the opportunity for the interviewer to explore themes (Seidman, 2012). In this study, a semi-structured interview instrument was used in the academic advisors' conversations as they occured in a natural setting. Seidman noted the researcher must have the capability to appreciate and observe differences in meanings and conversations among the participants' perspectives in qualitative research. Seidman highlights that it is important to note that when using interviews as a data collection method in qualitative research, the interviewer is considered the instrument. The data collected for this study captured the perspectives of actual events by the people who lived them, and not the values, or perceptions or meanings interpreted by the researcher.

Research Question

The following research question will guide this study. What are the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees regarding their role in student success?

Participants

The selected population for this study included academic advisors with counseling degrees who advise(d) undergraduate students at a four-year institution. Participants for the study were recruited using both purposeful and snowball sampling approaches. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants based on criteria set by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful

sampling was appropriate for phenomenological inquiry because it supports the phenomenon of the participant to be explored from the participant's experience. Participants in a purposeful sample presented qualitative data that was the most significant to the focus on the research (Thorne & Darby, 2005). Additionally, I recruited participants by referral or snowball sampling. Snowball sampling or network sampling is a sampling approach used when a participant knows of other participants who fit the criteria and refers them to the study (Creswell, 2007). I solicited participants from universities with whom I have contacts and spoke to academic advising departments to ask for referrals. Further, I selected participants from referrals of current participants who knew someone at another university and satisfied all criteria that was included in this study. This method of sampling was used when the researcher had difficulty finding the recommended number of participants for the phenomenological study. I conducted these individual interviews with participants to support an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon by the data that was directly gathered from those who have lived the experience.

I conducted an initial invitation to participate (Appendix A) to identify some participants. I sent the invitations to the American Association of School Personnel Association (AASPA), NACADA, National Association of Advisors for Health Professions (NAAHP), National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE), and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), Virginia Commonwealth University's University Academic Advisory Board (VCU UAAB) listservs for academic advisors and academic advisors who also serve as higher education administrators and student services personnel administrators. I also sent the invitation to the Counselor Education and Supervision Network (CESNET) and COUNSGRADS (available through ACA) listservs. These two listservs are open to counselors, counseling graduate students, and counselor educators. This invitation specifically addressed the criteria for

inclusion which was for participants to have received a master's degree in counseling, been currently employed at a four-year university as an academic advisor, and must have had a job responsibility associated with student success, such as retention and graduation rate increase efforts. Because these criteria were very specific, I sent the invitation to each of the counseling and higher education student services personnel listervs based on the benefit for recruitment. I included a link to a survey that utilized Survey Monkey in all invitations to be used to collect demographic data of participants that were screened for appropriate inclusion.

Approximately ten participants are recommended for a phenomenological study to meet the minimum requirements for data saturation (Creswell, 2007). In the gathering of the data, I sought after saturation in the data to exhibit there were no new ideas or themes to be identified. For secured saturation in qualitative research and a repetition of themes, generally, 10 participant interviews will reach that level of saturation. If I had not met data saturation after conducting 10 participant interviews, I would have continued to recruit additional participants until continued recurrences of existing themes and no more themes emerged.

Role of the Researcher

As typical in most qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to serve as the primary instrument in data collection (Creswell, 2007; 2009; Seidman, 2012). As the primary instrument in the data collection for this research study, it was expected that biases may be present. Thus, it was important to understand the lens from which I operated and that I addressed any biases that I brought to this study. I was aware of my potential bias and attempted to remain objective. I also had to be aware that the various identities I possess may factor into the data collection and interpretation of the results of this study.

First, I have over fifteen years of experience as an academic advisor in a large university in the Southeast. I experienced many of the academic advisor experiences detailed in the literature review including creating relationships with students to encourage connection with the institution. I have led teams of advisors by providing training for effective communication and engagement strategies to support increased student success. While I witnessed and experienced firsthand both the joy and honor of being an academic advisor, I also experienced that stress of feeling pressure, expectation, and the weight of responsibility for being a key component to retention and student success efforts of the university.

Secondly, I am a current full-time assistant dean, part-time doctoral student, and an aspiring counselor educator and researcher. For the past ten years, my responsibility as a senior leader within academic advising has presented an opportunity for me to establish policy, guidelines, and procedures for academic advising practices. Although there is consistency and standardization in educational training to be a counselor, the same uniformity does not exist for the profession of academic advising. As a higher education administrative professional, I have observed the challenges to establishing a concreteness of the profession of academic advising. There is no one direct path to the profession of academic advising, and that can bring ambiguity, a lack of clarity for the role and expectations, and difficulty to assess success as an academic advisor. My doctoral student and aspiring counselor educator/researcher identities emerge as I see the opportunity to create a new understanding and awareness around this topic and to be a part of the solution to enhance the role of academic advisors in student success. In addition to having served as the data instrument, I also interpreted the data. Because of this desire to be a part of the solution, I acknowledged that I had to not only look for answers that were not there, but rather I had to let the data inform me of potential solutions.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) emphasized data analysis and collection must be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. Qualitative research is interpretive research in which a personal assessment as to a description fits a situation or themes to capture categories of information. The interviews were recorded using Zoom and Otter, a transcript recording software, to ensure accuracy when analyzing the data. Interpretation of qualitative data collected in this study through recorded interviews using Zoom and Otter, involved the conversion of those interviews, observations, and conversations from audio to textual form. Data for this study were gathered using Zoom technology for all the interviews. The goal of data collection was to gather the participants' exact stories and experiences in their own words. Interviews were kept in a password-secured electronic location that was only accessible by the researcher to ensure confidentiality.

I recruited experienced qualitative researchers who have prior experience with coding transcripts to assist in the data analysis process. A team with two peer coders, in addition to myself, comprised the research team. Once the transcripts were completed, I ensured any identifying information such as name and university affiliation\were removed from each transcript before it was given to members of my coding team. The participant interview transcripts were downloaded from the transcript software and virtual recording to a Microsoft Word document for each code team member to review. Each code team member used Microsoft Word Track Changes and brought any individual notes collected while they reviewed the transcripts on their own to each code meeting. My research coding team had prior experience in qualitative coding by previously participating on a coding team for at least one other research study. The coding review process began with each member of the team independently reading

and coding the first transcript to determine if the interview questions were appropriate and sufficient for the remaining interviews. If additional review of the questions was needed, then a review of those questions and a development of new questions were added to the full list of interview questions. Upon completion of the review, the coding team did not deem a need for any adjustments to the interview questions. After that review, the remaining participants were interviewed using the set of interview questions.

The coding team met virtually via Zoom and discussed and deliberated over the codes they created individually and collectively agreed upon a consensus of final codes and themes for the code book. The data gathered from the academic advisor interviews enabled patterns of shared meanings, reflections, points of view and experiences. Over the time period the research team met, there were broader codes that developed into larger themes. These were discussed within the code team for a group consensus. The data was categorized, organized, and reviewed repeatedly and ensured internal validity during the research process. Team members then recoded all of the transcripts again to be used in the final code book. Lastly, the members of the coding team met virtually and reviewed final coding and came to a consensus of evidence for each code and/or theme.

Data Collection. A descriptive phenomenological approach was used for this qualitative study because it helped understand the phenomenon of addressing the advisors' perceptions of their role as an academic advisor in student success. Semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews were conducted via Zoom. Semi-structured interviews were used and promoted open conversations that evolved ideas, perceptions and reactions to the researcher's questions (Thorne & Darby, 2005). This interview method allowed the researcher the flexibility to follow-up on

specific topics of the experience for the academic advisor and allowed for probing questions (Thorne & Darby, 2005).

Data was reviewed to analyze systematically for the emerged themes and provided details of the participants' lived experiences. The analysis of interview transcripts was based on an inductive approach that was geared towards identified patterns in the data by means of thematic codes. "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). Data was analyzed by reviewing each line, sentence, and paragraph segments of the transcribed interviews and the code team decided what codes fit the concepts suggested by the data. Each code was constantly compared to all other codes to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Themes gradually emerged as a result of the combined processes of consistent and constant review of the data, connections were made with the interview questions, and what was explored and learned during the initial review of the literature was considered. The themes then moved from a lower level of importance to become significant. Those emerged themes presented as major findings of my study.

All participants were provided with the informed consent that detailed the purpose of the study, role of the researcher, procedures of study, and benefits and risks of participation (Appendix A). This informed consent was in written format and they each signed the form and agreed to participate in a Skype, Zoom, or telephone interview. Participant demographics was collected in the recruitment stage via Survey Monkey, and was verified by the researcher at the beginning of each individual interview to ensure accurate participant inclusion. Information

collected included gender, educational credentials, type of accreditation of counseling programs (i.e., CACREP), job title and responsibilities, length of employment as an academic advisor.

The interview questions were designed from a review of the literature. The questions specifically focused on the relationship between advisor and student, how the advisor defined student success, how student success is addressed in the advising sessions, how identified strategies for student success are used by advisors, and what other types of resources are utilized for student success. Proper communication, observation skills, and trust are crucial to the advising environment, therefore, some of the questions focused on the advisor-student relationship (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986; O'Keefe, 2013; Pardee, 1994; Tinto, 1987, 2012). Because student success has such varied definitions, constructs, and models (Crookston, 1972; Darling, 2015; Himes, 2014; Hollis, 2009), it was important to know how academic advisors define student success and how they implemented student success strategies into their advising sessions. Additionally, it was well-documented that students are not likely to seek help even when needed (Tinto, 1987, 1993; Nutt, 2003). Thus, questions pertaining to other resources students may utilize were relevant. Lastly, students have stated that there are many reasons that may not stay in college, such as finances, psychological or emotional trauma, or even feeling as though they do not belong (Lopez, 2006). And, therefore, the question regarding identifying barriers to student success was asked and identified the barriers as perceived by the participant for universities, administrators, and academic advisors.

Prior to data collection, the interview questions were piloted. Patton (2002) suggests piloting interview questions to ensure that any flaws or limitations are addressed before conducting the study. He further suggests that pilot testing should be done with people who have similar interests in the study. For this study, I piloted the questions with two participants who

were formerly served as university academic advisors and both hold counseling degrees. After I conducted these interviews, I made any adjustments necessary to address flow and timing of the questions. Questions in this semi-structured interview included:

1. What are some of your job responsibilities when working with your college students?

   a. What would you say are your primary responsibilities?

   b. What is your caseload?

   c. How often do you meet with the students on your caseload per semester?

      i. Is it required for you to meet with them?

      ii. If so, what is the required number of times you must meet with your students?

      iii. Do you ever see your students more than the required number of times?

2. How would you describe your relationship with your students?

   a. To what degree do you think your students open up to you and/or trust you?

   b. To whom do you report if you have concerns?

3. What are student success-related activities or approaches that you incorporate in your work with your students?

   a. How do you incorporate them?

4. How would you describe your role in addressing student success compared to other resources available to students? (Such as academic services, supplemental instruction, student organizations, tutoring, counseling, wellness, etc.)

5. What student success support resources are available to your student caseload?

a. How do you know what support services are available to students? (Such as professional development, workshops, training on resources, etc.)

b. Do your students utilize these resources?

c. Which ones do they utilize most?

d. What may be some reasons that students do not use these resources?

7. What type of counseling skills do you use in your work with students?

a. How often do you use them?

b. What other skills do you use in your work with them and why?

8. What would you consider as your counseling theoretical perspective or perspectives?

9. How do you know when students are in need of these support services?

a. How do you refer students to these support services?

10. What are the barriers to student success that you have observed with your students?

a. How do you approach assisting students with overcoming these barriers?

b. What do you do to decrease or eliminate these barriers?

11. If you could provide students with any assistance, support, etc. for student success without restrictions (time, money, etc.), what would they be?

12. How would you define student success?

a. What does it mean to you?

13. What else about your experience as an academic advisor and your role in student success you would like to share with me?

Ethical Considerations

The participants in this study were protected and assured confidentiality and privacy. Participants were assigned pseudonyms as a measure of identity protection. The interview process was recorded by audio and video format in an informal, semi-structured event. The in-depth interviews allowed the academic advisors to reveal much about their academic role and their individual experiences. During such interviews, a measure of comfort developed between the interviewer and participants. The qualitative researcher tried not to take on a specific behavior for each interview. It was be the goal of the interviewer to follow a conversational mode, and it allowed the interviewer to foster an environment that supported an individualized experience for each participant. Seidman (2012) states it will be important for the interviewer to focus on remaining neutral in the interview process to respect and uphold objectivity.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Trustworthiness is in reference to the validity of the overall study, and is related to applying appropriate methodology, data collection procedures, and appropriate data analysis (Creswell, 2007). It ensures that the study is of the highest quality and objective conclusions emerge from the data collected. I was purposeful in varying the sample of participants. I recruited nationally for participants from a variety of national counseling, academic advising, and student personnel listservs in an attempt to intentionally recruit participants from different universities and different academic advising structures who brought various perspectives to this study. Due to the semi-structured interviews, I had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions or questions to clarify the participants' statements for understanding.

According to Creswell (2009), the researcher asks the participants to review the data they provided to ensure its accuracy. I incorporated member checking and used it in the data collection phase. After interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were sent back to each participant for member checking and I ensured accuracy. This member checking process also provided participants the opportunity to adjust any responses or ideas shared in the interview. Additionally, member checking helped the researcher check for the accuracy of the data from interviews. Creswell described member checking as one of the most important methods of increasing the credibility of research. I asked participants to review their interview transcripts to verify that their narratives were correct. Polit and Beck (2009) cautioned that there could be "misleading conclusions" that emerge following the member checking process (p. 499). Participants could agree with my interpretations in order to satisfy me as the researcher (Thorne & Darbyshire, 2005).

I also utilized a coding team for consensus coding to triangulate the data. This supported the maintenance of credibility and incorporated other perspectives and opinions to interpret the meaning of the data. Lastly, I recorded and organized an audit trail of my data collection protocol and coding procedures. This included a timeline of my research activities, interview protocols, coding team meetings, coding team processes, and the development of the codebook (Seidman, 2012).

Conclusion

The methodology that was utilized for this study was described in this chapter. The focus of this research was to examine academic advisors' perceptions of their role in student success. Academic advisors' experiences were gathered and identified successful advising strategies for students that are being utilized, and what barriers were faced by academic advisors when they

met with students and created a plan for academic success. This qualitative study was designed with Tinto's (ADD YEAR) departure and retention theoretical frameworks. The recruitment of participants, procedures, and research design including the interview structure and questions, role of the researcher, methods of data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness were all included in this chapter. Chapter Three identified the research question, appropriate methodology that was used to investigate the research question, and phenomenological design that utilized the semi-structured format. The data was secured appropriately and protected to ensure confidentiality. The subsequent findings and interpretations of the data are detailed in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this descriptive-phenomenological study was to explore and examine the lived experiences of higher education advisors with counseling degrees in addressing their role in student success. Data collected from the interviews were used to answer the primary question: What are the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees regarding their role in student success?

Authentic Relationships, Balanced Intrusive Advising, and The Value of Counselor Identity emerged as the three primary themes, and Skill Awareness and COVID-19 Impact Support emerged as the sub themes during data analysis with data from twelve participants. Questions that guided this study were based on academic advisors with counseling degrees and the perceptions of their role in student success. The justification for using these research questions to guide the study was based upon topics emerging from the literature review as areas of concern for student success in higher education institutions.

Description of Participants

Academic advisors with CACREP accredited counselor education graduate degrees working at a 4-year public institution with a minimum of three years of experience working as an academic advisor were recruited for this study. The sampling criteria stipulated that each participant be a currently-employed academic advisor working with undergraduate students for at least three years at a 4-year public university with an earned master's degree in counseling or related training from a CACREP accredited program. Advisors were emailed a participant survey

to confirm eligibility to serve as a study participant. Once participants' eligibility was confirmed, the researcher emailed a consent form that required electronic signatures.

Participants completed the survey on their own time within the deadline time frame established by the researcher. The survey was designed to be completed within 10-15 minutes. Twelve surveys were completed and all twelve individuals who completed the survey were confirmed as eligible participants. Once eligibility to participant was confirmed, all 12 advisors ultimately participated in the interviews (Fraenkel et al., 2016).

The researcher emailed the advisors to request interviews to be conducted at an agreed upon time online. The individual in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to listen to personal experiences, feelings, and opinions from the academic advisors relating to advising barriers and strategies (Yin, 2016). Interviews for this research study were conducted and recorded using Otter technology in one-on-one virtual sessions for 45-60 minutes via Zoom. Each participant logged in via Zoom for the interview from their location of choice.

Participants included twelve females. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and to protect their identities. Each participant brought both unique and insightful perspectives of their experience as an academic advisor to the interviews. Table 1 includes participant demographic information with a description of participants' gender, ethnicity, number of years advising experience, advising population, and university location. Although demographic information was not a consideration in this study, this information may be important to consider because there were some differences in racial characteristics, number of years of service, advising population support, and geographic location of university for place of employment when comparing participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Advising Population	University Location
A: Amy	Female	White	8	First-year; Upper-level; Pre-health	South East
B: Melody	Female	White	8	Upper-level	South East
C: Sharon	Female	White	5	First-generation college student (FGCS); First-year; Upper-level	South East
D: Monica	Female	African American	20	FGCS; First-year	North East
E: Maureen	Female	African American	20	FGCS; First-year	South East
F: Susan	Female	Asian/ Pacific Islander	5	Honors; First-year; International	South East
G: Erica	Female	White	8	Upper-level; FGCS	South East
H: Sandra	Female	White	8	International; Fi; First-year; Upper-level	South East
I: Nancy	Female	White	15	FGCS; First-year; Upper-level	South East
J: Kylie	Female	White	15	Pre-health; FGCS; First-year	South East
K: Laura	Female	African American	8	FGCS; Upper-level	South East
L: Jennifer	Female	African American	3	FGCS; First-year; Upper-level	West

As displayed in Table 1, over half of the academic advisors were White and only 10% of the participants were from an underrepresented minority. All participants were full-time academic advisors with counseling degrees. All of the participants indicated they were graduates CACREP-accredited programs. Eleven of the twelve advisors had an assigned undergraduate student caseload that ranges from 150 students to over 300 students. The academic advisors have a number of years of experience within the profession ranging from

three to over twenty years of experience. In addition to their academic advising duties, four of the participants had more administrative and teaching duties compared to other participants who did not have any teaching or administrative duties. They all had additional administrative responsibilities outside of their advising responsibilities. Eight participants have supervisory responsibilities and four have dedicated much of their profession to curriculum development. Two participants have assessment reporting requirements to report on data tracking of retention of their student caseload. Eight participants have been engaged with student affairs service in various capacities supporting committees, student services program & events development, and task forces. Two participants specifically have the responsibility of career advising. Three participants also have new student recruitment and/or graduation application processing responsibilities. Two participants are directly engaged in new student orientation (NSO) and support the day-of planning, coordination, and engagement with family members who participant in NSO along with the new student. Four participants teach first-year experience courses. Of those participants, three have taught for three or more years. Twelve participants reported their advising approach as intrusive advising throughout their academic advising career.

Data Analysis

Yin (2016) explained nearly all qualitative studies contain information about the actions and voices of individual participants. Qualitative analysis involves labeling and coding of the data to recognize similarities and differences (Fraenkel et al., 2016). The analysis of data in this qualitative study was ongoing, and conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the data collection and analysis process. The instrument utilized in this study included original, semi-structured questions, which were used in the interviews. Interview participants were labeled by the letters of the alphabet, and assigned a pseudonym (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Thirteen

questions were presented to the participants. The participants provided a wealth of rich data representing lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees in their role with student success (Fraenkel et al., 2016).

After I interviewed the participants, each of the member of the research team individually analyzed each of the twelve transcripts and met virtually to discuss various codes and themes. The transcripts were analyzed and a consensus was made for each quote and code identified. Throughout the weeks the research team met, broader groups of codes were developed into larger themes as the research team analyzed direct quotes and descriptions of all of the participants' experiences. Codes continued to emerge into broader themes that the research team felt represented the core and foundation of each participant's experience. All coding research team meetings were conducted online via Zoom. I downloaded all completed transcripts from Otter to a Microsoft Word document and added line numbers to support easy communication and a speedy review of the transcripts. Additionally, I used Microsoft Word Track Changes for all members of the research team to easily follow comments and suggestions for coding consensus and theme discussions. The coding team reviewed individually and discussed as a team the participant interview transcripts that were downloaded from Zoom recordings and transcribed using Otter computer software.

Themes

During the final stage of data analysis, themes emerged. The development of topics led to an exploration of areas that seemed most salient. Therefore, academic advisors' experiences were further uncovered as subthemes to support the main themes (Workman, 2015). As a result of my analysis of the collected data, three primary themes emerged: Authentic Relationships, Balanced Intrusive Advising, and The Value of Counselor Identity. Two sub-themes emerged: Counselor Skill Awareness and COVID-19 Impact Support (Table 2).

Table 2

Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Authentic Relationships	
2. Balanced Intrusive Advising	
3. The Value of Counselor Identity	a. Counselor Skill Awareness b. COVID-19 Impact Support

Each participant experienced in their own unique way the phenomenon of being an academic advisor with a counseling degree addressing and supporting student success efforts at their institution. The twelve participants shared their perceptions and experiences regarding their role in student success. The questions led to discussion not only on the advisors' experiences, but also provided insight into the experiences that supported a variety of advising strategies to support various student populations. Through sharing their unique perspectives on their role in student success, their responses illustrated their experiences and brought the content of this study to life. Sharing the quotes of the participants aims to capture the participant's views, perspectives, and experiences.

Authentic Relationships

Academic advisors discussed positive authentic relationships are needed to achieve a successful transition to college and engagement with the university. There are particular relational elements that contribute to and promote an engaged advising relationship that is authentically embraced with open communication and connectedness. The advising relationship plays a critical role within a college student's experience (Crookston, 1972; Ender, 1994; Harrison, 2009). Student learning is at the center of what advisors do, with the development of an effective advising relationship as the gateway to that learning experience. Part of the process

of intentionally attempting to build an authentic advising relationship is centered on teaching and learning that works for both the student and advisor. The advising relationship can also support the development of an environment where a student feels comfortable and supported to share information, ask questions, and experience self-reflection (Hughey, 2011). Kylie shared "students should take the initiative in developing relationships with their advisors". Kylie also stated "the role of academic advising is a partnership between the academic advisor and student". Kylie emphasized this partnership is based on "the advisor must communicate opportunities and services at the college with our students, and it's important for the student to take responsibility in their educational plan made with their academic advisor". She described it as:

> And what I always tell them [my students] is that the relationship that I'm going to have with you is going to be very dependent on you. Because you can meet with me once a year or never, and I won't know who you are, or, you know, I won't remember things about, or you can make yourself proactive and build that relationship with me. So, you can email me regularly, you can check in with me monthly, you know, at least every semester. So, I have, I think, a great deal of variety in terms of my relationships with students, I have students that I'm very close with that are asking me for recommendation letters and giving me updates on law school applications. And I have students that don't know, I'm their advisor, you know, it's, it's very, it's very variable. But I will say, I think that one of my strengths as an advisor, is my is my counseling background in my sort of, like rosarian, unconditional positive regard and, like, natural level of curiosity about students. So, I would say that when students engage, when I have the opportunity to engage with students, I do think I have a tendency to build a relationship with them. And so I always think my biggest challenge is getting a student to come in the very first time,

and you students meet with me, and they experience my personality, and they kind of see

my authenticity, and they realize, like, Oh, this is a nice lady who like really cares and

wants to help me, then usually, once I can get that initial meeting, like under their belt,

then typically, I would say, on average, have good positive relationships with students.

Other participants emphasized the importance of intentionality of establishing and

maintaining a positive relationship with their students. Nancy shared "I've seen the positive

relationships with academic advisors being helpful to students knowing we are always willing to

support and encourage students." Monica discussed how "every interaction with a student can

have an impact on a student's desire to stay enrolled at an institution whether the experience is

positive or negative." The advisors recognized the importance of making each advising session

specific to a student's needs and preferred learning style. These advising sessions were described

as by Maureen as "making the students feel welcomed at college, and not threatened by a lack of

communication from the advisor to the student". Maureen discussed the importance of

personalizing advising to each student and shared "With every student, there are things in life

that happen. I want to be around for my students to provide the support needed in difficult

times." In addition, the advisors discussed the importance of identifying areas where students

were disconnected in college. Monica discussed during virtual advising sessions, it is important

for the student to "Know I am here for them, and I am interested in what their goals are and not

what I want them to do." By identifying areas of disconnect for students, Kylie discussed the role

of academic advising in a student's academic life compared to a partnership with the student.

This partnership included engaging students in a caring environment to promote and improve

student interactions with the campus community. Kylie shared:

It's gonna depend on how that student chooses to engage and share. But I do think, again,

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with the counseling skills and background, help students feel comfortable with me, you

know, where I might meet with a student for the very first time and then 10 minutes, and

they're telling me that they were abused as a child. And so, I think that using those skills

sort of puts students at ease. I'm well intentioned. So, I think that kind of creates that

environment where they can talk about things. And then I think, also, it's that I have a

knack for asking the right question that gets at, what lies beneath. And I really try to

honor their stories. I let them know this is a supportive relationship beyond a partnership.

You know, if they tell me a little if they give me like a little breadcrumb or a little nugget

of something that might be going on, and say, Wow, I'm really like, honored that you

would share that with me, I understand that it's not easy to talk about that. And then

sometimes I might talk about barriers.

Nancy's perception of the role of an intrusive advisor was described as "a personal connection

that supports success for students" and it appears to be in line with the other participants. She

shared "I establish a personal connection with my students by having conversations with them to

try and figure out what the student wants to do, and make sure that this is what they want to do,

and then I do whatever it takes for them to be able to do that." She went on to describe the

evolution of her process of developing relationships with students as "[students] walking in to

just meet with me to now they have to come see me and get the prereqs. [prerequisites] done

ahead of time."

During COVID, Nancy shared that she created a "virtual snack and chat drop in

sessions". These sessions created an informal virtual space for students to engage with her. She

continued to share "Students could just drop in my zoom for informal touch points and check-

ins. Then while they're in either an informal drop-in or a scheduled advising session with m,

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they're constantly advised." Jennifer shared a pre-COVID memory that mirrors an approach to developing relationships with her students:

> One morning I brought a group of students in my office and invited them to have a seat. I told them they were not registered for the following semester and may not get the required courses necessary for degree completion progress. I asked them was it overwhelming for them…were the classes (and college) what they expected, and is there something that we can do at the college or something I can do differently to make it easier for them to be successful? And all of them said, "Yeah, it's overwhelming", and many times things move at a pace they couldn't tolerate.

Jennifer described developing personal relationships with her students as:

> I get to spend time with them [students on her advising caseload] on a weekly basis in the classroom when I teach some of my students on my caseload in my first-year experience courses that I teach. My weekly interaction with my students helps to build personal relationships with them and that leads them to engage in discussions related to their degree plan, future career goals, course progress, academic policies, and other personal conversations. I make the most of all of my engagements with my students in academic programming, one-on-one advising sessions, and every time that I'm with them.

Furthermore, the students' needs, expectations, and life circumstances change over time (Tinto, 2012). Melody stated, "For some students, they need everything written out, clear cut, where they can go back and know what classes to take to keep on track." And, Nancy shared how she ensured student remains active in meeting:

> When my students require answers for educational needs, and it is the student's

responsibility to find out the information from available resources, I challenge them to

use the information I've shared with them to help accomplish their plan for their

educational success.

These interactions are pertinent to create a positive relationship between students and academic

advisors to which the student turns for help with transitions into college (Workman, 2015).

Jennifer explained "some students preferred a personal fulfillment of being in control of their

educational and career decisions instead of the advisor telling them what to do and this creates a

students' sense of ownership for their educational journey and success".

An aspect of the authentic relationship emerged theme is a focus on quality engagement

within the authentic relationship. This was acknowledged as a purposeful personal engagement

by the academic advisor with students, as well as the students' engagement with the institution.

All twelve participants agreed that creating spaces and opportunities for quality engagement with

students was one of their primary roles as an academic advisor, yet many perceived this role

differently. Amy described her role as one that includes being "a personal connection for

students where I give undivided attention to meet with my students and discuss their goals." She

voiced that her goal was to make the environment "light and funny" and asked students "what do

you [student] want to do when you grow up?" Amy described one of the discussions as:

I get to know students by discussing and articulating their long-term plans and then I try

to learn more about my students and what experiences they bring with them, what

progress they have made towards attaining their goals, and what steps they know they

need to pursue to reach their goals.

Amy continued to describe her approach to building and authentic relationship and shared "I

focus on helping students plan and progress towards their goals." Similar to Amy's role in

purposefully creating opportunities for engagement with students, Monica highlighted her role as one where she "actively engages with my students". She explained "one outcome I hope for in providing space for open discussion is for students to just come hang out." To further support the participants' experience with their role in student success through quality engagement, Erica described her perception of this role as, "helping them [students] determine their strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes…and also pointing them, once we settle on some of that, helping point them in the right direction." She went on to state "I approach this role by using career counseling when a student is unsure of what he or she wants to do". Erica explained she does this by "sitting down with a student who hasn't made up their mind what to do yet and trying to help them narrow down what they might or should be pursuing."

Balanced Intrusive Advising

Intrusive advising involves intentional contact with students with a goal of developing a caring and beneficial relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence (Earl, 1988). Heisserer and Parette (2002) suggests that contact with a significant person within an institution of higher education is a crucial factor in a student's decision to remain in college. This theme of balanced intrusive advising emerged in the analyses of the data was that all of the participants experienced intrusive advising as a valuable tool that can be used to increase student success. Erica identified intrusive advising as "the only way to advise to be effective." Sharon supported Erica's perception of the value of intrusive advising when stating it was "essential" to student success. She further explained that intrusive advising is "absolutely necessary [for student success] especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. So many students were detached and not as connected. We had to intentionally and consistently engage with our students." She continued to share "Many of them [first-year students] were underprepared during this year with

remote learning because of COVID-19. Many don't come from families where, I mean, they are first generation college students. So, everything was new and uncharted territory." Maureen was similar to the other participants' experiences, noting she acknowledged intrusive advising is "the best thing for the students." Sharon also mirrored Maureen's experience and perception of the importance of intrusive advising as "a good thing for a lot of our students." Sandra's perception of intrusive advising is "this approach has an impact on student success and when used appropriately without overwhelming the student it is an effective tool". She further supported this point and stated:

> Students need to have intrusive advising, and advisors must balance with specific need for the individual student, and they need to have a set plan, and that plan needs to follow all the way through the completion of their program and keep that student on track and not let them deviate from that [plan], unless they want to change majors.

Jennifer addressed the importance of intrusive advising and described it as "as a tool to support student success". As she explained, intrusive advising is "good for the students who have a goal, but don't know how to bring it to fruition." She described how intrusive advising is "effective in helping me make connections with my students":

> I think it's [intrusive advising] effective in that the students that go through the process, not just the first time, connect with me over the course of their academic journey checking to make sure that they're staying close to the original degree plan, checking with me if they need to make a change in it, or coming back telling me.

To further support this balanced intrusive advising as a valuable tool for student success, Sandra described the support from her institution by stating "my institution's ability to support student success prior to the implementation of intrusive advising was as an absolute disaster". She

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provided the following example, based on her experience, to support the impact intrusive

advising has when working with students:

> I had a student I recently met via zoom asking me questions about their class and what
>
> happens if they fail a course. They were getting ready for   their finals. You know, they
>
> were trying to cram some last-minute questions, and they're not with their instructor in
>
> the classroom instead trying to find a quiet place in a small apartment to hear and
>
> understand the lecture. But, it was nearly impossible with the terrible network connection
>
> so they reached out to somebody they know that may have gotten better notes.

Without balanced intrusive advising, the advisor may not have had the structure to be as

intentional with engaging with the student and inquiring about the good standing academic state

of their course. Some of the other participants also specifically identified intrusive advising as a

way to positively affect student success measures including retention and graduation rates. Both

Kylie and Sandra emphasized their support for intrusive advising as a tool for student success,

specifically related to retention, graduation, and transfer rates. Kylie stated:

> I think that if we required the students to see an academic advisor every semester, if they
>
> were being advised intrusively like my students are we'd have a better retention rate,
>
> we'd have a better graduation rate, transfer rate, all the way around.

Sandra had a similar perspective to Kylie's perception and shared "I've seen how the value of

intrusive advising positively impacts retention and graduation rates". Nancy described her

experience with intrusive advising as "individualized and balanced". She perceived her role a

little differently from Kylie and Sandra. She described her role as "helping students understand

the system [college experience] in a different way". Nancy explained "I try to make sure students

know what services are available within the institution". She allows for a more lenient approach

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to intrusive advising. Nancy described one- and one-half pages in her advising syllabus that includes outlined tips for students to succeed, including study habits and resources within student services. She went on to emphasize "I explain to students that they are actually paying for these services and need to take advantage of them". She further explains:

> I liken your tuition bill to the bundle, you know…you're basically paying for multiple services, and even if you don't use them, your' still paying for them…you know it's kind of like buying the bundle and only using the internet, and forgetting about the TV and phone. I think a lot of students here, not just here but in general, college students don't know what their tuition affords them to use.

Nancy emphasized "it's my role to inform students about the library, benefits of the library, and library services to help them navigate through the system."

The Value of Counselor Identity

Academic advisors discussed their counselor identity and how their awareness of this identify helped them to embrace their counselor identity. They expressed the value add from their counselor perspective as a significant advantage for their role as academic advisors. Kylie shared "I use my counseling skills and counseling techniques quite a bit of with my students". She explained:

> sitting down with students and mapping out time management and talking about their study skills. And, that leads into also talking about test anxiety which can lead into tasks about the resources. And again, that'snot something you'd stereotypically think of with an advising session. But as a counselor these are typical approaches to discussions with students. I use a lot of open-ended questions and get students to think about things in a completely different way.

Amy shared "establishing rapport is critical". She stated:

> I put more of an effort into building a personal relationship with my pre-health students, and really breaking down some of their apprehension about having conversations with me and not to see me as a gatekeeper to acceptance in their healthcare program. I try to take on a more personal role so that I can intentionally establish and build the rapport and relationship with my students.

With the counselor perspective ever present in their role as an academic advisor, there was some sense of surprise of how impactful their counselor identity actually was without necessarily feeling confident to name it. And, yet, consistently each participant reflected on the awareness of their counselor identity. This was evident when Laura shared:

> I don't think I realized that at first, I just thought that this was something that came to every advisor until we started having. So, I started connecting more with other advisors on campus. And then I started hearing them say my students are struggling with all of this, and I don't know how to help them. And I would say, well, why don't you try this activity, or here's a really great time management resource I use with my students. And they were all saying, well, I refer them to Learning Services, or I refer them here. And certainly, I still refer students for lots of things, especially counseling services, because that's not my role right now and I accept appropriate referral action. But I am able to help them with some of those minor things [anxiety and general wellness], some of those smaller skill-based things pretty easily. And I didn't realize that I was doing something other people weren't doing because of my nature. And I think I also in my graduate program for counseling. I did a lot of solution-focused work. Research and my master's thesis was based on solution focused play therapy with young children. So, my

experience has been about problem solving skills, even at   a young age. And that has

developed over my career as a school counselor and as a counselor. And that just kind of

comes into what I do every day. And sometimes I don't even realize it's happening.

Counselor Skill Awareness. This sub-theme emerged in the analyses of the data was

that all of the participants experienced an awareness of their counseling skill knowledge and

awareness that they use their skills intentionally and regularly in their engagement with their

students and even with colleagues. Jennifer shared "I always use my counseling skills and know

when and how to use them in specific situations". She explained "many of my discussions are

from my counseling skills". She shared:

> I use a lot of silence with students. If I present a question, and they hesitate, I don't fill it
>
> with another question because they get off the hook that way. So, I try to, you know, wait
>
> them out and say, you know, take your time to think about it. Also probe a lot. So, if they
>
> give me a question, or they say something, and I'm like, that doesn't make sense. I'll just
>
> keep going back, keep going back.

Laura opened up about her counseling skill use and reported:

> Every day. Yeah, every single day. I really vary up my approach with each student. So, I
>
> mentioned before with my pre-health students, I was very solution focused with them.
>
> Helping them you know, they had this goal of getting into more clinical lab sciences,
>
> creating concrete steps for them to meet that goal. Lots of active listening and open-
>
> ended questions. And, for some students, I have more of a person-centered approach.

Monica similarly shared:

> I would say I'm very person centered. I really am a reflective listener. I use a lot of
>
> reflection. And I just want them to know that there is no judgment. There's no judgement
>
> at all. They can share whatever they feel comfortable sharing with me. I want to be their

cheerleader, their coach, their motivator. And for some, you know, but I do have to

switch up that approach with some students who need more structure, and you know, and

then I'll lean more towards solution focused. So, I can, I'm very versatile.

Amy reflected on the impact of using her counseling skills every day and shared:

I use these skills every day. I think it's really helped me create a welcoming environment

for students where they feel comfortable sharing their experience. And I'm able to, like I

said before, really tailor my approach to different personalities and different preferences.

So having that counseling background I think has really enriched my experiences

working with students and has made me more and has made them feel more comfortable

coming to me and having difficult conversations.

COVID-19 Impact Support. Just as the COVID -19 pandemic hit the world with a

tremendous impact for all ways of life, it did the same for the way in which academic advisors

supported students. Many advisors had to adjust their practices, techniques, and strategies for

engaging with students and in identifying their needs and providing resources. The participants

described the struggles that emerged from this pandemic and the opportunities for innovation in

engagement to continue to propel student success.

Melody stated "during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic I specifically talked with many

of my students regarding anxiety". She further shared:

...so, it [COVID-19] caused a lot of anxiety. I'm seeing it a lot due to being in COVID.

Now, it's become a big issue as far as isolation and not having that physical face to face

contact. So, I'm using those skills a lot more. Because I have a counseling background,

and I've done mental health support, and served as a counselor under supervision, I'm

particularly aware of the importance of using my counseling skills to build rapport,

embrace empathy, and be an active listener for my students.

Amy shared "I noticed a difference in my students' comfort level with knowing how to

communicate with instructors during this time". She said:

> Since COVID has happened, students really don't understand how to connect with
> their instructors or how to do any of their class assignments on the various online
> platforms. But yes, I would say mostly, it's part of me, sensing, like seeing some pink
> flags when students are talking, and recognizing from past conversations with past
> students what that might mean, and then feeling it out to see if that's what it means. Or
> me asking probing questions to see how they're doing, and then seeing what their answers
> not.

Nancy reiterated this perspective and experience of using counseling skills consistently. She
shared "I use these skills every day." She continued to explain the impact of COVID-19 and said
"using my counseling skills have a positive impact on my role as an advisor". She also shared:

> A lot of my work is trying to actively listen to what's being said. And especially now with
> zoom, what isn't being said, or aspects of body language that you can see from, you
> know, chest up. Whereas before I could get a full picture in my office of what was going
> on, I could see the feet tapping or like the knees bobbing, where the hands were like, Oh,
> my gosh, I'm so nervous. I don't get that as much anymore. So, I have to rely a lot more
> on what's happening in the face. A lot of clarifying questions are open ended questions to
> try and elicit more of, you know, what are they really trying to say? Or maybe I didn't
> understand, and I'm trying to get clarity on what they're telling me about their concerns
> for a class? Is it a true concern, or they just think it's unusual, and that they've never had
> this situation happen? And of course, before, so really trying to hone in with open ended
> questions, clarifying questions, and then there's often a lot of, and this one I don't like so
> much, because with zoom, there's often a delay, but I'll try and mirror the behavior that
> they're giving me.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the participant interviews. The analysis of the transcripts yielded three major themes including Authentic Relationships, Balanced Intrusive Advising, and The Value of the Counselor Perspective. Further, the various sub themes Counselor Skill Awareness and COVID-19 Impact Support were also discussed. Direct quotes from the participants were used to support the themes. A discussion of the themes along with implications and recommendations for counseling programs and the advising professionals is provided in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees in their role in student success. This descriptive phenomenological study provided an opportunity to understand the experiences of academic advisors related to efforts to support student success in an academic setting. This study explored understanding the experiences academic advisors had using established relationships with their students and student utilization of campus support resources to promote student success (Darling, 2015).

As college personnel address improving student success, it is equally advantageous to understand the experiences of the staff that is charged with supporting student success, particularly academic advisors. Research has shown that intrusive academic advising has a positive impact on student retention rates (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Ryan, 2013; Thomas & Minton, 2004), and is one strategy that may be effective in increasing graduation rates of students (Thomas & Minton, 2004). As the research shows, student wellness also impacts the success of students (Baker & Griffin, 2010; McArthur, 2005). Understanding the experience of academic advisors with counseling degrees in their roles in student success and how they perceive it can be used to address student success this information will contribute to the practice and knowledge base in higher education of strategies to improve retention and completion rates of students.

The participants for this study were twelve full-time academic advisors with counseling degrees from a CACREP accredited counselor education program from an U.S. 4-year college.

Participants advised undergraduate students from various populations such as first-generation college students, international students, various academic programs, honors students, first-year and upper-level students. Participants included academic advisors from four-year institutions, with ten participants from universities in the Southeast region of the U.S., one from the West Coast, and one from the Northeast region. The participants' experience as an academic advisor ranged from three years to over twenty years of advising experience.

Discussion of the Themes

Authentic relationships, balanced intrusive advising, and the value of counselor identity emerged as three primary themes and counselor skill awareness and COVID-19 impact support emerged as two sub-themes. The research question was written to explore academic advisors' experiences as it relates to their roles in student success, which affect student's retention, persistence, and matriculation in college. Missing from the available literature are the stories of those advisors with counseling degrees and how their counselor identity, knowledge of counseling skills, and counseling perspective intersected with their role as an academic advisor to their experiences in addressing student success. This study explored the participants' thoughts and experience of their role, as well as their beliefs about how and why students are persisting and aimed to explore the professional experience of academic advisors with counseling degrees. This study specifically focused on participants who graduated from CACREP accredited counselor education graduate programs and serve as academic advisors to undergraduate students, as the current state of student success is recorded nationally with a retention rate of 81% and a 4-year graduation rate of 60% (NCES, 2018).

This study sought to reveal the experiences of academic advisors in the role with student success. Student retention rates are not a new concern for colleges (Jarrell, 2004) as at-risk

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populations and students experiencing challenges in college have barriers to completing their degree (Burns, 2010). The characteristics of many college students include: transition difficulties, financially, attending college while working part time, and are first-generation students. These factors make academic persistence and success challenging for college students, leaving institutions struggling to retain them through degree completion (Drake, 2011; Farrell & Langrehr, 2017; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Garrod, 2017; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 2004).

The findings supported current literature, exploring the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees with their role in student success, but also highlights the absence of understanding the experiences and the advisor's impact on their students' success, including barriers experienced by the advisors. Additionally, the participants clearly articulated their experiences and how their experiences as advisors related to their students' experience; each one described the opportunities and relationships that support their students' success.

Authentic Relationships

All twelve participants in this study shared that their educational background and professional readiness as a counselor had a positive and direct impact on increasing student retention and completion rates. Some of the participants indicated their intentional counseling practices help retain students, keeping them at the institution from one semester to the next, ultimately improving the retention rates of their programs and their institutions. The findings in this study present a new perspective of the academic advisor with a counseling degree and support advisors involved in active engagement from a counseling perspective is an effective strategy to help support student success. Personal connections are shown to help retain students and were identified by the study participants as a critical practice of academic advising to support student success, further supporting the high level of engagement expressed by the

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participants (Yarbrough, 2002). In addition to the participants perceiving how their counseling skills and perspective positively impacts student retention, they also perceived that it can be used to help increase completion rates (Sharkin, 2004; Tinto, 2004). Additionally, advisors noted the importance of students feeling connected to a school if they have no significant relationships with others, including other students or faculty (Al-Asmi & Thumiki, 2014; Anderson & Bourdeaux, 2014; Beasley-Fieldstein, 1986; Belcheir, 1999; Creamer, 1980; Smith & Allen, 2006; Tinto, 1993). And, their response was to intentionally develop an authentic relationship to support a feeling of connection for the student. This supports Thomas and Minton's (2004) research that found one-on-one relationship between academic advisor and student contributes to increased graduation rates.

As indicated by Hunter and White's (2004) research the participants indicated that ongoing contact with their students was vitally important to developing an authentic relationship. As a result, advisors saw the value in making early contact with their students and made attempts to establish a routine in contact with their students, many at the beginning of the semester. Some reported experiencing difficulty simply trying to initiate contact with students, and persistence was critical. The participants emphasized their desire to develop meaningful relationships with their students and perceived regular contact with their students as a way to establish and maintain these relationships (Turner & Thompson, 2014; Vianden & Barlow, 2015; Winston & Sandor, 1984b). As a result of these relationships, students were expected to actively support their own success by monitoring their academic, social, and personal progress on a regular basis.

Many of the participants' experiences all had something in common connecting them—time. According to the majority of the participants, time was an important factor in their academic advising experiences. There was clearly a great expectation for greater availability;

they communicated that greater availability would allow for more quality contact between themselves and their students and consequently foster a significant and authentic advisor-student relationship (Vianden et al., 2015; Walters, 2015; Winston et al, 1984b).

Further, the use of a proactive and intentional approach to academic advising serves students holistically and increases engagement between the academic advisor and student (Bland, 2003; Paul et al., 2012; Schee, 2007). The participants reported the need for consistent and detailed information to share with their students due to a lack of familiarity with the new academic environment. As a result, students were dependent on their academic advisors to provide the information they needed to be successful in college (Thomas et al., 2004; Tinto, 1986; Upcraft et al., 1989). Some advisors shared that short academic advising sessions did not allow for adequate information to be provided. As a result, students had to be more responsible for researching and processing information themselves. For many, this was unsolicited pressure. Participants described their preference for establishing a more holistic academic advising approach. As noted previously, engaged staff and faculty have the most impact on student success (McArthur, 2005; Perez et al., 2012). This involved an expanded academic advising discussion where students could focus on the traditional advising topics such as courses of study, registration, and grades, but also on topics like social and community involvement, graduate study, financial stability, career planning, family life, and more. Based on the experiences shared by the participants, students welcomed this level of engaged relationship (Prokorny et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2004).

The participants reflected on student sharing the level of involvement and navigation from their parents and families, and this quality engagement was expected by the students with their advisors. The parental relationships that students maintained at home had been transferred

to their academic advisors (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986; Farrell et al., 2017; Fong et al., 2017;

Komiya et al., 2000; Pather et al., 2016; Perry, 1999; Tseng, 2004). This transference could build

a foundation for advisors to share the detailed information students would need for future

success. The quality relationship was not only welcomed, but expected. The participants worked

towards establishing holistic academic advising experiences that were similar to the familial and

parental relationships with which the students were accustomed and desiring in the college

setting.

Balanced Intrusive Advising

As Yarborough (2002) identified, when advisors effectively engage with students and

build relationships it leads to the success of their students. The advising experiences shared as

part of this study continue to support prior research that intrusive advising is a tool that can

encourage and nurture student engagement (Bloom, 2004; Bloom et al., 2011; Braxton; 2014;

Drake, 2011; Earl, 1988; Habley et al., 2004; Kelly-Hall, 2010; Thomas & Minton, 2004).

Academic advisors with counseling degrees who utilize intrusive advising present as one strategy

that can be used by these institutions to help accomplish the retention and matriculation goals of

a university.

Advisors shared that although it is difficult to directly attribute their students' academic

performance to the engagement with their students or the intrusive advising practices, their

students respond with sharing feedback of appreciation for all of the support and constant

guidance that is exhibited (Habley et al., 2004; Thomas & Minton, 2004). This emerged theme

supports the findings of the previous research that found intrusive advising led to increased

graduation rates. The participants positively indicated that they perceived their academic

advising strategies aided and influenced their students' decisions to remain or return to their

institution for continued enrollment. Bland (2003) and Smith (2007) identified that developing personal connections with students plays a critical role in their success, addresses their comprehensive needs, and increases their retention within institutions. This personal connection was expressed as the advisors shared that they associated interactions with their students as being central to their educational experiences and major factors in retention and persistence efforts. The importance of this personal connection was identified as a significant factor in retaining college students in the research by Wiseman and Messitt (2010).

The participants expressed concerns that there are critics who have questioned the need for universities to spend additional time or funding on academic advising services as there is not a direct correlation to yield positive student success outcomes to the advisor-student relationship. University leaders responsible for supporting, supervising, or providing academic advising services should pay close attention to what advisors are actually saying about the amount of time needed for delivering these intrusive advising approaches and authentic advising relationships with their students. The AACU (2010) research emphasizes the importance of universities prioritization to fund and support student support services, such as academic advising. The research by Bontrager (2004) unveils and supports this same prioritization and importance of academic advisors in a college student's educational experience. The academic advisors have clearly identified time as a major factor in their ensuring quality and engaged academic advising sessions (McGhill, 2016; Raushi, 1993; Tinto, 2012; 1996; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). The quality time they spend with their students makes all the difference.

The Value of the Counseling Perspective

The participants shared their unique perspective as academic advisors with counseling degrees when assisting their students who are confronting difficult personal and transitional

issues. As previously shared, academic advisors are positioned as the institutionalized front line of support and assistance for students (Dadgar et al., 2014; Farrell & Langrehr, 2017; Gordon et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). Academic advisors with counseling degrees have extensive knowledge about curricula or academic policies, help students to develop and realize their educational, career, and personal goals, and, are trained counselors to help students address personal challenges from the past and present that interfere with their academic success (CACREP, 2016). The participants shared the development of their comfort with discussing and addressing these difficulties with their students and how they helped them utilize appropriate resources to resolve the problems. Raushi's (1993) research addressed the benefits of offering short-term, solution-focused advising in conjunction with mental health counseling and the participants shared their experiences of using this very approach when advising their students. Even with the utilization of developmental advising to strengthen an advisor-student relationship, the participants addressed advising concerns from the unique counseling lens by offering information in the context of students' needs, values, goals, and personal situations. And, rather than just informing or explaining curricular or campus procedures to students, the participants took the approach to help students to set goals to enhance their personal wellness, identify barriers that may impact successful accomplishment of their goals, develop strategies to accomplish these goals, and assess whether or not the strategies are successful. This approach was examined by Kelley-Hall (2010) and the research explored the benefit of incorporating a counseling model in student engagement experiences, including academic advising, aids in students' success.

The participants' experiences included an overall appreciation for their gained knowledge and clinical practice experience from the counselor education and supervision graduate program. The participants shared their comfort with addressing a myriad of what may have been

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considered severe problems by professional academic advisors who did not have counseling degrees. The participants considered it a significant advantage that they felt comfortable with being alert to and addressing potential behavior or emotional changes expressed by their students. And, some of the issues they have addressed have ranged from suicidal ideation, stress and anxiety, and other personal challenges. The participants' shared as counselors they supported their students with personal and social problems and helped them cope with difficult personal and social transitions and events so that they are better equipped to manage their lives.

Participants generally positively reflected on and were surprised in many cases in their retained knowledge that had developed into an expertise of counseling practices and strategies. In particular they especially responded to inquiries during the interviews regarding their supervisory experiences and consulting with other counselors. Participants shared that at times they judged the strength of their own knowledge and doubted their level of expertise through comparison of other counselors, specifically those who were working within as clinical practice environment.

Skill Awareness. The participants shared not only their knowledge but innate comfort with utilizing on a daily basis the counseling skills learned from their graduate counselor education and supervision courses, practicum, and supervision experiences (ACA, 2016). Each participant repeatedly expressed the use of these skills on a daily basis. And, although some of the participants could not specifically name the particular skill term or connect it to an exact counselor theory, each of the participants were inherently aware of the positive impact that their knowledge and skill development had on the development of the relationship with their students and ability as an academic advisor. The participants reflected on concrete, consistent, and

comprehensive expectations in the areas of counseling skills, professional dispositions, and professional behaviors that enhanced their professionalism as an academic advisor.

A few of the participants shared that many of their colleagues sought them out as mentors, consultants, and reference points to share strategies and approaches to successfully engaging with students, building rapport and trust. Likewise, the emergence of this theme supported that the academic advisors with counseling degrees served as consultants to their academic advisors' colleagues so that those colleagues could benefit from their knowledge. Participants expressed frustration when they encountered university student personnel who either questioned or directly restricted the advisors with counseling degrees from utilizing and practicing the very skills sets and knowledge that they gained from their graduate counselor education & supervision program and practical experiences. One participant, describing their belief that the student personnel leader may have been intimidated by their very knowledge.

COVID-19 Impact Support. Considering their critical front-line roles with students, academic advisors are well-positioned to proactively embed wellness resources in their advising sessions. And, that is indeed what the participants of this study did for their students during the height and initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID -19 pandemic has a huge global impact on education over the world. Many universities decided to shift both academic classes and student services to 100% online due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It is reported that almost 91% of students worldwide shifted to online education in 2020 (Abumalloh et al., 2021). Academic advisors conducted their sessions using different tools that are provided from the university website. So, instead of face to face meetings between the advisors and the students, they have conducted their meeting online. While online academic advising became more relevant than ever amid the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the advising community realized the

need to be proactive about alternative academic advising modalities. An adjustment of how universities saw the role of an academic advisor shifted to that of "first responder" to assist with supporting students with stress, anxiety, and emergency well-being situations in the post-era of COVID-19 pandemic (Flaherty, 2020). The expectation of academic advisors is to be prepared to address these concerns along with balancing their curricular and academic responsibilities as an academic advisor. To respond to changing student needs and post-COVID-19 uncertainties, the participants shared the need to enhance student–advisor relationship building, and support student learning.

For instance, some of the participants embedded mental health discussions and check-ins during informal virtual chats, scheduled appointments, virtual small group discussions, and even during advising seminars. This provided an opportunity to share contact information for mental health resources, frequently emailing or caseload texts to students to share information about how to access mental health services offered by the university or community, and even lead short mindfulness sessions. The participants shared some of the intent of these actions were not only to establish these practices within their own advising sessions and to share mental health resources, but also these approaches and strategies were aimed to potentially help to de-stigmatize mental health struggles and increase students' comfort when reaching out for help.

Limitations of the Study

While this study makes a contribution to understanding students' perceptions of academic advising, it has several limitations. Trustworthiness was a key focus during this study, but I have to address and acknowledge some of the limitations of the study. A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit participants who worked as undergraduate academic advisors at a 4-year institution and who completed a CACREP accredited counselor education graduate program for

this study. Six of the twelve participants were recruited using the VCU University Academic Advising listserv and referral sampling, or snowball sampling, was used to recruit the remaining participants. Even with the sample size of twelve recognized as a sufficient number of participants for saturation of data for a phenomenological study, it can be difficult to apply the results specifically for the profession of academic advising based on the unique experiences of these participants (Creswell, 2007).

Another limitation is that these thoughts, feelings, experiences, perspectives, and opinions of these participants do not fully reflect the academic advising experience for all academic advisors with counseling degrees due to the criteria being very specific (i.e., master's degree in counseling from a CACREP accredited program). Even with data saturation, it is certainly possible that other experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees were not shared as these participants. Academic advisors who work at community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities may have very different experiences. Further, six of the twelve participants were recruited using one institution's academic advising listserv. Other advisors who are not employed at that institution may have different experiences to share. In addition to the minimum number of participants needed, the goal was to have a sample that represented a wide range of perspectives from across the United States and perhaps even internationally.

While I was able to have participants from varied parts of the United States including the Southeast, Northeast, and West Coast, not every part of the country was represented. Additionally, the gender and ethnicity self-reported by the participants was homogenous as all twelve participants identified as female and seven participants identified as White. This study did not have a representative population of participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Thus, it wasn't completely possible to determine if the lived experiences shared were

representative. This lack of diverse participants created a situation where only certain demographic subsets of advisors participated in the survey, which limits generalizability.

The transcripts of the participant interviews were reviewed to extract excerpts and quotes that were identified as important to the research question. During the coding process, the research team assigned codes to these quotes and excerpts to best represent and illustrate the participant's experience. As a part of the coding process, additional codes emerged and collapsed to identify broader themes. Even with participants being sent their transcripts to be reviewed for accuracy as member checking, this did not happen during the data analysis process. It is possible that because of the lack of participation of the participants in this phase, some of the data would have been coded differently and therefore new themes may have emerged.

Implications for Higher Education

Academic advising has consistently been rated a top predictor of students' success and satisfaction during their undergraduate experiences in college (Anderson et al., 2014). Maintaining effective undergraduate academic advising strategies to meet the needs of students is an ongoing challenge for universities across the country (Tinto, 2012). Many colleges and universities struggle to develop and maintain effective advising strategies to promote retention and student satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2014; Darling, 2015).

The findings from this study led to a number of implications regarding the experiences of academic advisors as it relates to their role in student success and retention. Conclusions of this study may be used to guide researchers, counselor educators, and higher education administrators in the enhancement of academic advising practices, counseling practices and techniques to implement in the college setting. In addition, administrators, counselor educators, and other university leaders should gauge if the advising services and counselor education curriculum

offered at their institutions are optimal for counselor education graduate students and academic advising training for professional advisors. Strategic planning involving academic advisors include student integration to address special characteristics and traits of generation of students, but also increase educational persistence, socialization and integrative efforts (Turner & Thompson, 2014).

Academic advisors with counseling degrees appear to embrace and follow the practice of counseling techniques coupled with intrusive advising as an approach that can impact students' retention and completion rates. If an institution enrolls a student, it has a responsibility to help the student be successful (Bland, 2003). To not change the academic advising approach to a more intrusive and holistic advising model that supports the needs of diverse students is to not acknowledge that students experience barriers in pursuing their education or not recognize that retention and graduation rates are challenges for colleges (NCES, 2019; Nitecki, 2011). Students are more likely to attend and stay at an institution they feel a connection to (Perez et al., 2012), and without this engagement, the institution is not fully connected with students.

Providing academic advisors with professional development and training related to developmental and intrusive academic advising practices will provide an opportunity to further support student success. Institutions are either limited by financial constraints or have not placed much value in these specific academic advising practices, expressed by all participants as critical to supporting student success, as a major retention activity to offer professional development and training. As a result, advisors without a counseling degree, will be placed in academic advising situations with general preparation or proper training. Serry and Corrigal (2009) stated that professional development, especially related to academic advising, is an important resource for academic advisors. Because academic advising has been shown to significantly impact the

retention of students, including first-generation students, colleges should make it a priority to provide all academic advisors with some form of professional development and/or training in the area of intrusive and developmental academic advising. Many advisors are early career advisors and do not have a counselor education background. Professional development would provide these advisors a foundation of tools to be able to facilitate successful academic advising sessions.

Based on the results of this study, academic advisors with counseling degrees have a unique perspective and skill set that shows promise as one strategy that institutions can implement to address student retention and completion rates. This requires institutions to change their mindsets about academic advising; mandatory advising is necessary to positively impact student success.

Implications for Academic Advising

Academic advising units are encouraged to utilize the expertise of academic advisors with counseling degrees in training practices for the full academic advising community. In particular, this is vital as advisors are deemed as first responders to student issues. This was particularly noted at the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bland (2003), Fowler and Boylan (2010), Ryan (2013), Schee, (2007), and Yarbrough (2002) emphasize the critical practice of advisors engaging students and developing mutually beneficial relationships with them, resulting in increases in the completion of degrees. As with any new relationship, the first step is to establish a connection with the student advisee (Tinto, 2012). The techniques and skills provided by an academic advisor become a part of all effective advising, regardless of the type of student (Gordon & Stelle, 2015).

Professional associations of academic advising, such as NACADA, can embrace the opportunity for academic advisors with counseling degrees to serve as immediate or first

responders to address mental health and wellness challenges experienced by students. Acknowledging academic advisors with counseling degrees as subject matter experts within these areas presents an opportunity to support the larger academic advising community. Professional associations are in an advantageous position to capitalize on the expertise and unique perspective of counseling being brought to the profession of academic advising. This presents an opportunity for further legitimization and professionalism of the advising profession. The recognition of counseling philosophies and practices that parallel that of holistic, developmental, and intrusive advising practices may be an opportunity to expand on the integration of these practices to ultimately provide enhanced support for student success. It will be important to directly address and recognize the distinct differences between academic advising and counseling, while also acknowledging the significant contributions that an academic advisor with a counseling degree can make in the holistic support given to a student.

An additional implication for the advising profession would be to expand the current academic advising discussion that primarily focuses on students' academic progression, performance, and success to also include non-academic factors that are major influences on college students. It is expected that academic advisors would focus on factors related to students' academic performance—registration, course offerings, major curriculum, grades, etc. In many cases, this is the only discussion that academic advisors can have in the short amount of time designated for advising students. Retention theorists like Tinto (1975) have long linked student performance to retention. Researchers have also demonstrated that non-academic factors, such as social interaction, financial stability, physical health, motivation, and psychological stability, significantly impact student retention. Advisors should be able address students' needs in a more holistic approach by making clearer suggestions for student engagement.

Implications for Counselor Education

An academic advisor with a counseling degree can assist with leading training for the larger advising staff to ensure effective practices that foster the development of this type of authentic relationship between the student and the advisor. This intentional practice reflected the importance of advisors acknowledging the personal and academic needs and then providing information to make students feel advisors cared (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Therefore, if academic advisors allow time to know students before diving into academic matters, this shows students that advisors care. If the student senses advisors care, they care more about the learning process and overall academic advising experiences.

These practices are embedded in the curriculum for counselor education students (CACREP, 2016). Institutions that do not provide intentional strategies to allow advisors and students to connect through intrusive advising practices are missing opportunities to create meaningful conversations and connections that have been shown to increase student retention and completion rates.

A final implication for Counselor Education and Supervision graduate programs is to encourage a review of curricular guidelines, expectations, and requirements for graduates of counselor education and supervision programs within the higher education concentration. Integrating and addressing the intersection of advising practices and approaches along with counseling techniques and practices will provide an enhanced learning experience for graduate students and will prepare them for the professional practices as a student personnel practitioner. Addressing these advising approaches that were shared by the participants of this study are imperative to preparing future counselors who will work in the student personnel positions within higher education.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is certainly encouraged in the area of effective academic advising strategies to promote student retention. Similar to other studies, the recommendation for a larger population of academic advisors may be beneficial for future research. Further studies could include a more diverse group of participants from various regions of the United States, a broader ethnic and racial demographic, in addition to varied gender representation. The experiences of early career academic advisors with counseling degrees is critical to the advisor's integration in the profession within a university. Therefore, a quantitative survey would examine how new advisors would benefit from a more robust curriculum within academic advising in graduate school or training as an academic advisor. A survey of early career academic advisors along with focus group interview sessions by type of university or demographic of students within advising caseload would be beneficial in further research for this study.

Further research is needed to understand the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees during times of catastrophe, pandemics, or other emergency situations. This study would explore whether times of pandemics [COVID-19] and uncertainty affect advisors' experiences, conduct a qualitative study at various times throughout an academic year to capture the experiences based on contemporary issues within the U.S. Additionally, conducting a qualitative survey to understand how and when academic advisors feel valued and why, as well as what advisors feel is positive or challenging about their experiences within their role in student success would provide richer data on advisors' experience. Further consideration for future research could explore how advisors' experiences are impacted by the level and type of support provided and expressed by their institution of work, specific academic advising unit, or direct supervisor.

Conclusion

This descriptive phenomenological study was intended to examine the lived experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees in regards to their role in student success. The experiences of these academic advisors revealed their approaches, responses, and perceptions of their role in effective advising strategies to promote student success. Trust is facilitated through mutual respect between students and academic advisors (Paul &Fitzpatrick, 2015). In addition, advisors' honesty about students' academic situations and advisors' knowledge of majors and careers also promote trust and respect between students and advisors (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015).

The background of the study was established, to include the problem and purpose statement. The economic uncertainty of higher education institutions due to a decrease in retention was revealed (Himes, 2014). The academic advisor participants shared their experiences with their role in student success, including effective strategies, barriers to student success, and the practices of counselor education in higher education. Tinto's (1987; 2012) theories of student departure and retention purported students leave an academic institution due to a lack of integration and trust with a university, because of academic difficulties, by not obtaining needed resources and the inability of a student to complete their educational goals. Academic advising is a continuous process throughout a student's educational experience, adapting to the culture of an institution (Williamson et al, 2014). Academic advising strategies involve effective communication, personalized advising, and consistency in the offering of academic resources (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015).

The findings from the research led to implications for established policy and practice within a higher education institution, as well as student success (Anderson et al., 2014). Positive aspects of advising from academic advisors with counseling degrees, providing a resource for

administrative leaders and counselor educators interested in evaluating advising and counselor education curricula and programs in a qualitative manner. Although, there is no singular new discovery that occurred because of this study; this study provided an examination of personal experience, adding depth to the advising experience, looking at personal discovery, growth and the intentional advising and counseling practices of academic advisors with counseling degrees, and is its own experience. The participants in this study drew from many facets of their professional and educational experiences as an academic advisor with a counseling degree with their role in student success. Their academic advising practices and counseling perspectives ebbed and flowed as did their experience, as a living, fluid process; it grew and changed as their experiences did supporting different students throughout their professional journey.

This study gave birth to a few insights about academic advisors' experiences with counseling degrees and ways to enhance with intentionality their role in student success. The first is to keep on doing what they are doing, but to more fully explain what the role of the advisor with a counseling degree is and can be. The second is to more fully integrate the academic advising and counseling technique practices used by advisors with counseling degrees in advising programs across colleges. Higher education is a transformative process; these advisors have played a significant role in supporting their students' success, and it was also shared how much they learned from the support systems they created for themselves and often from within themselves. In many cases, they became the support systems for their students to have the opportunities for exploration, freedom, the development of advocacy skills, and the growth of self-confidence and self-efficacy.

In conclusion, this study sought to provide insight into the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees and their role in and contribution to student success. These

themes highlighted how higher education institutions can benefit by supporting academic advisors with counseling degrees, counselor education & supervision programs to implement specialized interventions to support student success and the ongoing professional development of the advisor with a counseling degree. The growing emphasis on student retention and degree completion from institutions and their constituents means that investigation and effective application of knowledge about all aspects of the academic experience is crucial. Academic advising is one element of a student's academic journey that can be further developed with an emphasis on the academic advisor with a counseling degree as a tool to help students achieve educational and career goals while helping institutions to accomplish stated educational missions. Therefore, further research is essential to expand understanding of academic advisors with counseling degrees and the measurable impact on personal and institutional aspects of student success.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Title of the Project: Phenomenological Study: The Lived Experiences of Higher Education
Academic Advisors with Counseling Degrees in Addressing Their Role in Student Success

Principal Investigator: Shajuana Isom-Payne, M.Ed.

Faculty Supervisors: Donna Gibson, Ph.D. and Abigail Conley, Ph.D.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. It is up to you if you choose to
participate.

Informed Consent

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding your perceptions of the role of an
academic advisor in student success. The goal of this survey is to understand the experiences of
academic advisors with counseling degrees in addressing their role in student success for
undergraduate students at a four-year college or university, and you will be asked to answer
questions about that topic. This research is being carried out by Shajuana Isom-Payne, doctoral
student at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

Procedure

If you agree to participate as a subject in this research, you will be asked to participate in an
interview. This interview will be one on one with the researcher. The interview can take place
in person, over the phone, or via Skype or Zoom. The survey may take the average participant
up to 1 hour.

The interviews will be recorded by audio and transcribed. After the interview has been
transcribed, I will send you a link to view the transcript and ask you to review it for accuracy.
The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 60 minutes.

Potential Risk of Participation

The risks of participating in this study are no more than are experienced in daily life. There may
be moments of discomfort during our discussion that may include uncomfortable feelings from
advisors answering questions regarding experiences with current advising practices and
processes.

Potential Benefits of Participation

There are no direct benefits for participating. College students and academic advisors may
benefit through the increased understanding of the role of academic advising for student success.
However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about effective advising strategies
to promote student success and retention within a four-year university.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation is voluntary. You have the option to not choose to participate in this research. You may stop participating in the interview at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

Statement of Confidentiality

Interview question responses will be stored in recording device and recorded in an excel spreadsheet with no identifying information. Responses will be stored electronically for three years and then any data will be destroyed. It will only be available to the researcher and the coding team members. No names or identifying information will be recorded. Interview question responses will be anonymous. However, there is always a risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality and/or anonymity when working with online technology.

As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study, and the information collected will remain in the position of the investigator in a safe location.

Contact and questions

This research is being directed by Shajuana Isom-Payne, doctoral student Virginia Commonwealth University. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Ms. Isom-Payne at 804-400-0049 or sipayne@vcu.edu. If you have questions about the treatment of human participants and Virginia Commonwealth University, contact the VCU Office of Research Subjects Protection at irbpanela@vcu.edu or 804-828-0868.

Statement of Consent

Responding to the interview questions indicates your informed consent to participate in this study. Also, submission of responses to the interview questions attest that I am at least 18 years of age or older. All questions that may have arisen have been answered by the document or the investigators listed above.

I understand that the researcher is conducting a research study about the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees who advise undergraduate students. Specifically, this study will investigate how advisors address their role in student success in academic advising sessions.

I understand that the researcher is a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University and she is completing this research study as a partial fulfillment of earning a Ph.D. in Education with a concentration in Counselor Education and Supervision.

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____

Participant Printed Name, Signature, and Date

_____

Principal Investigator Printed Name, Signature, and Date

APPENDIX B

Immediate Supervisor and Dean Notification Email

Good Morning/Afternoon,

As I have been working on my dissertation, I want to share with you the focus and purpose of my research.

The purpose of the study is to explore the phenomenon of academic advisors with counseling degrees and their role in student success.

I will aim to further understand the experiences of higher education academic advisors and student success.

I understand the process of VCU research and review board for approval to conduct research with academic advisors on the VCU campus and other institutions within the U.S. As my immediate supervisor and dean, my intent of this email is to make you aware of the purpose of my research.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Shajuana Isom-Payne

Doctoral Student Virginia Commonwealth University

APPENDIX C

Academic Advisor Electronic Email Request for Participation and Explanation of Study

Subject: Research Project

Dear Academic Advisors:

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond, VA, studying Counselor Education and Supervision. I am also a member of the university academic personnel and administrator for Virginia Commonwealth University.

For my dissertation, I am conducting research on higher education academic advisors' experiences regarding their role in student success. This study is to explore the experiences of academic advisors with student success efforts. The purpose of this study is intended for your participation to discuss advisor perceptions regarding academic advisor interactions, strategies of advising, and what you would consider barriers to the current academic advising processes that support student success.

Participation in this research will include a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Your participation in this process will take less than one hour of your time. All information provided in this interview will be kept confidential, and at any time you may choose to withdraw from this research study. You will receive an email requesting your participation in this study at a later date.

If you have any questions about this process, please do not hesitate to email me at sipayne@vcu.edu, or phone number of (804-400-0049). You may also contact my dissertation advisors, Dr. Donna Gibson and Dr. Abigail Conley, at Virginia Commonwealth University, at dgibson@vcu.edu or ahconley@vcu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Shajuana Isom-Payne, Doctoral Student Virginia Commonwealth University

IRB – Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant,

My name is Shajuana Isom-Payne and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Special Education Department at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation about the experiences of higher education academic advisors with counseling degrees who work with undergraduate students. Specifically, my study will work with potential participants on how they address their role in student success with undergraduate students in their academic advising sessions. Completion of this study will fulfill part of my requirements for a Ph.D. in Education with a concentration in Counselor Education and Supervision.

Eligibility criteria for participation in this study include:

1. Working as an academic advisor with undergraduate students

2. Earned master's degree in counseling or related training

Should you meet the criteria above and choose to participate, I will conduct an either in-person or phone interview with you regarding your experiences as an academic advisor in addressing your role in student success. Participation will take approximately 45-60 minutes. This study has been approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research (insert IRB#) and there are minimal to no risks for participation. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy, but will be kept confidential and secure. Your name will not be attached to any data and any identifying information revealed in the interview will be deleted or concealed before data analysis. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time or decline to answer any questions I may ask.

Currently, there are many studies detailing student success and the academic advisor's experience, yet there are few studies on academic advisors with counseling degrees. Additionally, there are no available studies on the role of academic advisors with counseling degrees addressing student success, so your participation will help reveal if and how student success is addressed by this special population.

Thank you for your time and consideration in both assisting me with my professional endeavors and providing the counseling field with this useful information. If you are willing to participate or have additional questions, please contact me via email at sipayne@vcu.edu. Additionally, my

dissertation co-chairs, Dr. Donna Gibson, can be reached at dgibson7@vcu.edu and, Dr. Abigail Conley, can be reached at ahconley@vcu.edu.

With warmest regards,

Shajuana Isom-Payne, M. Ed.

Doctoral Candidate

Virginia Commonwealth University

APPENDIX E

IRB – Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions below by entering your response or by checking the most appropriate response:

1. Last name: _____
2. First name: _____
3. Email address: _____
4. Phone number: _____
5. Please share your gender identity:
    - € Female
    - € Male
    - € Other
    - € Prefer not to identify
6. Please describe your race/ethnicity:
    - € African-American
    - € American Indian
    - € Asian or Pacific Islander
    - € Caucasian
    - € Hispanic
    - € Other: _____
7. Name of college or university you currently work and job title:

    _____
8. Name of counseling degree, institution, and year obtained (ex. Master's in college counseling and student affairs from ABC University). If no counseling degree was obtained, please enter "N/A": _____
9. If you entered "N/A" above, please describe the type of related training you have received and year obtained. _____
10. Was your degree training from a CACREP-accredited institution?
    - € Yes
    - € No
11. What are the number of years and months at your current job: _____
12. How many years and months have you worked as an academic advisor for undergraduate students? _____