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Examining Effective Advising and Assessment: The Academic Advising Environment, Current Practices and Experiences at UT Austin

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Examining Effective Advising and Assessment: The Academic Advising Environment, Current Practices and Experiences at UT Austin

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my son, Wesley. You are the only superhero that I have ever known. You are kind and sincere towards others, and I remain in awe of your positive energy and the power to make those around you happy. May you never lose that indomitable spirit and joy that defines you, even when life begins to present you with ever increasing challenges, obstacles, and pressures as you grow and mature from a toddler to a man. Let this work serve as a testament to what one can accomplish with courage, dedication, and perseverance in the face of doubt and hardship. Invest in knowledge and learning, for material things may be here today and gone tomorrow, but your education will remain with you forever.

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The completion of this work has allowed me time to reflect upon my extraordinary journey through this academic endeavor of a lifetime. Today is the culmination of several years of labor and a testament to one's resolve and fortitude to see a journey through to its end. The process has been a humbling experience wrought with lessons that have taken me through several extremes of the human experience. To be honest, there were as many days marked by frustration and isolation as there were of exhilaration and accomplishment that I felt. I am certain that I would not have been able to reach this endpoint without an unbelievable faith in myself and the patience, support, and inspiration of a few individuals close to me. Also, this treatise project would not have been possible without the participants of this study, the many students, staff, and administrators who volunteered their time and effort, and all those who shared their stories with me and provided meaningful insights into their advising experiences within the colleges.

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Examining Effective Advising and Assessment: The Academic Advising Environment, Current Practices and Experiences at UT Austin

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Effective academic advising may be perceived or experienced differently depending on a person's involvement (student, advisor, or administrator). In addition, a person's understanding and description of effective advising depends on how it is identified (process, outcome, or approach) or the context in which it is encountered. Results from multiple studies of the relevant literature have demonstrated how the quality of advising influences students in regard to retention, academic and social integration, decision-making processes in selecting academic programs and careers, overall student satisfaction, and success (Banta et al., 2002; Cuseo, 2004, Hunter & White, 2004). However, research on effective advising and the assessment of advising has received very little attention in the literature. Although awareness of the importance of institutional assessment has increased, assessment of academic advising today is – if conducted at all – is piecemeal and consists of simple student satisfaction surveys that may be neither adequate of useful. Even when assessment measures are conducted, advising units are often inept at utilizing the results to create positive change within their programs. Understanding effective advising requires a closer look at the participants, the advising

programs, and the assessment practices of programs along with exploring student learning outcomes.

The overarching area of inquiry in the research study is: What is effective advising (how is it manifested and in what ways is it measured at the University)? Within this context, the goals for this study were to uncover the following: how academic advising is administered and supported across a specific institution; how perceptions about advising differ among system participants; what valued characteristics are found among effective advisors and advising programs; what assessment of academic advising looks like at the institution; what advisors and advising programs do to contribute to quality and improvement.

To achieve these objectives, the study utilized a multi-faceted case study of undergraduate academic advising and the participants within a large public research institution which contained several academic advising centers. Understanding effective advising and the advising system required a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that involved the collection and analysis of many different forms of data from a variety of sources and over an extended period of time. A mixed methods, action-research design utilized the collection and review of numerous assessment and advising documents, descriptive and quantitative SPSS analysis of several longitudinal data sets yielded from electronic survey systems of seven colleges, numerous original interviews and focus groups with students, staff, and administrators, and a year's worth of detailed field observations (journals and critical reflection) of the advising process and the advising system.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Advising in higher education is an important part of students' academic and career choices. Choosing a career, understanding requirements for degrees and certificates, and navigating the process of transferring or applying credits all require comprehensive support. Perhaps more than any other resource available to institutions, effective advising connects directly to individual students, their aspirations, and persistence in higher education. Texas law mandates that "Each institution shall establish an advising program to advise students at every level of courses and degree options that are appropriate for the individual student" (TEC 51.306 [I]). Results from the annual academic advising survey of public institutions of higher education conducted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for the 1993 through 1997 academic years revealed that fewer than half of the institutions reported having a program of regular and systematic research and evaluation within their academic advising programs to determine whether the educational goals and needs of students are being met (*Academic Advising in Texas Public Institutions of Higher Education*, 2000). Since results of the study were based on the self-reporting of advisors at the individual institutions and evaluation of institutional assessment was not actually conducted, it is unclear what more comprehensive methodologies would reveal.

Statement of the Problem

Over a decade later, the landscape has changed very little in regards to assessment of academic advising programs. Although there is a significant effort in academic advising communities to construct and implement meaningful assessment plans, the profession has not yet clarified how to define and measure student learning outcomes related to academic advising. Meeting these expectations of assessment in meaningful ways provides both challenges and opportunities for academic advising units.

The culture of assessment and accountability is touching all areas of higher education, including academic advising units. Effective assessment is a holistic, integral, and iterative process that focuses on student learning, a process that involves reviewing and reflecting on practice in a planned and careful way. Defining and measuring student learning outcomes in advising leads to more thoughtful, deliberate work and helps identify areas to improve advising programs. By measuring the impact of advising on student learning, advisors demonstrate their critical roles within the educational missions of their institutions.

It is proposed that although awareness of the importance of institutional assessment has increased, assessment of academic advising today – if conducted at all - is piecemeal and consists of simple student satisfaction surveys that may be neither adequate nor useful. Even when assessment measures are conducted, advising units are often inept at utilizing the results to create positive change within their programs. Further contemplation on the subject of academic assessment unveils many questions.

Purpose of the Study

Effective advising may be perceived or experienced differently depending on a person's involvement (student, advisor, or administrator). In addition, a person's understanding and description of effective advising depends on how it is identified: as a process, outcome, or approach, and the context in which it is encountered.

The purpose of this study is threefold: 1) to gain a better understanding and current picture of the academic advising environment (context and climate) and how advising is supported and administered at a large, public Tier One research institution , 2) to understand what effective advising is or what effective advisors/advising programs do, and 3) to discover participants' experiences with advising and assessment, how assessment is being conducted around the university, and how it is (or is not used) to improve advising programs.

Educational Significance

Research studies over the past three decades have contributed to the understanding of key issues within the field of academic advising. The practice of advising began as a prescriptive approach in order to provide for direct student needs such as course selection and course planning (Frost, 1991). A major concept in redefining advising was to view it from a developmental perspective that involves development of the person as a whole. Within the developmental concept, advising is viewed as the intentional stimulation of the student's growth and development through the use of a full range of university and community resources (Winston et al., 1982). This approach to advising is grounded in both psychological and intellectual theory emphasizing behavioral characteristics and thinking processes (Winston, Enders, & Miller 1982). Since Crookston's 1972 ground breaking piece that defined developmental advising, the developmental advising approach became the dominant and most heavily promoted approach in the advising field (Frost, 1991; Smith & Allen 2006; Winston et al., 1984). While early proponents listed goals such as "cognitive, affective, career, physical, and moral growth" (Winston, Ender, & Miller, 1982, p.7) or argued that the focus should be on "the self - paying particular attention to the students' intrapersonal development" (Winston et al., 1982, p. 25), recent scholars have argued for the transformation of the developmental approach to shift emphasis away from students' personal development to focus more on academic learning. From the advising is teaching perspective, advising is considered part of the teaching paradigm in that planning, problem solving, decision making, and cognitive skills are facilitated through advising interactions (Frost; Nutt, 2004; Smith & Allen, 2006).

Although the literature is ripe with examples of advising theories, approaches, or philosophy, there are very few studies that examine the implementation of these frameworks or their prevalence and effectiveness in practice. Research on assessment related to academic advising has received very little attention in the literature. Moreover, studies that focus on the actual process of assessment (from beginning to end) within a higher education setting are extremely limited. The delivery of advising and the advisor-advisee relationship remains an integral part of understanding what effective advising is about.

Understanding effective advising requires a closer look at the academic assessment practices of advising programs. Existing studies on academic assessment have focused on student satisfaction with advisors or advising programs but rarely address student learning outcomes or what advisors and advising programs actually do.

Additionally, studies that focus on the entire process of assessment including participants' perceptions and experiences, and how advisors / advising organizations address quality is lacking in the literature. There is a widespread concern among scholars that academic assessment is not taking place in the advising field (Brown & Sanstead, 1982; Macaruso, 2004; Nutt, 2004). Nationally, systematic assessment of academic advising is reportedly lacking at all levels: student, program, and institution (Winston et al., 1984). Since the overall purpose of evaluating academic advising is to provide information useful for making changes in advising programs, this research study serves a dual purpose of contributing to the literature and providing a guideline for action.

Frameworks and Research Structure of the Study

This study subscribes to the basic interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm and employs a case study research design with a grounded theory approach to theory building. For this study, a mixed method approach of data collection is chosen that involves observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document analysis, historical case review, and survey comment compilations. The research environment (or case) is a large, public Tier One Research University in the U.S. The study examines the phenomenon of how academic advising units make their programs successful within a specific context to benefit the institution, to benefit students, and to ensure both individual and organizational quality.

Issue/Guide Questions (Research Questions)

Stake (1995) suggests that instead of preparing traditional research questions, the researcher that utilizes an inductive approach and case study design should plan a number of issue questions that prompt good thinking. He suggests that the initial question count should be around 10 to 20 questions and that these could be reduced to three or four questions as the research focus is refined through the inductive process. Either the existing literature or experience of the researcher can be used to guide the research through the process. Two sets of issue/guide questions have been sparked by the purposes of this study on academic advising. The first set of issue questions pertains to effective academic advising while the second set pertains to the assessment of advising. During a whittling down process representative of the inductive approach to inquiry, the issue questions were consolidated and transformed into four final research questions after an initial period of general advising observations and collection of assessment documents.

Issue Questions: Effective Academic Advising

1. What are the characteristics, behaviors, and advising approaches of effective advisors?
2. What does a successful advising unit look like?
3. How do viewpoints/perceptions differ among students, staff, and the administration?
4. How do advising programs address the issue of organizational diversity and working with a diverse student body?
5. What are some effective advising styles/approaches?
6. What characteristics and behaviors are essential to becoming a better advisor?
7. How do advisors develop?

8. What specific attitudes, behaviors, and actions contribute to an ideal advising environment?
9. What are ways in which an advising community can tell if it is doing a good job (assessment)?

Issue Questions: Assessment of Academic Advising

1. What happens within an advising office during and after its assessment efforts?
2. What types of challenges arise during the process?
3. What methods are employed to measure the value of an advising program?
4. How does an advising program attempt to address students' expectations and the needs of the institution?
5. Why do some organizations change and others do not?
6. How do people feel about assessment?
7. Why do or do not advising units participate in assessment?
8. How is assessment being used currently?

Research Questions: Effective Advising and Assessment

1. What is the general state of academic advising at the University?
2. How are advising systems (advisors, students, programs) assessed at the University?
3. What specific attitudes, behaviors, and actions contribute to effective advising?

4. What are some things that limit the effectiveness of advising systems or that impact the quality of advising?

Definition of Key Terms

The terms "assessment" and "effective advising" are rather vague or elusive, and perception of these concepts can vary among the different constituents that are involved in the process. Assessment for the purposes of this study is defined as an ongoing process focusing on the systematic collection, review, and use of information regarding academic advising, with the goal of improving learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Assessment is a dynamic process whereby advisors engage other advisors, staff, students, and administrators in a reciprocal, unending dialogue regarding what students, staff, and the administration should get out of the advising program/experience, and pointedly, what students should learn or benefit from a specific institution. Effective advising is defined as what advisors and advising programs do that contribute to the quality or improvement of advisors or advising programs and that promote identified student learning outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

Just a single case requires an extensive time commitment from the researcher to yield rich and illustrative data to be useful for case study research. Additionally, theory building requires the ongoing comparison of data and theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the continuous refinement between theory and practice (Lynham, 2000). Thus, new theory does not emerge quickly but is developed over time as the research is extended from one case to the next and more and more data are collected and analyzed. Due to imposed time constraints for this study, theory development became less of an emphasis through the progression of the study compared to the exploration of the advising system and discovery of emergent themes. Time constraints also limited the number of sites that could be visited and examined, and the study was confined to a single, large Tier One research university in the U.S. Furthermore, the study focused mostly on large, centralized advising units (Dean's office/ Student affairs) in the major colleges at the university because those environments were likely to experience heavier student traffic and encounter a larger variety of advising issues. The seven degree-granting colleges at the university were selected based on factors such as the availability of resources and information, and access to a large number of participants.

Another limitation of the study is representative of interpretive case studies in general. Since the researcher is directly involved in the process of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 1998; Klein & Myers, 1999; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Morse, 1994), interpretive research makes it possible to present the researcher's own constructions as well as those of all the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Neuman; Walsham, 1995). The researcher, through a close interaction with the actors, becomes a "passionate participant" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.115). Although this aspect might be regarded as a pitfall, it is in fact one of this approach's advantages. It provides an opportunity to get a deep insight into the problem under study because "[a]n interpretive explanation documents the [participant's] point of view and translates it into a form that is intelligible to readers" (Neuman, 1997, p. 72). However, this trait of interpretive case studies puts an additional onus on the researcher to be mindful of one's own biases and to ensure that methods are in place to maintain the integrity of the study. Legitimacy of findings can be an issue, due to the subjectivity of depending on some degree of researcher judgment for strength and significance of a finding (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A third limitation of the study is that the nature of a case study limits the amount of confidence in analytic generalizations (1994). Although little can be done to combat challenges concerning the generalizability of case studies, "most writers suggest that qualitative research should be judged as credible and confirmable as opposed to valid and reliable" (Merriam,1985, p. 205). Likewise, it has been argued that "rather than transplanting statistical, quantitative notions of generalizability and thus finding qualitative research inadequate, it makes more sense to develop an understanding of generalization that is congruent with the basic characteristics of qualitative inquiry" (1985, p.205).

Organization of Chapters

This study is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the topic under study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance to research. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature concerning the research questions. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the study, including sampling techniques and procedures used to collect and analyze the data. Chapters 4 – 7 provide the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 8 addresses the results of the study in relation to the research questions- a summary discussion, insights, and implications for future research and practice are provided.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the dominant themes and key issues in the progression and transformation of academic advising into what it is today. The chapter reviews literature that contributes to the understanding of academic advising as a profession – its growth, its role and importance within higher education, and its attempts to improve the quality and effectiveness of advising programs. A supplemental focus is to examine developments and practices in the assessment of academic advising, advisor training/professional development, and organizational effectiveness. Emphasis is placed on current concepts and themes, although historical references are included when appropriate.

Over the past three decades students, faculty members, and administrators in higher education have given academic advising increasing recognition and value as a contributing factor in college student success. The literature has many examples of studies reporting how the quality of advising influences students in regard to retention, academic and social integration, decision-making processes in selecting academic programs and careers, overall student satisfaction, and success (Banta, Hansen, Black & Jackson, 2002; Cuseo, 2004, Hunter & White, 2004). This chapter examines the research that supports the assertion that academic advising makes a positive impact on undergraduate education, and that its assessment is critical to the quality undergraduate experience.

Historical Background

Academic advising has its roots in the teaching and learning mission of higher education. As defined by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) (2006, Summary section, para.1), it is “a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. It synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes.”

Although academic advising is a relatively recent term in the chronology of higher education, the concept has existed in some shape or form since the inception of academic institutions in colonial America. In its earliest form, advising was an unorganized and undefined activity (Cook, 2001). The English colonists who settled America believed deeply that an educated citizenry and a learned clergy were essential aspects of the society they wanted to establish. The creation of the early American colleges was an attempt by the colonial communities to establish social order, instill civic responsibility, prepare leaders for service to the church, and educate privileged young white men. When Harvard was established in 1636, university presidents, and later faculty, acted in loco parentis and advised students concerning their moral life, extracurricular activities and intellectual habits (Cook, 2001; Frost, 2001). From the late 17^{th} century to the late 18^{th} century, many other colonial colleges such as William and Mary, Yale , New Jersey , King's, Philadelphia , Rhode Island , Queen's and Dartmouth were established (Rudolph, 1990). Emulating the English residential college structure and the governing patterns of German universities, the colonial colleges taught a classical curriculum that emphasized ideas, or the life of the mind.

During this time students and faculty often shared residence, providing the faculty a close disciplinary relationship with the students both in and out of the classroom (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Faculty, which were few and oftentimes consisted of a college's president or rector, governed all aspects of students' lives including the living environment and worship. Referred to as the collegiate way, instructors had great effect over the strict guidance and control of the students. Academic learning by students consisted almost exclusively of rote memorization and recitation. Both the curriculum and method of instruction were standard, and students had little or no choice in selecting courses.

Around the time of the American Revolutionary War, the rebellious spirit along with the attitudes and ideology of colony leaders at the time influenced the colleges to evolve from educating students for the clergy and state to educating students for citizenship in a new republic. As America neared the American Revolutionary War, the distance between the English and American college models grew wider. American faculty began to become less involved with student discipline due to the growing needs of the school as a whole. The paternalism that had once been the norm in classes and dormitories was disappearing. Collegiate faculty began treating students as free thinking gentlemen who were responsible for their own developmental choices (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

The first instances of organized advising began with groups of faculty. In 1841, Rutherford Hayes described a rule adopted by Kenyon College stipulating that each student choose a faculty member who would be an adviser and friend as well as a medium of communication within the faculty (Hardee, 1970). The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1892 sparked the proliferation of colleges and universities in America. As the nation began coming into its own, the federal government became involved in higher education.

The first Morrill Act, signed by President Lincoln in 1862 delegated 30,000 acres of land to each congress member to sell to fund agricultural and mechanical colleges or expand the mission of existing state colleges to include agricultural and technical studies. More majors thus became available, making access to higher education more widespread and affordable (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). Many of these new colleges had to accept students just out of the common schools since public high schools still did not exist in many places (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

A second Morrill Act in 1890 expanded the program, increased the aid available to such colleges, and prohibited state receiving the funding from discriminating in higher education (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). As the nineteenth century unfolded, there was for the first time some access for women to a college education. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, more and more public and private women's colleges were formed. Due in part to the second Morrill Act, state universities in every state except Georgia, Virginia, and Louisiana admitted women by the early twentieth century (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

The growing diversity of the student population provided the opportunity for academic guidance to secure its place in education and advising groups began to emerge around this time (Gordon, 1992). Access to higher education for more Americans was on its way to becoming a reality. "These colleges stood pre-eminently for the principle, increasingly important in the twentieth century, that every American citizen is entitled to receive some form of higher education" (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 64). Faculty within specialized curricula took the charge of guiding students to the classes that they needed, and the concept of departmental advising was born.

The Transformation of Academic Advising

The first wide-spread development in the practice and progression of academic advising coincided with the creation of the elective system at Harvard in 1870. Charles W. Eliot's visionary leadership in higher education created the first appointment for an administrator in charge of student discipline and development and initiated the elective system that created the need for advisement about course choices (Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). In 1876, Daniel Gilman, the president of Johns Hopkins University, developed and implemented the first organized system of faculty advisors. The advisors of Gilman's administration faced the challenge of balancing dual roles. Not only were they charged with the daunting task to be the connection between students and the administration, they were also counted on to be the moral forces on campus. It is uncertain how many advisors there were to begin. Hawkins (1960) states "there were approximately thirty faculty members teaching forty-nine matriculates in 1882–1883, and enough of these were advisors to guarantee personal attention." (p. 126). An advisor's availability for consultation (one hour each day, five days a week) was printed in the Circulars, the handbook of the University. Gilman (1886) made sure that this very human role be emphasized when he declared: "The office is not that of an inspector, nor of a proctor, nor of a recipient of excuses, nor of a distant and unapproachable embodiment of the authority of the Faculty. It is the adviser's business to listen to difficulties which the student assigned to him may bring to his notice; to act as his representative if any collective action is necessary on the part of the board of instruction to see that every part of his course of studies has received the proper attention" (p.565). By the beginning of the 20th century, the elective principle had catalyzed and transformed the advising system within American higher education.

Besides the elective system movement, another major development that contributed to the transformation of academic advising occurred during that time – the emergence of the research university. With the transcendence of numerous research universities in the late 19th century, with more complex structures and increased courses, students began to need greater assistance and guidance throughout their academic experience. By the end of the nineteenth century, college enrollment was quickly increasing. Between 1885 and 1895, enrollment at private colleges in the East grew by 20%, and at state universities by 32% (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). With this swelling of college enrollment and despite the rise in the existence of secondary schools, a great many students were entering colleges and universities in an underprepared state. Consequently, advising activities became more defined, with advisors specializing in personal, vocational, and academic issues, among others.

Counseling and advising practices in higher education were inadvertently strengthened as a consequence of World War I (Gallagher & Demos, 1983) when industrial psychology practices placed recruits into specific occupations in the U.S. Army based on their skills and intelligence. Witnessing the utility of the methods employed by the army, administrators at universities adopted the study of psychometrics in personnel placement and established vocational guidance centers that utilized occupational aptitude assessments as a tool for advising students in their academic pursuits.

The Progressive Education Movement of the 1920s focused on the self-direction of the student and placed emphasis on the role of educators as mentors who were integral in the development of the student. In 1937, the American Council on Education published the Student Personnel Point of View, which brought to the limelight of student affairs the philosophy of individual student interests, unique differences, and the idea of holistic learning (Strange, 1994). By the 1930s most colleges and universities had developed organized approaches to academic advising (Bishop, 1987; Grites, 1979).

In the 1940s, the GI Bill fostered a huge growth of enrollment after World War II and spurred the creation of a multitude of student services common on campuses today. The bill not only gave funding for veterans to attend college, but it also funded auxiliary services such as tutorial centers, academic advising and guidance services, and programs to help former GIs to improve their reading and study skills (Casazza, 1999). Access to college for many more Americans thus increased as a consequence of the GI Bill. By the fall of 1946, over a million veterans had participated in the opportunity. Furthermore, the success of veterans in returning to the classroom sparked a half-century of optimism resulting in more Americans being granted access to higher education (McCabe & Day, 1998).

Despite the enormous influx of students at colleges and universities during this time, academic advising was still seen as a faculty function. However, as the research focus of faculty, the diversity of the student body, and concerns about student retention continued to grow, so did the need for professional advisors and comprehensive advising systems (Frost, 1991). Continued formalization of academic advising on most campuses was a response to two forces: student populations that were increasingly numerous and diverse, and faculties who were devoted to research. With increased federal spending on new initiatives and the formation of the National Science Foundation in 1950, many institutions began the transformation into large, research institutions that exist today. Faculty no longer had the time or incentive to advise due to increasing teaching and research obligations. This weakened formal faculty advising systems, and advising became a function of student affairs administrators on many campuses, or was placed second to teaching on campuses that employed a faculty advising system (Grites, 1979).

A large gain in Americans' access to higher education came in the 1950s and 1960s with the advent of the civil rights movement. After Brown v. Board of Education and similar court decisions struck down “separate but equal” facilities and de facto segregation in schools at all levels, the diversity of the student body increased. In the 1960s and 1970s, the increased access to higher education of students of color coupled with the impact of baby boomers attending college brought an increased demand for student advising and counseling, and student developmental issues exploded onto the academic forefront (Gordon, 1992).

The launching and rapid growth of community colleges during this period further expanded post-secondary opportunities to first-generation college students and students from families of low socioeconomic status. The demand for new student services and the emergence of research into student development theory was a direct result of the changing demographics of the student population and its diversity. By the 1970s, many of the students entering college were first-generation college students - those who had no family history of attending college. New students could also be found who had special needs such as learning disabilities and health issues. As non-traditional aged students, multicultural students, women, and students with disabilities began enrolling in mass, changes in the structure of support services, especially academic advising, became necessary (Casazza, 1999). The tremendous growth in the enrollment of ethnic minorities and international students in the 1980s led further to the growth and professionalization of academic advising to meet the needs of the changing student population. While the issues of higher education equity, access, quality, and accountability became the focal point of a variety of student services, it was especially true of academic advising (Komives, Woodard Jr., & Associates, 1996).

Faced with tumbling enrollments and higher attrition, lack of faculty interest or rewards for advising, and student demands for improved advising, many colleges and universities established advising centers or more coordinated advising efforts in the 1970s and 1980s. The explosion of community colleges in the 1960s and 1970s and open admissions policies had made higher education accessible to more first-generation college students than ever before. Many of these students scored in the bottom third of standardized academic tests, but were eager to seek a higher education, seeing it as a way to rise to better career opportunities and live better than their parents did (Boylan, 1995). In addition, the growth and diversification of four-year colleges and universities opened the doors for students with specialized needs. However, the increases in access to institutions of higher education also brought about a new set of issues related to students being unprepared for college or being overwhelmed by the demands of their new environments (Boylan & Saxon, n.d.).

Research confirms that academic advising, student services that connect the student to the institution, and faculty-student contact can have a significant effect on student motivation, involvement, and retention (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Frost, 1991; Glennen, 1995; Noel, Levitz, Saluri, & Associates, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Because retention improves the academic and financial foundations of the institution, most colleges have approved the expansion of advising centers in the last twenty years (Glennen, Farren, & Vowell, 1996; Gordon & Habley, 2000). In fact, the ACT National Survey of Academic Advising found that in that time period, the percentage of institutions with advising centers tripled to 73 % and that 78 % had a coordinator of campus advising (Habley & Morales, 1998). Sparked by a dramatic decline in the number of traditional age students, the development of theoretical frameworks, and the establishment of a national organization, the field of academic advising moved from a peripheral support function into a position of increasing prominence in higher education.

Academic advising received renewed attention in the 1970s and 1980s as it emerged as a strategy to combat declining enrollments and alarming attrition rates (Beal & Noel, 1980; Biggs, Brodie & Barnhart, 1975; Crockett, 1978). Groundbreaking articles by Crookston (1972) on developmental advising and O'Banion (1972) on a five-stage academic advising model changed the face of academic advising in U.S. higher education and opened the door to the professionalization of the field (Habley, 1988). Subsequently, the National Conference on Academic Advising was first held in 1977, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was chartered in 1979, and the *NACADA Journal: The Journal of the National Academic Advising Association* followed in 1981 (Beatty, 1991).

Since Beal and Noel (1980) published their landmark report in which they found academic advising to be one of three major areas promoting student satisfaction and retention across 947 institutions of higher education, the importance of academic advising within universities has increased (Bedford & Durkee, 1989; Carstensen & Silberhorn, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Steele, Kennedy, & Gordon, 1993; Tinto, 1998; Trombley & Holmes, 1981). Many scholars have suggested improved advising as a means to increase retention. Anderson (1985) and Tinto (1975) argued that one of the most powerful, positive influences on student persistence in college is individual attention and integration into the formal and informal academic and social systems of a campus. Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) went even further, and suggested ways to infuse student development theory into advising practices.

Crookston (1972) described the role of advisor as teacher and encouraged advisors to foster growth across all dimensions in students. He reasoned that a relationship built on trust and openness allows for interactions and discussions that will foster student development. This notion of advising became known as developmental advising. O'Banion (1972) further defined developmental advising, and argued that an advising system should "help the student choose a program of study which will serve him in the development of his total potential" (p. 10). He suggested that students should have a larger role in decision making and share responsibility with advisors in the advising process. Developmental advising was described as a logical and sequential, five-step process that students and advisors worked on collaboratively: exploration of life goals; exploration of vocational goals; program choice; course choice; and, scheduling choices (O'Banion, 1972). Ender, Wilson, and Miller (1984) drew upon Crookston's and O'Banion's ideas of what developmental advising could be and have defined developmental academic advising as:

> a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources. It both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life. Developmental academic advising relationships focus on identifying and accomplishing life goals, acquiring skills and attitudes that promote intellectual

> and personal growth, and sharing concerns for each other and for the academic community. (p.19)

Since 1972, a number of scholars and professional associations have described characteristics of developmental advising and developmental advisors. Kramer (2000) describes developmental advising as advising when it is based upon "student growth and success" (p.84). Specifically, advisors who utilize a developmental approach focus on three major themes which include: competence, personal involvement, and developing or validating life purpose (Ender & Wilkie, 2000). These ideals have been defined in at least one instrument, the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) that measures developmental academic advising behaviors (Winston & Sandor, 1984a). The developmental advising approach has gained increased credibility and has been referred to as the ideal approach for advising university students (Gordon, 1994).

Authors of numerous studies have found that the developmental approach results in student satisfaction with advising (Alexitch, 1997; Broadbridge, 1996), and some have suggested that the developmental approach is preferred by students (Fielstein, 1989; Herndon, Kaiser, & Creamer, 1996; Winston & Sandor, 1984b). Additional research has examined the relationship between developmental academic advising and student retention (Beal & Noel, 1980; Crockett, 1985). Other scholars have explored student and faculty perceptions of the advising process (Eddy & Essarum, 1989), and still others have studied advising for special student populations (Brown & Rivas, 1992; Fielstein, Scoles, & Webb, 1992; Padilla & Pavel, 1994; Price, 1994). Certain advising activities described in the literature as "growth oriented," such as exploring the student's values and how they relate to career choice as well as helping the student with interpersonal problems or with improving interpersonal skills (Winston & Sandor, 1984b, p. 8), are associated with the developmental approach.

Prior to the construct of developmental advising, prescriptive advising was the most dominant and widespread approach to advising. Prescriptive advising is based on an authoritative relationship (Crookston, 1979). Crookston likened prescriptive advising to the doctor-patient relationship. In this relationship, a student brings a problem to their advisor for a solution. Once the advisor has answered the student's question, the responsibility is then on the student to follow through. In a prescriptive advising relationship, advisors are seen as superior in their academic knowledge and status**.** Thus, the advisor is an authority figure who tends to make decisions for the advisee, and there is little involvement or input from the advisee in the advising process.

The Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) (Winston & Sandor, 1984) provides descriptors of the prescriptive advising style. Some of the descriptors that relate to prescriptive advising include a formal and distant advising relationship, an advising relationship that is restricted to academic matters, and a relationship in which the advisor is the expert. When describing the academic decision-making found in the prescriptive advising style, the AAI describes the advisor as one who informs the student of the proper course of action, ensures that the student follows through, and makes many of the decisions for the student. In the area of course selection, advisors are described as the main decision-makers, where decisions are based upon the students' grades and test scores.

Although most of the literature promotes developmental advising as the best advising approach, very few studies have focused on the efficacy of the approach. Since the 1960s, those conducting psychotherapy research have consistently argued that the nature of the therapeutic relationship rather than any specific approach or technique may contribute the most to client satisfaction with the psychotherapy they receive (Beutler, Machado, & Neufeldt, 1994; Rogers, 1992). As long as the relational variables were present in the therapy, client satisfaction was reported regardless of whether the therapist was humanistic and nondirective or was quite directive, behavioral, and even therapeutically confrontational (Bergin & Suinn, 1975). Recent research seems to indicate that a parallel situation may exist in academic advising.

The results of a study focusing specifically on freshman students at a large northeastern university demonstrated that these students primarily experienced prescriptive advising and actually preferred it to developmental advising (Smith, 2002). The findings of this study seem to suggest that advising as a developmental process, rather than a static philosophy of either developmental or prescriptive advising, is warranted. Another study used a policy capturing approach to examine the advising variables that contribute to student satisfaction (Motarrella, Fritzsche, Cerabino, 2004). The results of this study show that being known to the advisor, having a professional advisor, and receiving warmth and support from the advisor were important factors to advisee satisfaction. Whether the advising style was prescriptive or developmental was not a significant factor in student satisfaction.

The Value of Academic Advising

As mentioned earlier, multiple literature sources indicate that academic advising plays an important role in student success and retention. Light, in his book *Making the Most of College* (2001) stated, "good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81). Based on his interviews with undergraduates at Harvard College, Light asserts that at critical points in the students' college careers, advisors posed questions or challenges that "forced [students] to think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives" (p. 88).

Tinto (1987) indicates that effective retention programs have come to understand that academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. Tinto's research (1993) included a focus on the reasons students drop out of college. He theorized that students arrive at college with expectations that are subject to change during their enrollment. Students are likely to stay enrolled when their experiences and expectations are aligned with the normative culture on campus and when their interactions with others are positive. Students for whom this is not the case are more likely to drop out.

Although initial retention studies (Astin, 1977) focused on the characteristics of those students who did not persist, research after the early 1970's began to focus on the reasons students remained enrolled and how colleges and universities could make changes or develop programs to increase the retention of their students. Rendon (1995) indicates in her study that two critical factors in students' decisions to remain enrolled until the attainment of their goals are their successfully making the transition to college aided by initial and extended orientation and advisement programs and making positive connections with college personnel during their first term of enrollment.

Several literature sources have identified academic advising as one of the very few, structured activities on campus in which all students have the opportunity for one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution. Noel (1985) stated:

> It is the people who come face-to-face with students on a regular basis who provide the positive growth experiences for students that enable them to identify their goals and talents and learn how to put them to use. The caring attitude of college personnel is viewed as the most potent retention force on a campus (p. 17).

Academic advisors provide students with the needed connection to the various campus services and supply the essential academic connection between these services and the students (Habley, 1988). Through programs of academic advising, Moore (1965) thinks that "students can learn from seeing faculty as human beings who have something to say, not only in classrooms and behind the rostrum, but in a face- to-face relationship by listening and understanding as well as by talking" (p.23).

Dedicated and competent academic advisors help students find meaning in their lives, make decisions, and successfully navigate their way through the higher education system toward graduation. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) presented a synthesis of research findings demonstrating various dimensions in which students are changed by their collegiate experiences. These changes occur in the areas of cognitive growth, psychosocial maturity and moral development. Individuals develop critical reasoning, writing and speaking skills along with an appreciation for the arts and humanities and a better understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity. The findings revealed that a consistent and integrated pattern of change occurs in these areas rather than change in one area at the expense of another. Research suggests that academic advising is a crucial component of a student's experience in higher education (Gordon & Habley, 2000) and that it is one of the best vehicles for promoting the intellectual, personal, and social development of students (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1984; Crockett, 1985). As such, academic advising is a service that links students' academic and personal worlds and, hence, promotes holistic development – comprehensive growth that encompasses the intellectual (academic), emotional (personal), and social (societal) dimensions of growth.

Moreover, studies have shown that effective academic advising is not only beneficial to the student, but to the institution as well (Glennen, Farren, & Vowell, 1996; Gordon & Habley, 2000). At the institutional level, the most evident impact of student attrition is lost tuition revenue, since tuition and fees often represent 25% or more of the state appropriations for public colleges and universities (Gaither, 1992). In their study regarding the ways in which advising affects an institution's fiscal stability, Glennen, et al. (1996) suggests that academic advising contributes to improved retention and graduation rates. Their research indicates that the investments made by institutions in advising services and retention efforts may help to offset budget reductions.

The role of academic advising in influencing funding relates directly to student attrition and enrollment counts. Student tuition is an important source of revenue to institutions, and attrition can adversely affect this funding stream. Further, due to the nature of Full-time equivalents (FTE) driving formula funding, drops in enrollment counts can result in less state funding. Investments in advising services and retention efforts may help to offset budget reductions. Because graduation and retention rates are often measures included in how institutions are ranked and affect public perception about institutions, advising can also influence enrollment indirectly (Reisberg, 1999).

Assessment of Academic Advising

The second part of this chapter reviews the practice of assessing academic advising. Quality assessment in higher education is of national interest, and government and public demand for accountability from higher education institutions have steadily increased over the past decade. To ensure high-quality academic advising for its students, an institution needs a systematic measure of its effectiveness. Assessment is used to determine whether the goals of programs and the needs of students are being met (Suskie, 2004).

According to the literature, assessment is an ongoing process focusing on the systematic collection, review, and use of information regarding student learning, with the goal of improving student learning and development (Angelo, 1995; Ewell, 1994, 2002). Assessment is a dynamic process whereby institutions engage faculty and students in a reciprocal, continous dialogue regarding what students, faculty, and staff should get out of the college experience, and pointedly, what students should get out of a specific institution (Terezini, 1989).

While outcomes assessment has become a focus for institutions of higher education, assessment in academic support units remains sparse. Traditionally, assessment has been comprised of single student satisfaction surveys and/or supervisor evaluations tied specifically to job criteria. Although informative, these methods fail to account for or measure specific student learning outcomes completed by students via their interaction with faculty and staff.

A review of the impact of outcomes assessment on learning and development has revealed more questions than answers (Bennett, 2001; Pascarella, 2001; Peterson & Einarson, 2001), with some institutions reporting positive impact and others likening the challenge of conducting outcomes assessment as grappling with Godzilla (Smith, 1993). This may be in part due to the fact that some institutions have interpreted outcomes assessment strictly as evaluation and spend most of their energy on testing and reporting, rather than using testing and reporting as a means for feedback and improvement.

If academic advising is to be an educationally purposeful activity, then it is important to assess it as a function of higher education. Results of advising assessment can be used by policymakers, managers, and staff for any of the following purposes: to measure the effectiveness of the advising program (e.g., department-level or campus-wide), individual advisor improvement, recognition and reward (especially for faculty advisors, who often place teaching and research ahead of advising), to design and focus advising training strategies, to find out areas of advising weaknesses, and to provide support for advising program development (since advising programs are quite vulnerable to budget cuts). Ultimately, the reason to assess an advising program is to ensure high-quality advising since it is recognized as a major contributor to student satisfaction, success, and retention. Every year, attrition equates to substantial financial losses for post-secondary institutions (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002). For a variety of reasons, many students do not complete a degree, and a substantial number of these students do not persist past their freshman year (Carey, 2004). Nearly one-fourth of all undergraduate students do not return to their chosen four-year college or university for a second year (ACT, 2005). In addition, only 60% of entering freshman at four-year colleges or universities complete their bachelor degrees within six-years (Carey).

Not only does attrition create concern relating to funding, it can also lead to a negative public perception of an institution. According to Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab and Lynch (2002), low graduation rates lead to a series of problems and "are perceived to reflect the university's inability to meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of students" (p. 96). Retention and graduation rates are also considered components of various ratings methodologies that produce lists such as *U.S. News* rankings and *America's Best Colleges* (Mangold et al.).

Current Assessment Efforts (the Quality of Advising Programs)

Reports about the overall quality of advising over the past few decades have not been very encouraging. A national report issued by the Carnegie Foundation, based on three years of campus visits and extensive national survey research, arrived at the following conclusion: "We have found advising to be one of the weakest links in the undergraduate experience. Only about a third of the colleges in our study had a quality advisement program that helped students think carefully about their academic options (Boyer, 1987, p. 51). Student opinion surveys, as well as American College Testing (ACT) surveys on academic advising, supported the notion that academic advising programs were not particularly effective and seemed to remain unfocused (Habley, 1998). Moreover, research on student satisfaction with the quality of academic advisement in higher education yielded a pattern of disappointing findings (Astin, 1993; Habley & Morales, 1998).

Results from a longitudinal report of annual academic advising surveys of public institutions of higher education conducted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2000) for the 1993 through 1997 academic years, revealed that fewer than half of the institutions reported having a program of regular and systematic research and evaluation within their academic advising programs to determine whether the educational goals and needs of students are being met. Further, because these data were based upon self-reports by advisors, it is unclear what more comprehensive methodologies would reveal.

Indeed, more recent data from the American College Testing (ACT) Program's Sixth National Survey of Academic Advising (2004) paint a similar picture about advising. ACT found that only 58% of national universities surveyed evaluated advising; only 32% required and provided training; and only 31% recognized, rewarded, or compensated faculty members for advising. Evaluating, training, and rewarding advising are important steps to improvement. This survey of college officials conducted by ACT, in cooperation with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), suggests that many U.S. colleges and universities are underutilizing and poorly administering their academic advising programs. Specifically, the survey results indicate that many colleges fail to capitalize on the benefits of quality advising, particularly when it comes to helping students stay in school. The survey results also suggest that few colleges have a formal, structured program in place to effectively promote advising as a tool to increase retention, and most do not even have a consistent, campus-wide advising program. College faculty are typically allowed a great deal of autonomy, and each department may have its own approach to advising students (http://www.act.org/news/releases/2004/6-23-04.html).

The findings of another major national report, the 2005–2006 National Student Satisfaction Report (NSSR) support the discoveries from the 2003 ACT study and revealed that there was no significant improvement in the quality of academic advising in the five-year period from 2000 to 2005 (*Five-year trend study: National student satisfaction report*, *2005*). During the same time period, the report found that academic advising ranked second in importance after instruction—exceeding registration, campus safety, and support services. The findings indicated that although there is a significant effort in academic advising communities to construct and implement meaningful assessment plans, the profession has not yet clarified how to define and measure student learning outcomes related to academic advising. Even when assessment measures are conducted, advising units are often inept at utilizing the results to create positive change within their programs. Meeting these expectations of assessment in meaningful ways provides both challenges and opportunities for academic advising units. At the institutional level, the most common advising problems cited in a review of available literature are: lack of advisor training (Gordon,1992; Pardee, 2000); insufficient evaluation measures (Habley & Morales, 1998); lack of recognition for advisors - especially for faculty advisors in tenure and promotion decisions (Dillon & Fisher, 2000;

Habley & Morales; Reinarz, 2000), and high and unevenly distributed caseloads (Burton, 1996; Gordon; Pardee). The problems are interrelated. For example, it is difficult to reward or recognize faculty members for advising if their performance in this area is not evaluated. Faculty members will not want to invest much time in developmental advising if there is no acknowledgment of a job well done, and they cannot make such an investment in any event if caseloads are too high and training is insufficient.

Advisor Training, Professional Development, and Technology

Advisor training and professional development for both faculty and staff advisors is a crucial aspect of an advising program that warrants attention. In the absence of training and support, advising may fail in its effectiveness and ability to institute positive outcomes. Academic advisors may not be aware of the contributions they can make to a student's college experience through developmental advising. Faculty advisors in particular may not be motivated to engage in such advising when other activities compete for their time. As suggested in a review of the relevant literature, ineffective advisor training programs often lack organization, support, and balance. The training of advising personnel may focus too much on office policies and procedures while neglecting the understanding of advising theory, and vice-versa. Just as critical as training is to the overall quality of advising, professional development is an underemphasized vehicle for advisors to remain current with new information, skills and best practices in the field of advising (Huggett, 2000).

King (2000) states that the primary goal of an advisor training program should be "to increase the effectiveness of advising services provided to students, thus increasing student satisfaction and persistence” (p. 290). In developing the content of an advisor training program, a great deal of research and literature support the use of three essential components. McClellan (2007) states that skills in all three areas should be received through formal training and that without the use of all three, the quality of the advising program is missing essential elements needed for successful advising. The three types of adviser knowledge—informational, conceptual, and relational—are consistently identified in the literature as essential skills to quality advising (Burton et al.,1996; Habley & Morales, 1998; Higginson 2000; King, 2000). Informational knowledge has to do with what the adviser needs to know to help students navigate through the institutional bureaucracy successfully, such as understanding university and departmental policies, program requirements, and availability of student services. Conceptual elements include but are not limited to definitions of advising; understanding the relation between advising and retention; understanding roles, rights, and responsibilities of students and advisors; and understanding developmental aspects of advising. Relational concepts, like the name suggests, have to do with the advisor-advisee relationship and involve skills such as active listening, questioning, and rapport-building (Burton et al. 20).

Several institutions have integrated the use of case studies in advising training programs. Envisioned by the Harvard School of Business faculty in the early 1900s and pioneered into widespread use in the 1960s, this method of training did not spread to the advising field until the 1990s. It is still unclear how much the case studies method has proliferated into advisor training programs. Currently, several institutions utilize case studies in their advisor training programs. One example, Lynchburg College in Virginia, utilizes case studies as a fundamental cornerstone of its training. Koring (2003) states that case studies are an effective part of the training process whether advisor training takes place as a single workshop, or as series of continuing in-service meetings, or in formal presentations or informal discussions. They are used to enhance skills development and add richness and complexity to advisor training by reflecting the complex environment of contemporary college students. According to Koring (2003), case studies not only help advisors come to grips with the ambiguities and complexities of student development, but aid them in improving human relations and problem solving skills.

Many institutions have integrated the use of technology in to training and advisor development programs. For example, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) uses an online training system of modules followed by reflections for thought (questions) that need to be completed before credit is awarded to the trainee. The system generates certificates of completion that are to be included in a faculty advisor's tenure/promotion materials and annual review (http://www.mtsu.edu/mtadvise/).

Another benchmark training program for advising, the Department of Academic Advising at the University of Arkansas - Little Rock , offers semi-annual courses to train other cross-campus advisors on how to advise "New Freshmen," "Continuing Students," and "New Transfer Students" **(**http://ualr.edu/advising/index.php/home/for-advisors/). Quality programs are able to employ the efficient and effective use of a wide-range of technological instruments that range from complex student record/mainframe systems to simple communication tools such as pod casts and instant messaging tools.

Especially important to understanding academic advising in Texas is the emerging role of technology and the unprecedented advancements presented by new data systems. For example, The University of Texas at Austin, The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas), and the University of North Texas (UNT), serve as outstanding examples for how technology can support academic advising. Specifically, these systems benefit students and advisors, especially in facilitating degree planning, transfers among institutions, and ensuring timely graduation.

UT-Austin's technology system supports students in creating appropriate degree plans and in choosing courses of study. Besides offering students easy access, this system also facilitates the implementation of university policies. For instance, successful students may be guaranteed seats in certain high-demand classes. This ensures that they complete their coursework appropriately and in a beneficial sequence. Similarly, the system simplifies and automates university policies regarding who are not successful and in need of intervention, such as those that fail a required course more than twice. Equally important, online advisory worksheets and other communications are stored longitudinally and easily reviewed. Given the paramount importance of consistency and accuracy in advising, this tool greatly benefits students in timely graduation.

Another system that facilitates timely graduation, degree planning, and student transfers is the Course Applicability System (CAS) (Dearman, n.d.). Via CAS, students are able to build term-by-term, multi-year plans for graduation. Especially important to students is the ability to plan and organize their transfer of credits when attending multiple institutions. CAS is offered at no cost to students and is used at 217 institutions throughout the United States (https://oh.transfer.org/cas/). In fact, CAS has proven so beneficial that Arizona, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana have elected to implement the program statewide (Armstrong & Fulkerson, 2002). This connects seamlessly all of the public two- and four-year institutions in these states with each other, as well as all of the other institutions participating in CAS.

CAS has facilitated greatly, transfers to and degree completion at UNT and UT-Dallas. In terms of volume of transfers, UNT places eighth in the U.S. and first in Texas (Jarrell, 2008). In contrast to traditional transfer guides, which are often complex, highly labor intensive to create, and difficult to maintain current, CAS has offered institutions a simplified and electronic approach to facilitating transfer and degree completion. This clarity made more efficient institutions' advising and recordkeeping. Unexpectedly, CAS has also benefited institutions as they recruit new and transfer students. Finally, via participating in CAS, four-year institutions and community colleges are strengthening long-term and cooperative relationships (Jarrell).

Planning is essential for the success of effective advisor development programs. The literature supports a team approach in planning the training. The team should represent a diverse group of constituents that have stake in the advising process. Once a training team has been established, Nutt (2003) recommends identifying the audience, the content of the training and the delivery mode of the program. Specific steps in creating and implementing an advisor training program are specified by King (2000) as follows: 1- review the institutional mission; 2 - identify needs to be addressed in the training program; 3 - establish goals and objectives; 4 - select appropriate content, strategies and methods; 5 - implement the program; 6 - evaluate the program.

The systematic process begins with the review of shared goals and objectives in order to develop a strong connection between advising and the missions of the advising unit, as well as the institution. After the first step has been completed, a needs assessment should be performed by the advising team. Following the review of key areas, the advising team must develop objectives that are tied to the mission statement, that are formalized in writing, and that are “specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and tangible” (King, 2000, p. 292). When designing a training program, the advising team should develop the three essential elements (conceptual, informational, and relational) for advisor training, and skills in all three of these areas should be received through formal training (McClellan, 2007). The advising team should also consider the importance of advising in relation to student progress and incorporate aspects of the training to address core functions. During the implementation of the training program, the advising team must address best practices and ensure consistency of its services. Finally, a coordinated assessment program should be established to ensure accountability and to measure effectiveness. This last step is essential to understanding “how and what” students are gaining from advising and to make needed adjustments to the training program to improve student learning.

Advisor and Program Assessment Instruments

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising contains the following thirteen standards: mission, program;

leadership, organization, and management; human resources; financial resources; facilities, technology and equipment; legal responsibilities; equity and access; campus and external relations; diversity; ethics; and assessment and evaluation. Each standard establishes the criteria that every institution of higher education is expected and able to reach with reasonable effort and diligence**.** For example, one of the mission standards is that an institution must have a clearly written statement of philosophy pertaining to academic advising, including program goals and advisor and advisee responsibilities.

There are commercially developed instruments available that specifically target evaluation of academic advising—for instance: (a) The ACT Survey of Academic Advising (American College Testing, 2008), (b) The Academic Advising Inventory (Winston & Sandor, 2002), and (c) The Developmental Advising Inventory (Dickson & Thayer,1993). These standardized instruments come with the advantage of having already-established reliability and validity, as well as the availability of norms that allow for cross-institutional comparisons. However, a possible drawback is that they do not account for the unique, campus-specific concerns and objectives that would be best assessed via locally developed questions, and do not provide instruments that elicit more qualitative data such as written responses.

Principles of Effective Assessment

Advisor assessment is embedded within a larger system of effective program practices. For effective assessment of advisors to take place, other supporting components of an effective advising system need to be in place. These supportive components may be viewed as concurrent or corequisite steps that ensure that advisor assessment is taken seriously by the institution and that motivate advisors to use assessment results to improve their performance. These steps include: (a) clarifying the meaning and purpose of academic advising; (b) providing effective advisor orientation, training, and development; and (c) providing recognition and reward for effective advisor performance (Cuseo, 2008).

Although the academic advising process has undergone a transformation, scholars have expressed less enthusiasm regarding advising assessment (Brown & Sanstead 1982; Macaruso 2004; Nutt 2004). Nationally, systematic assessment of academic advising is reportedly lacking at all levels: student, program, and institution **(**Winston et al., 1984). The overall purpose of evaluating academic advising is to provide information useful for making changes in the advising program (Brown & Sanstead, 1982). Student evaluations of advising purportedly indicate how well the advising system is working, document the effectiveness of individual advisors, and help determine student learning outcomes (Campbell, 2005; Nutt, 2004). Brown and Sanstead, however, caution that evaluations should not be used for final judgment and particularly argue against isolated use of quantitative measures.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), administered through the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning in cooperation with the Indiana University Center for Survey Research, surveys randomly selected seniors at four-year colleges and universities regarding their engagement in the college experience (Kuh, 2001). The NSSE objective is to obtain annual information from colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their students' learning and personal development. Institutions can use their data to identify aspects of the undergraduate experience inside and outside the classroom that can be improved through changes more consistent with good practices. Survey questions are derived from one of five national benchmarks of effective educational practice: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2002). The data from these benchmarks create a powerful tool to help academic advisors focus on what needs to be changed and, possibly, how.

NSSE findings indicate that students typically do not exceed their own expectations, particularly with regard to academic work. Nevertheless, students will go beyond what they think they can do under certain conditions, one of which is that their mentors (faculty, advisors, peers) expect, challenge, and support them to do so (Kuh, 2003). With a unique function in the academic environment, academic advisors can play an integral role in promoting student success by assisting students in ways that encourage them to engage in the right kinds of activities, inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, 2006).

Assessment Approaches and Methods

A review of available literature provides numerous examples of advising assessment conducted by survey methods, including assessment of student satisfaction and expectations (Hanson & Raney, 1993), sources of advising (Reinarz & Ehlrich, 2002), and effectiveness of advising models (Milville & Sedlacek, 1995). Because of multiple approaches to delivering advising to a growing diversity of students, the assessment of advising can be complicated (Banta, Hansen, Black & Jackson, 2002). As with any assessment plan, one needs to determine the goals and objectives of the assessment activity. For instance, is advising assessment intended to improve the performance of individual advisors, or to improve the whole advising delivery system? Effective planning for a system-wide assessment brings careful scrutiny to the many aspects of advising and reveals its deep complexity. While the basic unit of advising is a one-to-one relationship between advisor and advisee, it is more than this coupling — it is a system, with many approaches to assessing it:

1. The *levels* of advising to be assessed: the individual, the program (such as cross-disciplinary studies, or honors programs), the academic department, the college, and the university;
2. The *aspects* of advising: the process (including policies, structure, communication, training) or outcomes (enrollments, performance, graduation rates) or both;
3. The *delivery model* of advising: via faculty, professional staff, or a combination;
4. The *function*: prescriptive (to give information and tell students what to do) or developmental (to promote growth of the whole person and include career and life goals);
5. The *data sources*: surveys, interviews, focus groups, student performance, and other assessment documents;

6. The *decision-makers*: program directors, department heads, deans, provosts, and presidents.

The literature on advising identifies assessment in two typical approaches: individual and program levels. In individual assessment, the core elements of advisor behavior—availability, knowledge, and helpfulness—are the focus of assessment (Creamer & Scott, 2000). Four primary methods are utilized: student evaluation, self-evaluation, supervisory performance review, and peer review (Habley, 2003).

Student evaluation of advisors may be the most direct and useful method of assessing advising effectiveness, since advisees are the recipients of the service (Habley, 2003). Students typically provide feedback through either surveys or focus group participation. Surveys can provide quantitative data to measure student satisfaction with advisor behavior and characteristics. These evaluations purportedly indicate how well the advising system is working, document the effectiveness of individual advisors, and help determine student learning outcomes (Campbell 2005; Nutt 2004). Brown and Sanstead (1982), however, caution that evaluations should not be used for final judgment and particularly argue against isolated use of quantitative measures. Focus groups allow for the collection of qualitative data, with participants expressing their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in their own words. Focus groups are effective for identifying outstanding advisors as well as the traits students associate with good advising (Creamer & Scott, 2000). Focus groups can supplement data gathered in surveys, and can provide more in-depth information about certain issues that are indicated in a survey. A use of both methods is effective for gathering a wide range of data.

Institutional/Program Effectiveness and Assessing Outcomes

Organizational effectiveness can be defined as an organization or institution that successfully identifies its critical constituencies such as customers, government agencies, financial institutions, students, labor unions, etc. and then satisfies, at least minimally, their demands (Cameron 1978b, p.17; Hage 1980, p.136; Miles 1980, p.375). It is important to measure effectiveness from the perspective of each of the different constituencies of an organization (Kleemann 1984; Miles 1980; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). As Miles (1980) notes, organizational assessment cannot be judged apart from the strategic constituencies. A strategic constituency is a group of essential individuals who have powerful influence within an organization and are resource providers. Research shows that different constituencies hold different preferences for organizational effectiveness.

Since its inception, numerous articles, chapters, and books have been written on the subject of organizational effectiveness (Cameron 1978a, 1978b, 1980; Graham and Gisi, 2000; Kleemann & Richardson 1985). Each individual researcher reveals that he or she begins work by indicating the conceptual dilemma and methodological problem surrounding this construct, but almost all indicate that little agreement exists about what organizational effectiveness means or how to adequately measure it.

Although several authors have contributed to the general understanding of effectiveness at the organizational and institutional level, hardly any research has been completed to increase understanding of college students' perceptions of the effectiveness of state universities. The term "effectiveness" can be substituted with performance, success, productivity, or accountability, but each is a measure of desired effectiveness. If effectiveness is the congruence between the importance of an activity and its perceived level of achievement as operationally defined by Kleeman and Richards (1985), then a needs-based assessment of students could contribute to the overall effectiveness of a program to provide the right mix of advising services for students. A discrepancy measure for how well an activity is being performed by the college and its perceived level of importance by the students could be employed. As researchers struggle to find better criteria to consistently and systematically measure, the public makes use of an easier approach, selecting whatever visible criteria are available for judgment (Graham & Gisi, 2000; Karemera, Reuben, & Sillah 2003).

Although outcomes assessment has become entrenched in the higher education landscape for much of the past decade, assessment in student affairs and academic affairs support units remain in its infancy. While there was significant discussion about the issue in student affairs in the mid-1990s (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), it appears that calls for action resulted in little more than mission statements, and there was no tangible movement toward comprehensive assessment of student experiences or student developmental gains. Likewise, assessment of academic advising and advisors has received scant attention in the literature (Gordon & Habley, 2000). Consequently, there are relatively few models of assessment that centralized advisement offices can adopt to examine the effectiveness of the services provided by the office or the advisors. While individual assessment (based on detailed job criteria) conducted by advisor supervisors and surveys of student satisfaction with academic advisement have been used most widely to assess academic advising these methods do not provide specific information about the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the University wants students to acquire (Severy, Lee, Carodine, Powers, & Mason, 1994). It is clear that assessment efforts to measure outcomes in academic advising programs must be comprehensive, include the “voices” of students (Palomba & Banta, 1999), and be reflective of what students have gained via their experiences with advisement.

Palomba and Banta (1999) provide a framework that consists of six essential components that serve as a guide to performing successful outcomes assessment: 1) developing a group consensus about goals and objectives, 2) formulating a concrete plan of assessment to measure those goals, 3) involving students, faculty, and staff in the process, 4) selecting the instruments to be used to measure the outcomes of objectives (deciding whether to use indirect or direct measurements of the outcome, qualitative or quantitative analysis, and decisions about when data should be collected), 5) collecting and making sense of results, and 6) improving practice and assessing the assessment process to improve advising practices (feedback loop). This framework, which has been successful in the assessment of academic majors and the assessment of general education, can also be applied to academic support units.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature pertaining to the historical background of the academic advising profession, the role and importance of academic advising, the assessment of advising, the basic components of effective advising programs, and the keys to organizational effectiveness. The chapter assisted the researcher in developing the preliminary issue questions in Chapter One. The following chapter provides the framework and research design for the study and organizes the study around the issue questions. Additionally, Chapter Two defines the boundaries of the study and specifies the data collection and analysis methods.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The previous chapter outlines much of what we know about academic advising and its impact on higher education. While recent studies have been successful in increasing awareness of the importance of advising and understanding student perceptions about advising, there are very few comprehensive studies on effective advising/advisors and how to measure the quality of a good advising program. Literature that focuses on the assessment of academic advising and the process of improvement is almost non-existent. The majority of existing research studies tend to be quantitative, to be interested in specific relationships of cause and effect, and to be more focused on specific theories of academic advising. According to Habley (2000b), “Much of the effort in advising [research] has been focused on theories and concepts, show-and-tell statistics that describe numbers and percentages” (p. 6). Not surprisingly, what is lacking are in depth studies that collect rich data and that capture the vivid experiences of the various participants within successful advising programs. In arguing for a comprehensive research agenda for the advising profession, McGillin (2000) notes, “Few studies of advising have investigated the advisor’s contribution to the [advising] relationship” (p. 366). Indeed, the literature suggests that studies tend to fixate on measuring student satisfaction rather than exploring learning outcomes, understanding how advisors develop or how advising programs address quality issues while working towards institutional missions and organization goals. Thus, there exists a need for more comprehensive studies that examine the participants, programs, and processes that shape the advising context.

Research evidence that institutional effectiveness activities have actually improved institutions is sparse, but there is accumulating evidence of barriers to their successful implementation (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). Among the barriers identified are lack of sustained attention by institutional leadership, limitations of assessment tools, poorly designed systems to use assessment results, and lack of staff/faculty commitment (Ewell, 1989; Palomba & Banta, 1999). Gaining the interest and support of institutional constituents is a major challenge colleges and universities face in designing and implementing institutional effectiveness activities. Literature suggests that campus academic departments and operating units tend to be resistant to effectiveness mandates (Campbell & Slaughter, 1999; Nichols, 1995; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007). Furthermore, the research literature and policy studies pertaining to implementation of institutional effectiveness programs in postsecondary institutions suggest that staff/faculty members are less likely to support institutional effectiveness reforms compared to administrators (Schilling & Schilling, 1998; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003b). The empirical research identifying perceptions held by advisors is limited, anecdotal, and polemical. In cases where advisor support for assessment and other data-based quality improvement strategies toward institutional effectiveness are evident, they are mitigated by various factors such as definition of quality, internal and external motivation, depth of implementation, and level of involvement. Therefore, understanding the perceptions of advisors on the importance of institutional effectiveness initiatives, as well as their levels of involvement, is crucial to improvement of any university.

This research study attempts to gain a deeper understanding of undergraduate academic advising services, processes, and practices at a large public research institution in the U.S. The overarching area of inquiry for this study is: What is effective advising? (How is it manifested and in what ways is it measured at the University?) This research study will explore academic advising in seven colleges and will examine organizational characteristics, advising practices, current instruments and methods of assessment for academic advisors and advising programs at the University. It is essentially a case study with the boundaries being a large research institution, specifically seven of its largest undergraduate colleges, and the focus of the research interest being effective academic advising. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach and to a lesser extent, action research principles. For the purposes of this research study, the term "mixed-methods approach" refers to the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect, record, and analyze various types of data including historical document reviews, numerical likert scale data, open text survey comments, personal interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection. The general intent of the research study was to gain a better understanding of effective academic advising and assessment by understanding the major participants involved: students, advisors, and administrators.

This research study is organized into two main sections: Phase One and Phase Two. Phase One is the document analysis section of the study. This involves a gathering and reviewing of existing documents and assessment instruments in seven colleges across the University. It also involves the discovering, compiling of original data and direct analysis of a common survey instrument for the colleges and the associated large collections of longitudinal data and open text comments (2003 – present) that pertain to academic advising at the University. This phase of the research study allows the researcher to understand the current state of academic advising and assessment at the University.

Phase Two of the research involves observations spread over an academic calendar year from advisor - staff meetings/interactions, interviews with advising administrators from the seven colleges, three undergraduate student focus groups, and an advisor self-reflection. This second phase of the research allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of advising, assessment, and structural issues. A detailed description of each phase of the research pertaining to methods and design is covered in the heading entitled, “Organization of the Research Study.”

The research study follows the interpretivist/constructivist approach to doing research while grounded theory will facilitate the theory building. The following sections provide an overview of the philosophical/theoretical approaches to conducting the research, the research design, and the processes and methods involved in the data collection for this research study.

Worldview Paradigm and Research Framework

The qualitative framework for doing research and the interpretivist research paradigm/worldview guide this research study while a mixed-methods approach in regards to the collection and analysis of data were employed. The terms “qualitative” and “quantitative” are used commonly to imply the difference between types of data collected; however, the differences are much broader and deeper when these terms are referred to as research paradigms. They involve assumptions and beliefs on several different levels that involve assumptions about the nature of the world and how humans can better understand the world they live in to assumptions about the proper relationships between social science/educational research and professional practice. Therefore, it is important to lay out the overarching paradigm for this study. Chalmers (1982) defines a paradigm as “made up of the general theoretical assumptions and laws, and techniques for their application that the members of a particular scientific community adopt” (p. 90). The interpretive researcher’s ontological assumption is that social reality is locally and specifically constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) “by humans through their action and interaction” (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14). Neuman (1997) affirms that “social reality is based on people’s definition of it” (p. 69). In this concept of worldview, the world is strongly bounded by particular time and specific context. The interpretive researcher’s epistemological assumption is that “findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Moreover, they explicitly recognize that “understanding social reality requires understanding how practices and meanings are formed and informed by the language and tacit norms shared by humans working towards some shared goal” (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14).

Qualitative research methods seek to understand, explore and probe the human experience as it relates to the subject being studied (Berg, 2001; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990, 2002). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 8). Qualitative researchers also seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

This study is primarily concerned with answering “what”, “how”, and “why” questions regarding the process of academic advising and assessment. These questions by their very nature are open-ended and have the potential for eliciting a wide range of responses. Qualitative research methods are most appropriate for this case study, due to the nature of the constructs under study, the depth of responses required for generation of theory, and the interpretivist philosophical orientation of this researcher.

Qualitative research typically involves the following steps: data collection, preparation of data, review of all data, coding (categorization) of data, creation of a general description and finally drawing interpretations (Creswell, 2003). These basic steps of the qualitative research process have been divided in a number of ways by various authors, and are often referred to by different titles.

A research framework put forth by Denzin (1989) effectively captures the main components of interpretive research and serves as a guide for the current project. This framework divides the interpretive research process into five major phases consisting of deconstruction, capture, bracketing or reduction (hereafter referred to as bracketing), construction, and contextualization. The deconstruction phase essentially refers to the critical review of existing information on the subject under study and is analogous to the literature review. The phase of capture consists of securing data sources and data collection. The third phase of research requires bracketing of the data. The bracketing phase marks the beginning of formal data analysis. The phase of construction is the process of completely interpreting the data and requires synthesis of the categories and themes revealed during bracketing. The last phase, contextualization, is an attempt to give the interpretations and findings context by locating them in the world of lived experiences (thick description). Bracketing, construction, and contextualization comprise the data analysis and interpretation phase of the study, and will be completed through textual analysis. This essentially means the written record (transcribed interviews) and the phenomena it reflects, will be viewed as a text requiring interpretation. Language plays a key role in textual analysis in that it is the medium for intersubjectivity.

Research Design and Approach to Theory

This study uses a mixed-methods, case study design and a grounded theory - action research approach to building theory. While the former assists the researcher in defining the boundaries of the study, unit of analysis, the latter focuses on the existing processes from which theory will be ultimately constructed.

Case Study Design and Grounded Theory

A case study design was determined to be best suited for this investigation given that the organizational identity (culture and behavior) of an academic advising unit must be studied under its natural context. Case study research excels at bringing one to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Also, case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Thus, a case-study design allows the researcher the opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights that a researcher gets from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research. In regards to cross-site comparisons, case study research is not concerned with a strict process of sampling for a representative set of cases, instead it aims for depth and if a site cannot deliver this due to limited access to actors, events, and settings, the site will not yield the data needed for this type of study to be successful.

The intent of the study is to gather relevant information that reveals key themes regarding the dynamics of academic advising, assessment, and the improvement of programs. The iterative process entailed in grounded theory research is ideal in that it allows for the study to narrow in focus as data collection and analysis reveal key themes. This successive narrowing of theoretical concepts and focusing of inquiry allows the study to reach a level of depth that would be otherwise unattainable.

Grounded theory, “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1), provides the opportunity for the researcher to theorize from evidence existing in the data. The basic idea is that one enters the research context with an open mind and develops sensitivity to patterns and common themes that emerge in the research and data collection process. It is primarily an inductive method that relies on an iterative process of continual revision as new units of analysis are processed. The major advantage of grounded theory is its inductive, contextual, and process based nature (Charmaz, 2006; Orlikowski, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These characteristics prove to be particularly useful for interpretive researchers. Through the correct application of this systemic process, the researcher can produce either substantive theory, which is generated from within a specific area of enquiry (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2006, p. 7) or formal theory, which is focused on conceptual entities (Strauss, 1987). Although one can blend into the other (Glaser, 1978), both substantive and formal theories are conclusive theories, they stand by themselves and are well grounded on the data.

Researchers can take their previous knowledge into account, either from the existing literature or from their previous experience. It assists them in forming a theoretical basis for the approach to the issue to be studied (Eisenhardt, 1989; Walsham, 1995b). Siggelkow (2007, p. 21) explains that "our observations [are] guided and influenced by some initial hunches and frames of reference" and emphasizes that "an open mind is good; an empty mind is not." The literature review should not make the researchers simply impose previous theories when analyzing the data instead of generating original categories; it informs the researchers' ideas and helps them to produce a preliminary theoretical framework that should be regarded as a "sensitizing device" (Klein & Myers, 1999, p. 75), only which could be modified according to the actual findings; that might result in a serendipitous discovery.

Theory generation in general entails an approach to data collection that is different from studies aimed at verification. Specifically, in theory generation the accuracy of evidence is less paramount than one would expect from verification studies. There is less emphasis on the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases involved in the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), "while verifying is the researcher's principal and vital task for existing theories, we suggest that his main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful systematic generation from the data of social research" (p. 28). Generating theory also assumes verifications and accurate descriptions, but only to an extent that does not hinder the development of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

A grounded theory approach to research can be described as theory in process. It requires that the processes of data collection, coding (into categories or themes) and analysis occur concurrently throughout the study. By combining the process, a grounded theory approach allows for incoming data to influence further data gathering. This iterative process allows for categories to emerge from incoming data. The initial categories are likely to be at a low conceptual level. As incoming data are coded and analyzed, emerging categories will then guide further data collection. Throughout the process the research evaluates and revises his/her theory. As the process moves on, emerging categories increase in complexity and occupy higher conceptual levels. Grounded theory places greatest emphasis on the criteria of theoretical purpose and relevance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in regard to the selection of data sources and the direction of inquiry. A grounded theory approach relies on saturation, or the point at which no additional information relevant to a category is being gathered, as the cue for stopping the sampling or data collection process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Initial Research Questions (Issue Questions)

Due to the nature of the inductive approach and case study design, it would be inappropriate to begin the research with a finalized list of research questions. However, initial questions based on the existing literature or experience of the researcher can be used to guide the researcher through the process. Stake (1995) suggests that the researcher plans a number of “issue” questions that prompt “good thinking”. Many of these “issue” or guide questions were clumped together with new and similar questions that arose through the document collection and observation processes while other questions were stricken from the list altogether. Stake (1995) suggests that the initial question count should be around 10 to 20 questions and that the number of questions could be reduced to three or four as the research focus is refined through the inductive process. For the purposes of the current study on academic advising, I began with two sets of issue/guide questions. The first set of issue questions pertains to effective advising while the second set pertains to the assessment of academic advising.

Issue Questions: Effective Academic Advising

1. What are the characteristics, behaviors, and advising approaches of effective advisors?
2. What does a successful advising unit look like?
3. How do viewpoints/perceptions differ among students, staff, and the administration?
4. How do advising programs address the issue of organizational diversity and working with a diverse student body?
5. What are some effective advising styles/approaches? (How do they contribute to effective advising?)
6. What characteristics and behaviors are essential to becoming a better advisor?
7. How do advisors develop (improve)?

8. What specific attitudes, behaviors, and actions contribute to an ideal advising environment?

9. What are ways in which an advising community can tell if it is doing a good job (assessment)?

Issue Questions: Assessment of Academic Advising

1. What happens within an advising office during and after its assessment efforts?

2. What types of challenges arise during the process?

3. What methods are employed to measure the value of an advising program?

4. How does an advising program attempt to address students' expectations and the needs of the institution?

5. Why do some organizations change and others do not?

6. How do people feel about assessment?

7. Why do or do not advising units participate in assessment?

8. How is assessment being used currently?

Final Research Questions

Arriving at a final set of research questions was a process in development. The process involved an inductive approach which began with general advising observations and was aided by the document analysis and chronicling of assessment activities in Phase One of the research study. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the overarching area of inquiry for this research study is: what is effective advising? (How is it manifested and in what ways is it measured at the University?)

Final Research Questions: Effective Advising & Assessment

1. What is the general state of academic advising at the University?
2. How are advising systems (advisors, programs) assessed at the University?
3. What specific attitudes, behaviors, and actions contribute to effective advising?
4. What are some factors that limit the effectiveness of advising systems or that impact the quality of advising?

Construct Validity

The case study design recognizes the problematic nature of defining a correct "operational set of measures" (Yin, 2003, p. 35), but does not discard it at all. Rather, the case study design proposes using multiple sources of evidence in a triangulation fashion to contribute to addressing any potential problem: "data triangulation… essentially provide[s] multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2003, p. 99). As a replacement for the word triangulation, interpretive researchers should prefer, and feel more comfortable with, the term corroboration, which denotes "the act of strengthening [an argument] by additional evidence" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1975, p. 253).

Internal Validity

Pattern-matching, by which the researcher compares an observed pattern against a predicted one, is regarded as a valuable tactic for case study analysis, while explanation building is considered as a special type of pattern matching (Yin, 2003). However, as was explained earlier, in an attempt to achieve internal validity according to the precepts of the case study design, interpretive researchers may downgrade the essence of theory building. Once again, theory-building studies can produce conclusive theories and are useful not simply for the generation of hypotheses.

External Validity

External validity refers to the extent to which findings from a particular study can be generalized. However, the term should not be restricted to a statistical definition based on generalizations to the population from the sample. Lee and Baskerville (2003, p. 232) convincingly argue that generalizing implies going “from particular instances to general notions.” Interpretive researchers should include the temporal and spatial dimensions of the phenomenon under study in their analysis in order to produce theoretical generalizations (Walsham, 1995a). These dimensions can yield important explanations of past data in particular contexts that could be useful to other settings in the future.

Interpretive researchers may or may not agree with the suggestion to test the emergent theory from one case to a second one and so on under the “replication logic” (Yin, 2003, p. 47). This approach returns us to a hypothesis-testing exercise, and although a correct approach from a positivistic perspective, it diverts the interpretive researchers aiming at theory building away from their main objective. Either from one case or from multiple cases, they intend to produce theoretical generalizations instead of testing theory.

Reliability

Using a case study protocol and developing a case study database (Yin, 2003) assists in organizing data during the research process. However, from an interpretive approach, the purpose in doing so is not to guarantee that a second researcher will arrive at exactly the same conclusions as the first one might have; the second researcher can use the same data and give a different interpretation based on her/his own beliefs and abilities to grasp the essence of the emotional context; i.e., “empathetic or appreciative accuracy” (Max Weber cited by Neuman, 1997, p. 72). Rather than presenting a completely different picture, the second researcher might discover a different angle to the problem at hand. Presenting the chain of evidence contributes to the trustworthiness of the analysis. Indeed, reliability for qualitative research “means producing results that can be trusted and establishing findings that are meaningful and interesting to the reader” (Trauth, 1997, p. 242) instead of showing consistent results by repeated analyses.

Organization of the Research Study

As discussed in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, the research study is organized into two sections. The first section, Phase One, was conducted before Phase Two and consists of the gathering, review, and analysis of existing documents and independent data sets including numerical survey data and open text comments. The second section, Phase Two, followed Phase One and consists of an action research, observation study of advisor-staff meetings and advisor interactions over the course of one academic year, seven advising administrator interviews from across the colleges, and three student focus groups. The observation study began first and overlapped with the semesters for conducting the interviews and focus groups. Areas of focus will include current advising events and issues, how academic advising is utilized, and how advising can be improved.

Phase One

This first phase of the research consists of three distinct sections: 1) compiling and reviewing current/historical advising documents and assessment products from the colleges and the university, 2) assembling and analyzing raw, post-appointment advising data from the electronic survey databases of seven colleges, and 3) organizing and reviewing hundreds of individual open-text survey comments. The primary objective of this section of the research study (the reason for doing the analysis) is to gain detailed insight into the current state of academic advising in each college at the University. Study interests include examining the following: assessment initiatives and assessment instruments, new advisor improvement (efficacy) over time, award-winning advisor and advising program efficacy over time, correlations between courtesy and efficacy variables, and student perceptions about advising experiences.

Compiling and reviewing current/historical documents. An informal summary of assessment procedures and a collection of assessment instruments were obtained from various college advising administrators who participated in a 2009 Vice-Provost sponsored, temporary task force on academic advising assessment. I was invited to attend the committee meetings and collected copies of documents that were provided to the committee (a few colleges did not submit information and/or were not subjects for this study). I also gathered historical assessment documents and supporting information that could be found through willing advising sources. I conducted a final sweep of document collection by contacting assistant deans, advising supervisors, and advising staff during 2012 – around the time that I met for the administrator interviews in Phase Two of the research study. Additionally, I reviewed the advising websites of the colleges as part of the assessment compilation process. In the end, a list of the academic advising assessment practices and assessment instruments was compiled for each college, and a careful review of collected surveys was conducted to identify the types of questions utilized and whether any covered student learning outcomes.

Post-appointment advising surveys. During my review of existing surveys and historical assessment documents, I observed that all seven colleges had an active, online student-advisor survey system with questions pertaining to student satisfaction of advising and/or student learning outcomes. Previously, six out of seven colleges utilized the same system, the waitlist survey system, which was adapted and controlled by each respective college. One of these six colleges, Communications, switched to a different online survey system beginning the 2010 spring semester. A seventh college, Business, never implemented the waitlist survey system, but created its own system that it began using in the 2009 fall semester.

Assembling datasets in Excel. Raw datasets were collected for each of the seven colleges. All data were collected electronically from each college via the waitlist systems and exported directly into Excel with the exception of the dataset from Business which was obtained through a different database and specially prepared for export into Excel. The waitlist system keeps track of students when they visit a centralized advising center in a college that has its system turned on. Although it is technically a centralized system, it is not utilized as a single University database, but rather several independent survey databases that are controlled and maintained by each college. Within a college, electronic authorization levels control what an advisor is able to access. Moreover, advisors are restricted from viewing surveys or results for other colleges. The survey system was developed by a software developer-analyst in the College of Communications at the time, and first used at the University in the summer of 2003. It was subsequently borrowed by other colleges and administered independently over time. Even though the technology, interface, and functionality for the survey systems are the same, each college only has control over its own survey system, and a college designates its users, survey questions (number and type), operating time, etc.

A student is added to the waitlist by a staff member who swipes the student's ID card or types in the student's EID on the waitlist survey's interface page. A survey is automatically sent to the student when an advisor seats the student for advising and takes the student off the waitlist by clicking the student's name generated on the computer. When a student responds to the online survey, data are created and organized via the system's programming depending on the type of data (numerical or open text). Likert score responses are recorded as 1 - 5 (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree), X (not applicable), or an empty cell (no response entered). The numerical data represent the Likert score responses from students to the questions presented on the waitlist survey for each college. Each college's dataset is treated as its own case and is exported directly into Excel. The survey instrument for each college varies in the number of questions and type of questions asked, although there are some colleges that have similar questions among them. Also, some college waitlist surveys include questions about student (peer) advisors in addition to full-time academic advisors.

Converting datasets from Excel to SPSS. Each college dataset was pruned and prepared for entry from Excel into SPSS. Challenges arose in systematizing the data columns within each college due to some minor changes in survey questions over a few of the semesters. First, some columns had to be deleted while others had to be carefully shifted over to align with the same questions from other semesters. Second, the original data column for specific dates of advising appointments needed to be converted to a more general semester-with-year format and then sorted and displayed in time order. Third, the waitlist survey rosters for each college had to be screened to leave out administrative staff with a majority of non-advising duties or staff that rarely met with students. The task of identifying these staff was more difficult for the earlier surveys and for some colleges more than others. I finally decided to look at average number of advising visits for each staff and left out staff with a relatively miniscule number of visits.

After transferring the data into SPSS, I checked the question (variable) columns for data integrity and formatted data to comply with SPSS protocol (i.e. converted string values to numeric values or “X” to “99” for “not applicable” and designated them not to be counted in the mean calculations). I then ran frequency distributions for the responses to check for possible errors.

Analysis of data in SPSS. Frequency distributions from the datasets were run for all seven colleges along with basic tests for descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, kurtosis, skewness, standard deviation, actual/valid/cumulative percentages). Next, histograms were created from the frequency distributions of each college dataset, and the results displayed nonparametric, negatively skewed distributions in all seven colleges. I made the decision to use the generalized linear model (GLZM) in SPSS as the analysis instrument. GLZM is a flexible generalization of ordinary linear regression that allows for response variables that have other than a normal distribution. However, since the distributions were negatively skewed, I had to transform the variable scores into their reflections in order to find a model distribution fit in SPSS for GLZM analysis. I flipped each distribution by reflecting the values in each dependent variable column in SPSS to create a positively skewed distribution. This was done by adding (1) to the largest value of the original variable (5) to create the constant (6). The original value of the variable was then subtracted from the constant to arrive at the reflected score. With the positively skewed transformation, I was able to utilize the Inverse Gaussian distribution in GLZM to analyze the data. This distribution is appropriate for variables with positive scale values that are skewed toward larger positive values.

Creating the variable columns for GLZM analysis. New dependent variable columns were created for Advising Efficacy (Effic_ADV), Advisor Courtesy (Court_ADV), Overall Advisor Efficacy (Overall_ADV), and their reflections: EfficADV_refl, CourtADV_refl, and OverADV_refl. The Advising Efficacy (Effic_ADV) variable or column of data responses was created by combining several variable columns that represented the responses to the respective survey question items and creating a new variable from them. This new variable included all the survey question items (variables) except for those that corresponded to courtesy and front desk items. The process utilized the Transform → Compute function in SPSS that involved selecting the MEAN function and specifying the exact question items to be considered in the conversion to the new variable. Court_ADV was created from the variable (column of data) that represented the courtesy question, or in some cases courtesy + professionalism depending on the specific school/college. Overall_ADV was created through a similar process as previously mentioned for the Advising Efficacy (Effic_ADV) variable column, but excluded front desk questions.

Decisions on efficacy, the selection of a variable, and concerns. One of the challenges that arose within this section of the research study was how to approach the concept of academic advising “efficacy”, specifically how to define and measure it. Unlike the qualitative sections of this study that did not require a predetermined definition of efficacy and that afforded me the opportunity to allow themes to emerge and develop gradually through an inductive approach to learning about effective advising (efficacy), the nature of the quantitative methods section necessitated the defining of an item for analysis. Within this context, the definition of efficacy that I ultimately decided upon was the following: “the behaviors and actions of advisors that help students succeed at the institution.” This definition was derived from the intent behind the post-appointment survey questions as described by various administrators for the colleges. Since these survey instruments had been utilized and relied upon for years already, and had remained functionally unchanged (scale + content), I assumed – perhaps precipitately and optimistically - that reliability and correlation already had been considered when these surveys were originally designed. Based on this assumption, I approached the efficacy construct as a composite of all of the individual survey items. My confidence to proceed with this construct of advising efficacy resulted from two additional observations: first, the survey questions among colleges were relatively consistent and similar in nature (either the exact same questions, or questions containing similar content), and second, the focus areas of the survey questions overlapped with many of the themes/subthemes that emerged from perceptions and descriptions of effective advising from the qualitative sections of the study. With hindsight, I should have gone ahead and tested for reliability of the questionnaires and performed either a Cronbach's alpha or factor analysis to determine whether the survey questions were correlated.

During the process of arriving at a final efficacy construct to be used as a dependent variable in the GLZM analysis, I created and considered two different variable composites. I had to decide between using EfficADV_refl which excluded the courtesy variable in its creation or OverADV_refl which included it. Ultimately, I decided upon inclusion of the courtesy factor because I had not excluded any of the other question variables, and students had identified "courtesy" as an important subcomponent of the demeanor theme that emerged in students' reports of their perceptions of effective advising during the qualitative sections of the study.

Description of the GLZM analysis. The statistical analysis used for this study resembles a two-way (two-factor) repeated measures ANOVA except that it is suitable for non-parametric distributions. Command syntax was created to specify the parameters and functions for the analysis as well as within-subjects (semester) and between-subjects (advisor) factors. In the syntax code, the first line starts with *GENLIN* and gives the dependent variable (OverADV_refl) and the independent variables, or predictors/factors (VisitDate and AdvisorSeen). This indicates that I want to know the differences between the different semesters and between the different advisors in their average overall efficacy (reflected) scores. The second line of code starts with *MODEL* and describes the model I am running; in this case, I have only two main effects, one for semester and one for advisor, but I also have specified an interaction for advisor with semester (advisor*semester). After the first two lines of code, the only other important syntax are the *EMMEANS* lines. These are the lines of code that ask for pairwise comparisons of all levels of VisitDate and all levels of AdvisorSeen. If either of these variables is significant in the model, the next step is to determine which semesters are different from each other and which advisors are different from each other. The EMMEANS command lines in the syntax code provide answers to these questions by generating pairwise comparison tables in the output.

GLZM output: SPSS analysis tools. Several tests were generated to analyze the data for the entire study population as well as subpopulations of interest such as new advisor and award-winning advisor groups. *New advisors* were identified as advisors who started their full-time academic advising careers at the university within the survey period for their respective colleges and had no prior, full-time advising experiences as an academic advisor. *Award-winning advisors* were identified as advisors who had been awarded a major advising award or multiple awards during their careers.

Omnibus test: The omnibus test is a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model versus the null (in this case, intercept) model. The significance value of less than 0.05 indicates that the current model outperforms the null model

Test of Model Effects: Each term in the model was tested for whether it has any effect. Terms with significance values less than 0.05 have some discernible effect. Each of the main-effects terms contributes to the model. Semester, Advisor, and Advisor*Semester are the terms for this research study.

Estimated Marginal Means (Semester): A table is created for the model-estimated marginal means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for the linear predictor of advisor efficacy scores at the factor level of Semester.

Estimated Marginal Means (Advisor): A table is created for the model-estimated marginal means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for the linear predictor of advisor efficacy scores at the factor level of Advisor.

*Estimated Marginal Means (Advisor*Semester interaction).* A table is created for the model-estimated marginal means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for the linear predictor of advisor efficacy scores at the interaction level of Advisor-by-Semester.

Pairwise Comparisons (Semesters): The pairwise comparisons table displays the differences between each pair of semesters and tests whether each difference is due to chance variation.

Pairwise Comparisons (Advisors): The pairwise comparisons table displays the differences between each pair of advisors and tests whether each difference is due to chance variation.

*Pairwise Comparisons (Advisors*Semesters):* The pairwise comparisons table displays the differences between each pair of advisor-by-semester interaction and tests whether each difference is due to chance variation.

Spearman's rank order correlation. In a separate procedure based on the primary datasets for the colleges, I used *Spearman's rank order correlation* in SPSS to determine if any correlation exists between the dependent variables, Courtesy and Efficacy within each college. I selected the two-tailed test for significance to account for positive or negative correlation. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation coefficient, r_s, is a non-parametric measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables measured on at least an ordinal scale; therefore, I determined that it would be a good instrument to use to determine if there was any significant relationship between the courtesy and efficacy variables.

Procedural summary of SPSS analysis tests. The seven waitlist survey databases (college advising survey data) collected for this part of the research study provided a plethora of longitudinal data for seven different colleges over the course of multiple semesters ranging from 2003 to 2011. I decided on the Generalized Linear Model with Inverse Gaussian Distribution as the method of analysis because of its goodness of fit. Also, the model allowed me to include the independent variables as factors, "semester" as a within-subjects factor and "advisor" as a between-subjects factor. This makes the analysis a repeated measures generalized linear model which yields main effects of semester and advisor as well as pair-wise comparisons of semesters and advisor. Additionally, I included an *Advisor*Semester* interaction which may be useful in telling if certain advisors improved over time or remained steady and how they compare with other advisors over time. Next, I extracted new advisors and award-winning advisors into two separate groups to determine if any patterns in the data exist. Finally, I used

Spearman's correlation in another test to determine if a relationship exists between advisors' courtesy and efficacy scores from the primary datasets for the colleges.

Organizing and coding open-text survey comments. Several semesters of student surveys from seven colleges were reviewed to uncover any centralized themes about students' advising experiences. An open records request for the student survey comments from post-appointment advising surveys from each college's central advising center (Dean's Office or Student Affairs Office) was submitted to the Office of the Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. Open-text comments for the fall 2009, spring 2010, summer 2010, and fall 2010 semesters were requested from the waitlist surveys for six colleges and from an equivalent student response survey for a seventh college.

Approximately 2000 open-text comments or open-discussion passages were collected in total for review. Initial coding began with the fall 2009 semester as a trial run before the coding of other semesters. The review consisted of a first-pass reading of open-ended student survey comments collected in hard copy for all advisors in the seven centralized advising centers. The comments list (text) for each advisor was enlarged and printed out via photo copier. Individual advisor comments were then cut out and arranged into general thematic strands. Next, similar thematic strands were sorted and grouped together to form fewer groupings. This process was repeated a third time, and titles were assigned to the final thematic strands. The titles along with their associated comments were pasted onto poster boards, and marked with a green dot or red dot to indicate a positive or negative comment respectively.

From this coding experience, I quickly realized my rudimentary ways and identified the need for a more efficient, documented way of doing things. Accordingly, I decided to enter the open-text comments from all semesters (fall 2009 spring 2010, summer 2010, and fall 2010) into Excel and to try a different method to sort and code the information. I began by rethinking my approach to coding and revisited the reasons for doing this part of the research study. Subsequently, I decided that the two most important goals for doing the analysis were as follows: 1) to identify focal areas for advisor/advising program improvement and 2) to discover the most relevant advising themes according to students. To achieve these goals, I decided on two separate procedures. First, I reviewed all of the student comments for each semester and flagged all of the negative comments and sorted them into a single column for easy identification of the advising issues. Second, I created a random sample consisting of 500 student comments using the RAND function in Excel, and I created coding categories for college, advisor, comment #, comment type, and comment value (positive/negative/neutral). Comments were reviewed several times to assign accurate category codes and value.

Phase Two

Observations: staff/advisor meetings (15) & interactions (multiple). The researcher participated in a total of fifteen advisor (staff) meetings and multiple advisor-to-student, advisor-to-advisor, and advisor-to-administrator interactions in the academic colleges over the course of an academic calendar year (fall 2011, spring 2012, summer 2012). The majority of the meetings and staff interactions were concentrated in central advising centers within the larger colleges at the University. Due to the enormity of information collected from the observations (staff meeting/interaction protocols, advisor journal entries, and self-reflections) and office culture subject matter, I decided that it would be more suitable and appropriate to extract this section and to present the observations section as a separate study with its own analysis and results for independent publication at a later time. However, for the present research study, the knowledge gained from the analysis of the staff meeting and advisor-office interactions observations was used to understand the most current and relevant advising issues and to facilitate the conducting of the administrator interviews and student focus groups; therefore, I felt it necessary to include a description here in the methods chapter. Also, my self-reflections and insights into the advising system from the observations phase will be applied in the final *Chapter 8 – Summary Discussions & Insights* to help explain the most important results of the student open survey comments (*Chapter 5*) and student focus group sections (*Chapter 6*). The observation protocols are provided in *Appendices A - C.*

Staff meetings. Due to my occupational status of academic advisor, I had the opportunity to participate fully in several of the meetings, a majority of which were conducted in one of the largest colleges at the University. For most of these meetings, my approach was to be an active listener first but to involve myself in discussions when necessary. I experimented between taking notes during the meetings and taking notes afterwards until I became comfortable with a single method. From these staff meetings, I hoped to get a better understanding of organizational culture, decision making processes, advising office communication, and current advising issues and concerns.

In the process of observing staff meetings, I looked for the power structure of the unit. Who is leading the discussion? How do others perceive him/her? What issues are at stake? How do issues/concerns get resolved? Are staff meetings considered productive? When developing an observation protocol, Patton (1990) recommends looking for data that illuminate sensitizing concepts in a particular program setting. These concepts include context, goals, inputs, recruitment, intake, implementation, processes, outcomes, products, and impacts. Merriam (1998) recommends the following six elements be included in the observation of any setting: the physical setting, the participants, the activities and interactions, the conversation, subtle factors such as nonverbal behavior, and the researcher's behavior (p. 97-98). The observation protocols for this study were inspired by Patton's and Merriam's recommendations.

Advisor-Office interactions: action research & self-reflection. Action research is a form of research in which practitioners reflect systematically on their practice, implementing informed action to bring about improvement in practice. As one widely accepted definition describes it:

> Action Research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

In its focus on practice, action research is rooted in the concerns of practitioners in real-world settings and in disciplined self-evaluation and reflection. In empirical forms of research, researchers do research on other people; in action research, researchers do research on themselves.

I had originally planned to include an advisor focus group for analysis in the research study, but I decided that an action research approach would allow me to become a full-participant within the researcher-role continuum and to utilize my advising knowledge and experience to provide more accurate descriptions as a direct participant. Thus, the intent is to be able to provide more, clarity, depth, and perspective through self-reflection techniques and to contextualize the direct reporting of my office interactions as an advisor with other advisors. A critical step in action research is that the researcher must recognize and be aware of his own biases; therefore, I was careful to maintain vigilance in this regard throughout the research process. As part of action research, self reflection must be iterative; therefore, I decided from the start to maintain a journal and to adhere as much as possible to the process of documenting my self-reflections through critical introspection of eventful occurrences each week throughout the 2011 – 2012 academic year.

Administrator interviews (7). The main purpose of the individual administrator interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the themes and topics that arose from Phase One of the study which examined assessment documents and current college advising surveys and from Phase Two observations. The research questions provided topic areas to explore, but were mainly used as a framework to guide the discussions in the free-flowing, semi-structured interviews.

Advising administrators from the seven colleges were contacted in spring 2012 via email and phone to gage interest to participate in individual interview sessions. Seven final participants were selected based on factors such as fit, access, and availability to meet for the in-person interviews. The large majority of participants were Assistant Deans of their respective colleges. A set of specific questions about the advising unit and assessment were asked in all seven interviews, but administrators were encouraged to speak about other relevant issues that came to mind during their discussions. The interviews primarily focused on the structure and practice of academic advising in the advising centers; the role of the advisor; perceptions of the effectiveness of the current advising services; advising practices and diversity; advisor training; assessment practices; and issues that administrators feel that warrant attention. The individual interviews ran 45- 60 minutes, with extra time provided for open discussion. The interview protocol is provided in *Appendix E*.

Interview sessions were digitally recorded with the prior consent of the participants. Sessions were transferred via USB into a computer and transcribed for analysis. The specific process of encoding qualitative information, a procedure that was utilized throughout many sections of the current study, is referred to as thematic analysis in the relevant literature (Boyatzis, 1998). Through this process, I developed "codes", or words and phrases that served as labels for sections of data. Referring to a set of codes, Boyatzis explained, "This may be a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms" (p. vii).

Thematic analysis began with the first interview. Transcripts and notes were analyzed inductively to identify themes that emerged within each session as well as those that recurred across other interviews. In this procedure, I listed each theme that arose from the participants' responses as these units were identified and revealed through the careful review of the transcribed recordings. Each unit/theme was then clumped together with similar themes to form distinct clusters. Afterwards, each cluster was assigned a descriptive title. These organized clusters, patterns of data, are described with findings in Chapter 7.

Student focus groups (3). Three separate focus groups consisting of seven students each and lasting 1 ½ hours per group were conducted with undergraduates at the University in spring 2012 to learn more about their experiences with advising and to uncover their perceptions of effective advising. Subjects were randomly selected from previously obtained First-Year-Interest Group (FIG) class rosters, registration waitlists, scholastic probation caseloads, graduation lists, and career services registration. These student populations were targeted to arrive at a diverse group of participants from key areas of advising. Potential participants were contacted via email and followed up via phone. The first forty students who agreed to participate were screened for relevancy and appropriateness for the study and three groups of seven students each, a total of twenty-one students, were selected. In this process of dwindling down the number of participants, I intentionally sought a balanced number of students to fit into three distinct groups. For example, group one consisted of students from FIG lists and registration waitlists with fewer than 60 hrs of college credit; group two consisted of students from scholastic probation caseloads, and group three consisted of students from graduation lists and career services lists. Also, care was taken to assemble a final group to maintain a close gender balance in each focus group. The first group consisted of four females and three males, the second group consisted of four males and three females, and the third group consisted of four females and three males. The final selections were sent emails with a summary description of the study along with the time, date, and location of their focus group. Follow up emails and tweets were sent out the day before and the day of the focus group meeting to the final selections. The procedures for coding and thematic analysis were based on the concepts presented in Denzin (1989) and Boyatzis (1998), and resembled the process previously mentioned for the analysis of the administrators' interviews. The focus group guides are provided in *Appendix D.*

Summary

This study uses a case study design for conducting the research. The power of case study research is the ability to use all methodologies within the data-collection process and to compare within case and across case for research validity. The ability of the researcher to use the observations of a single unit or subject, or contextual case, as the focal point of a study, along with its plurality as a research method enables case study research to transcend the boundaries of traditional research paradigms.

Case studies are complex because they generally involve multiple sources of data, may include multiple cases within a study, and produce large amounts of data for analysis. However, the case study method of research has many applications and can be used to build on theory, to produce new theory, to dispute or challenge theory, to explain a situation, to provide a basis to apply solutions to situations, to explore, or to describe an object or phenomenon.

This chapter described the research framework, the philosophy, the approach, and the data collection process of this multi-part case study. *Chapters 4 – 7* will report the results of the data collection process and analyses. The researcher will assume the role of narrator and, where applicable, will capture the experiences of the participants through their transcribed voices. As appropriate, the researcher will organize the collection of quantitative data and historical notes, and integrate them into the findings. Throughout the next chapters, the researcher will maintain a coherence and fluidity in the organization and presentation of the data for the reader.

CHAPTER 4: DOCUMENTS COLLECTION & REVIEW

Foreword for Data Analysis: Chapters 4 -7

The seven large academic colleges and the associated centralized advising centers at the University were the focus of much of this study. Although many students are advised in the academic departments they are admitted to, a majority of students pass through centralized advising suites such as an undergraduate advising center, student division office or student affairs office for advising at some time or another during their time at the University. Moreover, some centralized advising offices function similarly to departments and handle advising for specific majors. The reach of this study rarely extends beyond these centralized advising suites, but we do acquire some perspective of the advising in academic departments through the student focus groups and the self-reflection, action research component of the study that includes some observations and meetings with departmental advisors. Due to the enormity of information that was reviewed and the breadth of this study, the research findings have been divided into four separate chapters of findings (Chapters 4-7) with each chapter representing a different section of the research study. I have chosen not to include a chapter for the section of the research study that involved a year's worth of observations from the advising environment and the associated journal entries derived from individual advising sessions and staff meetings. Those results will be the focus of a separate publication in the near future. However, the knowledge that I have accumulated will assist me with my analyses in Chapters four through seven, as well as the critical reflections and recommendations in the final Chapter (Chapter 8).

Comprehensive Document Review: A Chronicling of Initiatives

In this section we will proceed through a historical overview of key institutional and assessment efforts pertaining to academic advising at the University. Prior to the mid '80s, non-faculty advisors were virtually non-existent, and faculty/staff who participated in academic advising, did so on a part-time basis. At the turn of the decade, academic advising quickly began to professionalize, but there were still so few full-time professional advisors that you could count them on your hands. However, things would soon begin to change with the creation of the first Undergraduate Advising Center at the University in the early '90s, the growth of campus and national advising organizations such as the Academic Counselors Association (ACA) and NACADA respectively, and institutional recognition through the creation of university advising awards.

Campus-Wide Advising Assessments

The first institutional-wide survey on academic advising was conducted at the beginning of the '90s and several colleges scored low on it. The survey findings spurred the creation of the original Undergraduate Advising Center. Additionally, college administrators began to examine advisor-to-student ratios and determined that more full-time academic advisors would be needed to address the quality issues that were revealed in the survey findings. This first university-wide advising survey raised awareness about academic advising, but it did not address student learning and programmatic outcomes.

Roughly a decade passed before the planning for a second survey to assess advising across campus began, and the survey was not administered until several years after the initial planning. In May 2001, the Provost selected members from the Provost's

Council on Academic Advising to form a subcommittee to design an assessment tool for the evaluation of academic advising services across campus. The subcommittee included a total of three faculty members (one person each from Mathematics, Middle Eastern Studies, and Social Work) as well as an advisor from Natural Sciences. Additional input was provided by a Liberal Arts advisor, an Engineering advisor, the ACA advisory council, and a faculty member from Advertising who served as a consultant for the survey design. With assistance from the Division of Student Information Systems (Office of Admissions) and UT student government representatives, the survey was launched online in the spring 2005 semester - almost four years after the first discussions took place.

It is unclear what happened after the survey results were collected. Some general analysis was provided to the Provost and restricted access to the data was granted to the Chair of the Faculty Council. The faculty council had interest in some aspects of the survey because it was deliberating the potential creation of an Undergraduate College and wondered how advising might be affected. An official report was never made and the results were not shared with the student or advising communities. Around this time, the Vice Provost departed, and so too went the remaining interest in the survey findings. The Spring 2005 Academic Advising Survey represented the best efforts of the institution to date to learn more about academic advising on campus, but the survey also failed, like the one before it, to adequately address student learning and programmatic outcomes. The survey consisted of 28 questions in Part 1 and two open questions in Part 2. About half of the questions asked students about structural, time and capacity aspects of advising such as how many times they had seen an advisor, how accommodating was the office space, how quickly they received an appointment or response, how advising was administered, etc. The remaining questions asked the student about their advisors such as if they had trust in them to keep confidentiality, if they demonstrated interest, it they were treated with respect to diversity, if they were given accurate information about degree requirements, if they felt the advisor was knowledgeable about campus resources, if the advisor helped to understand responsibilities in the advising process, etc. Several of the questions could have addressed student learning outcomes if they had been worded differently. For example, I noticed that the questions would all begin with "my advisor" did this or that, but the questions should have been structured to allow the student to take responsibility such as "As a result of the meeting, I learned how to …"

The third and most recent attempt at an institutional-wide survey assessment of academic advising began in the spring semester of 2009. A new Vice Provost had been appointed in fall 2006 after the vacancy left by the departure of the former Vice Provost who was involved in the previous survey from a few years earlier. Under the direction of the Provost Council for Academic Advising and Vice Provost, a task force was formed to create a new survey instrument to assess academic advising in the colleges and departments. The task force consisted of an Associate Dean from Liberal Arts, Assistant Deans from Social Work, Natural Sciences, and Undergraduate Studies, an academic advisor from Government, an Executive Assistant from the Vice Provost, and me (Liberal Arts advisor). Around the same time, an academic advising survey was being developed by the student officers from the Senate for College Councils, and the student Vice President who was leading the effort was invited to join the task force.

A final survey instrument was developed after review of several advising surveys from the colleges and after almost two semesters of discussions about student/advisor/programmatic outcomes and re-drafts. The survey moved beyond measuring general student satisfaction and transcended previous attempts at assessing academic advising through its comprehensive and thorough design. It contained a total of 64 questions, but students would only need to answer sections that applied to them. The survey was designed so that half the students would answer group 1 questions while the other half would answer group 2 questions. The common parts of the survey included two main sections (student learning outcomes/advising experience + demographics) totaling 20 questions followed by as section with 14 questions (if applicable) for students who did not see an advisor at orientation or during the year. Two additional sections followed and students assigned to a group 1 survey would respond to a section about the ideal advising relationship while students assigned to group 2 would respond to a section on student behaviors and most recent advising experiences. A small pilot test was conducted with the survey administered to a sampling of students through the direction of staff from the Division of Innovation and Instructional Assessment at the end of November in fall 2009 with initial test results arriving in early February of spring 2010. At that time, the possibility for a full launch in the near future seemed promising.

Unfortunately, as what often occurs in assessment, changes in administration and priorities often transpire and unforeseen circumstances can cause interest to wane. In the summer of 2009, two new Vice Provosts were appointed after the former Vice Provost hired in 2006 decided to return to full-time faculty. New initiatives were abundant due to the fledgling Undergraduate Studies College that had been created and larger looming issues emerged due to the state-wide budgetary situation. In 2010, massive layoffs to the Division of Instructional Innovation & Assessment eliminated a key assessment analyst who guided the pilot study. Later that year, a massive university-wide undertaking and national student survey initiative, SERU, overtook all other assessment priorities on campus. With no pressure from administration to follow through with the previous advising survey, much time having elapsed, and team members moving on to new projects, a promising advising assessment initiative came to its end.

All three of the previous attempts at assessing academic advising at the University were initiated by upper-level administration. The overarching goal of each was to obtain a general measure of advising on campus – particularly student satisfaction with advising and structural issues such as space and capacity. With the exception of the Fall 2009 advising assessment survey, none of the surveys attempted to measure student learning outcomes. Furthermore, none of the previous assessment initiatives were designed to obtain the advisor's perspective or to understand best practices for advising. In order to properly assess effective advising practices, we must first understand what advisors do and consider what they think needs to be changed or enhanced for advisors to be more effective in their roles.

The Academic Advising Association (ACA) of the University commissioned the research committee of that organization to conduct three focus groups to investigate two key areas of interest: (1) Establish an inventory of what academic advisors do in their roles on a daily basis; (2) Understand what academic advisors would like to see changed or enhanced in their roles as advisors. Additionally, the committee was interested in understanding attitudes toward and exposure to professional development activities. The research committee hired a graduate student in qualitative sociology at State University of New York-Stony Brook, and managing editor of *Qualitative Sociology*, University of Texas at Austin in spring 2009 to conduct the focus groups that contained 17 subjects total and lasted between one hour and fifteen minutes and one hour and a half each. The first focus group acted as a pilot test group to prepare for the second and third focus groups. One focus group consisted of advisors of Advisor I or Advisor II status, while the other group consisted of advisors of Advisor II or Advisor III status.

The focus group findings revealed that apart from a couple of key tasks that are common to most advisors, there is a wide range in the activities conducted by advisors on a daily basis. Duties that advisors are responsible for are varied and diverse and have developed organically and idiosyncratically within departments and offices, with some overlap in terms of advisors' responsibilities in seeing students, communication, and attending meetings. The focus group findings revealed 7 main areas that advisors addressed in their conversations: 1) Diversity in Responsibilities Across and Among Advisors, 2) What Advisors Do, 3) Cyclical and Seasonal Nature of Work, 4) Use of Technology, 5) Communication and Information Flow, 6) Areas of Improvement, and 7) Professional Development.

The final survey report was presented to the ACA research committee chair on May 20, 2009. It was intended to establish an inventory of advisor activity, to derive recommendations for changes in advisor activity, and to be used as a resource to inform the future creation of a quantitative survey on academic advising practices at the University - a survey of advisors "by advisors, and for advisors."As of the time of this writing (Fall 2012), no such survey has been created, and the results of the original focus group findings have not been shared with the larger advising community.

Advising Assessments in the Academic Colleges

Advising documents for assessment in the colleges mostly originate from the central advising offices. Assessment tends to be concentrated in these offices because these are comparatively large offices that handle policy matters and that direct large programs such as orientation, graduation, and retention. Although some assessment initiatives do carry over to departments in a few of the colleges, most academic departments remain independent and somewhat insulated from assessment measures with exceptions being programs that are grant funded or periodically reviewed for renewal.

Through the course of the document collection phase of this research study, I discovered that all seven of the colleges have utilized an online advising survey system that auto-generates a survey invitation that goes out to a student via email whenever a student's name has been electronically removed from the check-in log/waitlist to see an advisor. This survey system has yielded an abundance of data for the colleges over time, and the individual college survey instruments and associated data will be analyzed thoroughly in a separate section of Phase One. The college post-appointment advising surveys, better known as advisor “waitlist” surveys because all students check in to see an advisor through an electronic waitlist, are important because they represent the main assessment instrument for measuring advising in several colleges and are, in many colleges, the only mechanism for obtaining consistent feedback on advising. Nevertheless, these post-appointment surveys vary among colleges in the number and type of questions, and some attempt to measure student learning outcomes while others do not. A comprehensive examination of the survey system components and college instruments for seven colleges, as well as results from the data analysis process of large, longitudinal data sets from the advising centers are covered in *Chapter 5.*

Besides the waitlist surveys, most of the colleges do not have any other consistent, objective way of assessing advising programs. Moreover, many colleges have not attempted any other formal means of advising assessment or program assessment such as one-time measures or singular initiatives in years, if ever. Exceptions do exist and a couple of colleges have gone a step further in assessment by attempting to take on the difficult task of identifying and measuring student learning and advising outcomes. Additionally, administrators in several of the colleges do engage in their own informal practices to gain a better understanding of students and advisors. These self-reported, informal practices will be discussed later in the administrator interview findings of Phase Two of this research study, but our focus here relates to the assessment documents that I have collected from the main advising offices in the colleges.

Assessment documents pertaining to academic advising were identified and recovered from several of the colleges for one or more of the components of their academic programs that intersect academic advising such as orientation, retention, graduation, major/career planning, special populations, and registration. Additionally, documents pertaining directly to advisors/advising program quality, programmatic outcomes, and student learning outcomes were discovered in two of the colleges. The document analysis reveals that one college, Liberal Arts, has undergone the most extensive efforts in assessment as evidenced through the sheer number and variety of their assessment instruments and the depth and breadth of processes over a period of time, and that the Business School has demonstrated the most current attempts at the assessment of academic advising. We will now review the assessment documents to learn more about the process of assessment taking place inside the leading colleges, the types of assessment instruments, and the common advising program components that are assessed within the majority of the colleges.

Mission Statements

A review of all the assessment instruments and available advising documents collected from the colleges, as well as a search of official college websites revealed that only two of the seven colleges in this study have formalized advising mission statements. These two colleges have goals and objectives that are clearly stated and that are easily found on their websites. The advising mission statement for one of the colleges is presented through an online advising page within the college's Student Affairs portal (http://www.utexas.edu/cola/student-affairs/Advising/) that provides an explanation of advisor functions, clarifies advising walk-ins vs. appointments, and introduces the advisors with their contact information; the advising statement is also displayed on an additional page that contains information about that college's values, advising goals, and programmatic outcomes. The advising mission statement for a second college is surrounded by accentuating borders within the college's advising page (http://www.mccombs.utexas.edu/BBA/Advising/New/Advising.aspx) that also contains information about student responsibility and student policies/resources. A third college's website includes excellent academic advising as part of its broader mission statement for its Student Affairs unit, but does not provide specific academic advising goals or objectives.

Mapping Out Programmatic and Learning Outcomes

Only two advising centers, Liberal Arts and Business, have made strong and deliberate attempts to establish and improve their formal assessment practices. These advising centers have devoted relatively considerable amounts of time in the past to discuss and establish assessment practices based on specific concepts and principles in the field. The mapping process in Liberal Arts began in September of 2005 and lasted through the middle of March 2006. A glance at the assessment documents reveals that NACADA assessment guides for advising were used to structure the developmental process. Terms such as values, vision, mission, goals, programmatic outcomes, process/delivery outcomes, student learning/development outcomes, and mapping were introduced in handouts which were distributed during administrative advising meetings. A document of NACADA guidelines for mapping outcomes indicated the following four areas of importance to be considered in the process: what should be learned, where to learn it (what opportunities are provided for this learning to happen), by what time should the learning occur, and how will you know/what evidence will you gather. Two other documents that the advisors used to guide their assessment planning included Darling's flowchart of assessment in academic advising (2010) and Maki's assessment cycle (2005) which have been recreated and displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively.

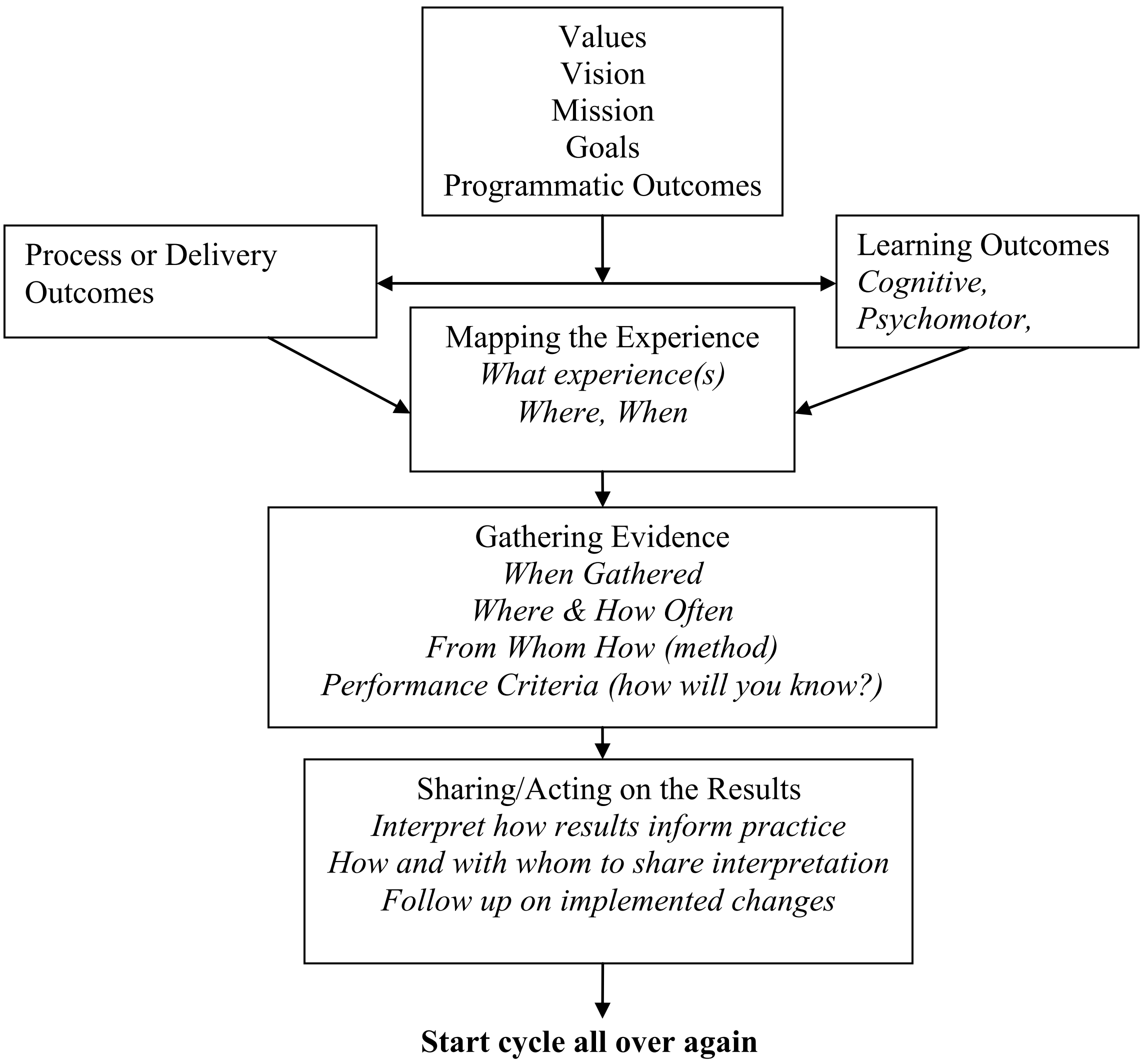


Figure 1. Flowchart of Assessment of Academic Advising (Darling, 2004, 2010).

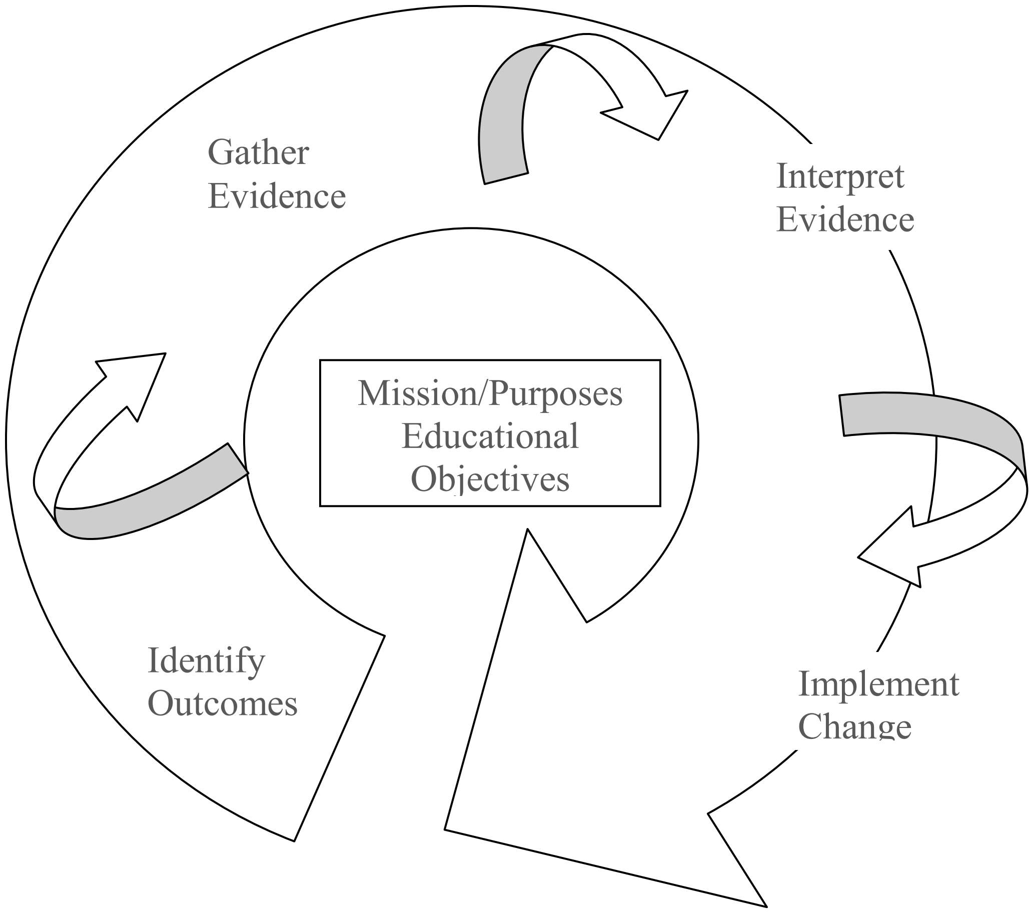


Figure 2. Maki's (2002, 2004) Assessment Cycle.

The Dean's office advisors (Student Division) of the College of Liberal Arts began their assessment process by identifying programmatic outcomes/objectives, for their advising program and developing both advisor and student outcomes. Six general programmatic outcomes were identified as follows: 1) to promote learning and development in students based on relevant theories and knowledge; 2) to assure that advisors communicate effectively and honestly with students in a caring and open manner; 3) to provide current and accurate information on University and College policies, procedures, guidelines, and degree requirements; 4) to protect academic integrity through fair and consistent application of University and College policies, procedures and guidelines; 5) to facilitate graduation in four years 6) to provide an advisor-training program.

These programmatic outcomes were then used as the foundations for developing the process/delivery outcomes that would steer how academic advising is delivered and what information should be delivered through the advising experience. A look at the process/delivery outcomes for the first programmatic outcome, to promote learning and development in students based on relevant theories and knowledge, reveals a fundamental list as follows:

- Empower students to make decisions.
- Refer students to appropriate resources.
- Teach students to utilized academic and campus resources.
- Explain general degree requirements.
- Explore options to meeting academic responsibilities, including Course Instructor Surveys, Credit-By-Exam, etc.
- Teach students to analyze information, think critically, and act appropriately.
- Develop problem solving skills.
- Identify barriers to academic success.
- Encourage activities to promote academic success (e.g., peer study groups, TA contact)

- Promote the Interactive Degree Audit (IDA) as a planning tool
- Facilitate Development of realistic academic and life goals.
- Develop decision-making skills.
- Emphasize student's increasing responsibility for academic and life decisions
- Discuss individual learning styles and relevant strategies.
- Encourage extracurricular, service-learning, intern, and volunteer activities
- Promote balance between academic social, and other activities
- Facilitate creation of individualized four-year plan
- Discuss values of Liberal Arts education and its importance in career and life goals

What is remarkable about the Liberal Arts assessment endeavor is that it was conceived by the advisors not because of any pressure from administrators but because advisors were committed to improving advising services and took a proactive approach towards assessment. I have provided the first programmatic outcome with its process and delivery outcomes as an example because it directly relates to the teacher/mentor aspect of advising which is what many advisors value and enjoy most among the many advising responsibilities. However, as we can see from some of the other programmatic outcomes, advisor responsibilities extend to the public institution and the state as well. Specifically, the fifth programmatic outcome, to facilitate graduation in four years, would be of particular interest to current university administrators and the state legislature. A downturn and uncertainty in the state's economy over the past several years has both policy makers and administrators taking a renewed interest with particular vigor in four-year graduation rates, and not surprisingly, the matter has risen to the top of the current University President's agenda. It is important to mention that the advisors derived their programmatic outcome and delivery outcomes back in 2005, almost seven years before the current emphasis to raise graduation rates. The process/delivery outcomes for the fifth programmatic outcomes were as follows:

- Facilitate creation of sample four-year plan.
- Promote the value of a Liberal Arts education.
- Conduct official degree checks.
- Inform students of financial, academic, and career advantages of graduating in four years.
- Promote timely graduation in Orientation and individual advising sessions.
- Process graduation application forms (GAFs).
- Participate in system of checks and balances between Student Division and departments, programs, and centers.
- Provide or show location degree plans.
- Discuss options for making progress through CBE and departmental tests, SAB, DEC, and/or Extension.
- Monitor academic progress and performance.
- Remove and discuss appropriate responses to advising and On Track bars.

- Develop 4-yr. strategy for graduation.
- Implement and manage On Track advising initiative.
- Promote IDA as a planning tool.
- Emphasize cohort in all encounters, (e.g., “Class of 2008”).
- Engage students in major/minor determinations regarding specific degree plans.
- Evaluate and process petitions for degree modification.
- Develop and implement practices deriving from findings of ongoing assessment program.

The mapping process for all six of the programmatic outcomes (advising program outcomes) yielded multiple delivery/process outcomes (advisor outcomes). However, in order to make these outcomes more manageable to act upon, Student Division advisors refined the lists to get rid of overlap and identified three key areas to focus their efforts: student satisfaction, academic planning and degree requirements, policies and procedures. The advisors determined that the six programmatic outcomes along with the delivery outcomes could be transferred and assumed under the three key areas. The student satisfaction area consisted mostly of process/delivery outcomes for programmatic outcome #2; the academic planning and degree requirements area consisted mostly of process/delivery outcomes for programmatic outcome #1 and a few for #3; the policies and procedures area consisted of mostly process/delivery outcomes for programmatic outcome #4 and a few for #3. Although a few process/delivery outcomes for programmatic outcomes # 5 and #6 were placed under the three areas, advisors decided to concentrate their actions towards working on the first four programmatic outcomes.

Student development/learning outcomes were then created under each of the three areas by using the already established process/delivery outcomes (advisor outcomes) as guides. A document in the form of a table-list was created with advisor outcomes displayed on the left-side and student outcomes displayed on the right-side of the page. To develop these student learning/development outcomes, advisors considered the three categories of student learning-development outcomes (Martin, 2005, p. 41): cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skill), and affective (attitude). These elements were elaborated in question form as follows: What do we want students to learn as a result of participating in academic advising? What do we want student to be able to do as a result of what they have learned in academic advising? What do we want students to value or appreciate as a result of participating in academic advising?

Advising Syllabi and Performance Standards on Advising Errors

During the process of retrieving assessment documents from administrators, staff, and the various college websites, I discovered two different types of items related to the assessment of advising. Advising syllabi were found online for the McCombs undergraduate advising center, Economics advising department, and Plan II Honors advising. Also, a document entitled *Performance Standards on Advising Errors* was retrieved directly from the Liberal Arts undergraduate advising center. Advising syllabi are extremely rare at the University, and formal written advisor error policies are even rarer as demonstrated by only one such document found from one of the seven colleges in this study.

An advising syllabus resembles an instructor/faculty syllabus but covers what is expected from a student from academic advising. It often states both advisor and student responsibilities, but tends to focus on what is expected from the student in terms of learning and development. Most students enter the University not knowing what academic advising actually is and what it can do for them. Many enter the University with the thinking that advisors are similar to high school counselors. An advising syllabus introduces students to programmatic expectations, goals, and resources, and it helps students to understand what they need to know to be successful at the University. It also provides information regarding advisors, advising times/schedules, and advising policies. Perhaps most importantly, a well-designed advising syllabus introduces accountability and delivers a message to students that they must be proactive in their education and take responsibility for their learning.

The idea to create advising syllabi at the University developed from "the advising as teaching" philosophy and gained momentum after the annual NACADA conference in 2005. An advising syllabus can resemble a simple document, for example, a typical instructor syllabus in its design such as the Economics Advising Syllabus (Figure 3), or it can be a more complex one with a customized web presence and goals spanning all four years such as the McCombs Student Affairs advising syllabus (Figure 4). The NACADA Clearinghouse of academic resources provides advisors with a guide on how to create an advising syllabus, *Advising Syllabus 101* (Trabant, T.D., 2006).

University of Texas at Austin Department of Economics

Advising Syllabus

Location: BRB 1.114
Phone: (512) 471-2973
Email: ecoadvisors@utlists.utexas.edu
Hours: Call office for walk-in hours or to make an appointment

Definition of advising:

Academic advising is collaboration between student and advisor. In this collaboration, advisors present students with university resources for academic, professional, and social development. Students will have the opportunity to realize academic and personal goals as they share their ambitions and aspirations with their academic advisors.

Student responsibilities:

Students are responsible for knowing their degree requirements, relevant policies, and deadlines, and for consulting with their advisors and the degree audit system.

- Be open to developing and clarifying personal values and goals.
- Research department and college programs as well as courses.
- Utilize campus resources to enhance academic experience and develop professional and personal goals.
- Keep contact info up-to-date and read all official correspondence.
- Keep a record of academic progress and goals.
- Be respectful of others' time: be on time, be prepared, and treat your advisor and other students the way you would wish to be treated.

Advisor responsibilities:

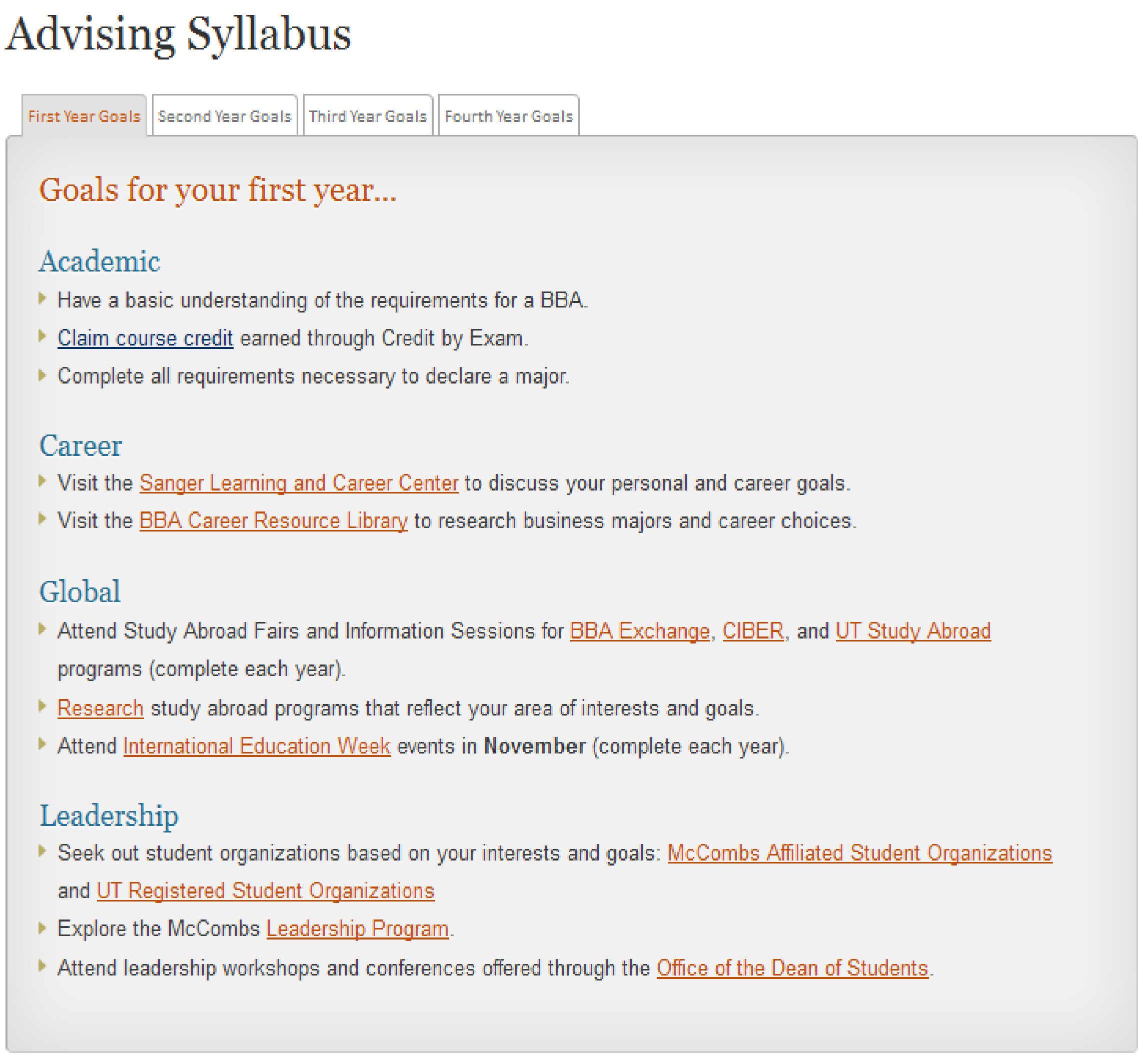
Academic Advisors have the responsibility to uphold the integrity and value of your degree by maintaining the standards and policies of the university.

- Listen carefully and respect your questions, concerns, and problems.
- Collaborate with you to develop your academic and personal goals and interests.
- Assist you in making academic decisions consistent with your interests, abilities and goals.
- Provide referrals and resources when appropriate for your needs.
- Communicate the Economics major and Liberal Arts degree requirements.
- Sometimes it is the Academic Advisor's job to say "no," or to present alternatives.

Important websites:

Dept. of Economics Undergrad Program: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/economics/undergraduate/
Blackboard ECO-Economics Community Online – Login with EID to: http://courses.utexas.edu
College of Liberal Arts: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/students/
UT Academic Calendar: http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/cals.html
Interactive Degree Audit: http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/ida/
Liberal Arts Career Services: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/lacs/
Career Exploration Center: http://www.utexas.edu/student/cec/

Figure 3. University of Texas at Austin Advising Syllabus. (http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/economics/_files/pdf/ECO-advising-syllabus.pdf).



Advising Syllabus

First Year Goals | Second Year Goals | Third Year Goals | Fourth Year Goals

Goals for your first year...

Academic
- Have a basic understanding of the requirements for a BBA.
- Claim course credit earned through Credit by Exam.
- Complete all requirements necessary to declare a major.

Career
- Visit the Sanger Learning and Career Center to discuss your personal and career goals.
- Visit the BBA Career Resource Library to research business majors and career choices.

Global
- Attend Study Abroad Fairs and Information Sessions for BBA Exchange, CIBER, and UT Study Abroad programs (complete each year).
- Research study abroad programs that reflect your area of interests and goals.
- Attend International Education Week events in **November** (complete each year).

Leadership
- Seek out student organizations based on your interests and goals: McCombs Affiliated Student Organizations and UT Registered Student Organizations
- Explore the McCombs Leadership Program.
- Attend leadership workshops and conferences offered through the Office of the Dean of Students.

Figure 4. McCombs School of Business Advising Syllabus. (http://www.mccombs.utexas.edu/BBA/Advising/Degree-Planning/Syllabus.aspx).

As stated earlier, formal advisor error policies are extremely rare at the University, and only the College of Liberal Arts has ever developed an official written policy. That document, *Performance Standard on Advising Errors*, was developed in the fall 2010 semester by college administrators, and was perceived by advisors as an unusual and largely unnecessary attempt by college administrators to respond to looming budgetary concerns within the University and the developing attitudes from the legislature regarding the quality of advising and student success in Texas. Through administrator actions perceived as top-down management to advisors, a policy was presented at the college's monthly advisors meeting where advisors were given the opportunity to raise questions. The policy document consisted of the following headings: rationale and goals, definitions, reporting, corrective action timing of errors, disputes, and concluding remarks. The policy also introduced terminology and defined topics such as *officially discovered error*, *serious advising error* and *material harm*. Several advisors were skeptical of its necessity based on the few number of actual serious error occurrences over the years and questioned the reasoning and timing behind the policy's creation. Many felt that several assessment measures were already in place to ensure the quality of advising and pointed to the fact that there was already an existing all encompassing HR policy (PMP) regarding corrective actions and proceedings for all staff. Advisors also expressed concern that the advisor error policy would lower morale and create an unwanted culture of finger pointing and turning in other advisors. Due to the many concerns, advisors called for revisions to the policy and raised questions regarding how it would be implemented. Currently, it is unclear whether the policy is used in the college anymore.

Orientation Program Surveys

Academic advisors in the colleges coordinate and conduct college and departmental meetings, parent meetings, and orientation advising. However, only a few of the colleges had survey instruments in place to assess these programs. Documents obtained from college administrators consisted of a pre-orientation survey and post-orientation survey from one college and a post-orientation survey from a different college. The pre-orientation survey extracted information from incoming students regarding their contact information, family and academic background, academic preparedness, views on college challenges/adjustment, academic interests, intended fall course load, summer course(s) - early enrollment intentions, student employment, and registration for orientation. The post-orientation surveys asked students about their experiences with the college and/or department orientation presentations by advisors and the individual registration advising sessions.

One college's post-orientation survey (24 questions, five sections) consisted of questions that addressed students' assessment of the college orientation information meetings, individual advising sessions, and their own preparation for registration and using university resources. The survey was comprehensive and covered inquiry areas such as communication, organization, engagement, comfort-level, knowledge/expertise, and effectiveness using a likert scale to record student responses. The survey was administered for the first time in the summer of 2008 and has been tweaked to respond to changes in the orientation format over the years. It has received consistently high response rates, over 60%, because the college has required all of its orientation students to complete the survey in order to be eligible to register during their earliest available registration times. In order to prevent a response set, a tendency for a respondent to answer a series of questions in a certain direction regardless of their content, the survey utilized reverse wording in some of the questions. The results of the survey indicated that students were satisfied with the advisors and the advising program for orientation and fairly well prepared to use university resources. Students indicated higher response scores for the individual sessions with advisors for registration advising during orientation week than they did for the college orientation meetings/department presentations and their perceptions of their own overall preparation to move forward after orientation. Also, regular fall freshman consistently rated all sections of the orientation program higher than transfer students rated the sections, and the ratings mirrored each other in direction (rise/fall) for each orientation section. The figure below was taken from the College of Liberal Arts 2007-2008 Annual Report. Although there is no longer a Summer Freshman Class (SFC) and the orientation structure and program sections involving advisors have changed, the figure provides some clarity to the narrative.

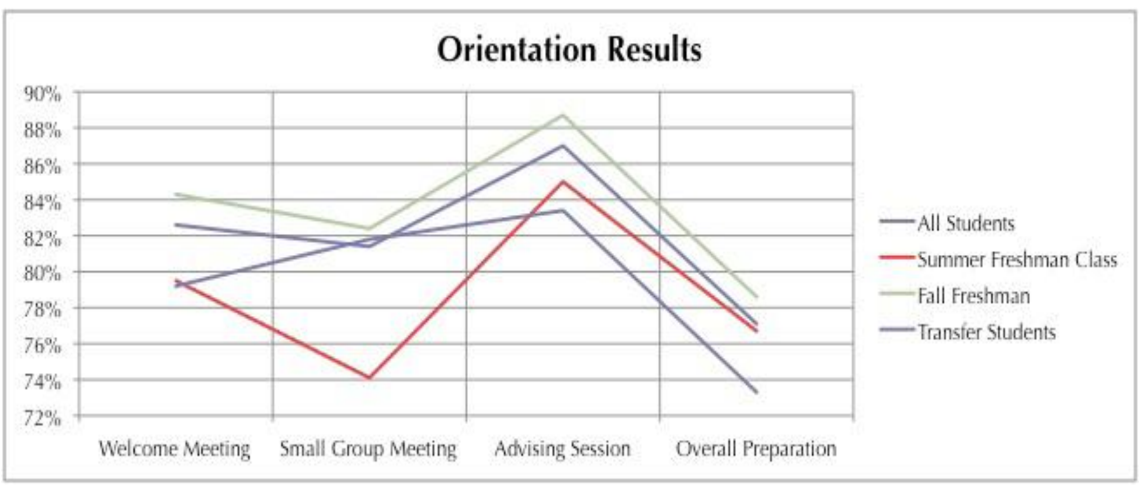


Figure 5. Orientation Advising 2008: Student satisfaction levels for various program components from entering Liberal Arts students. (College of Liberal Arts Annual Report 2007-2008).

It is important to note that for many years a transfer orientation week consisted of only a day and half while a freshman orientation week spanned four days. My perception as an advisor was that transfer students felt disoriented or stressed in the rush of having to get so many things done in such a relatively short amount of time. Another explanation of the lower ratings from transfer students was that they came into the orientation sessions with prior knowledge about college life and were bored with the college/departmental meeting presentations. Finally, the difficulty in finding classes to register for impacted transfer students more than freshmen as well as the realization of not being able to get into their desired majors.

Another college's post-orientation survey consisted of questions that did not focus on the various advisor orientation presentations but rather a student's ability to move forward with advising and academic plans as a result of meeting with advisors during orientation. A few of the questions addressed student learning outcomes from orientation. The last question on the survey allowed for open responses on how to improve orientation for future students. The seven questions and measuring scale are provided in Table 1 of the following page.

Table 1

School of Business Post-Orientation Survey Matrix

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have the basic understanding of the first year degree requirements for a business major.				
I have the knowledge and tools to create a schedule for my first semester.				
I understand the role my Academic Advisor will have in my experience at the university of Texas.				
I would go to an Academic Advisor for additional assistance.				
I have a basic understanding of how to find academic and co-curricular (student groups, leadership, etc.) resources at The University of Texas.				
The McCombs Business School portion of summer orientation was beneficial and worth my time.				
As we plan ahead for next year's orientation, do you have any suggestions that would help us in our planning?				

Note: Reformatted as an open template from the original.

Graduation Surveys

Administrators in all seven colleges reported keeping track of graduation data, but surveys pertaining to advising and graduation varied greatly across the colleges. Most colleges only had a couple of questions integrated into a larger, general graduation or career survey, while a few colleges had entire surveys dedicated towards assessing advising and perceptions from seniors or recent graduates. Also, the surveys varied in the type of information collected. While some surveys collected information about graduating seniors' future plans, others focused on senior students' perceptions of their advising experiences, learning, and/or graduation timelines.

The College of Natural Sciences survey was an example of a graduation survey that focused on reasons that affected timely graduation. It contained a single item that pertained directly to advising, but had several other items impacted by advising. The survey asked students to respond to several different situations and the effect that these might have had on their graduation date, and one of the situations was whether the student felt that they had been advised well on what to take. The results are displayed in Table 2.

The College of Liberal Arts has administered two different types of graduation surveys to its senior level students. One survey, known as the post-graduation plans survey, collected information on what students planned to do after they graduated. It had a high response rate due to advisors distributing it during walk-in graduation application requests and to the online graduation application that had an integrated survey. The results demonstrated that students were fairly successful with establishing post-graduation plans and included results on students' plans to go to graduate school, join the military, find employment, serve in the Peace Corps, and etc. The other survey, known as the senior survey, was sent out each semester via email with a link to the online survey that contained 68 questions. The survey focused on how often students contacted and met with advisors, what they thought of the advising they received, and what they would consider ideal in the advising relationship. Since the senior survey retained the same questions from year to year, administrators for the college were able to notice changes to the percentage of students in agreement for each item. Table 3 displays some of the areas that yielded higher agreement percentages that rose steadily through the years.

Table 2

College of Natural Sciences Graduation Survey

	NO	SOMEWHAT	YES
I had to repeat a class.	269	39	118
I worked while I was a student.	115	87	221
I earned more than one degree.	348	22	53
I selected my major late.	271	86	68
I wasn't advised well on what courses to take.	263	117	44
I took a lighter load for nonacademic reasons.	330	62	32
I studied abroad.	359	8	54
I stayed longer to take more courses I like.	337	49	38
I delayed graduation because of the job market.	401	15	7
I double-majored or earned a certificate.	289	23	111
I am in an honors program.	370	12	41
I took courses in the summer.	85	40	301

Note: Semester and year unknown, but within the past five years.

Table 3

Selected Advising Items Showing Percentage Increases per Semester for Liberal Arts

	Fall 2006	Spring 2007	Fall 2007	Spring 2008
The advisor was knowledgeable about courses outside of my academic department & college.	43.2%	49.6 %	50.6%	50.7%
The advisor was helpful in resolving issues I raised during the advising session.	78.9%	79.9%	81.3%	83.4%
The advisor encouraged me to reach my educational goals.	58.9%	65.7%	67.6%	69.0%
I was pleased with the professionalism of my advisor.	80.0%	85.0%	85.4%	87.6%

Note: From the College of Liberal Arts Annual Report 2007-2008.

Other College Surveys

Although waitlist, orientation and graduation surveys were the most common types of surveys pertaining to advising within the colleges at the university, there were a few other types of surveys found in the colleges. Officially sponsored student organizations have issued advising surveys in the College of Communication and a couple of other colleges. Also, a few college career centers have conducted surveys containing an advising question or two. Finally, *drop surveys* have been created and utilized in a few colleges to understand the reasons why students dropped their classes and how graduation was impacted. Questions on a McCombs Business Fall 2011 drop survey included the following: Why are you dropping the course? Have you spoken to your instructor about your issues/challenges with the course? Will this affect your academic plans (on time graduation)? If you must complete the course or its equivalent, how will you do that?

Focus Groups

A few college advising offices have had advisors or consultants to conduct student focus groups on advising periodically during the past few years. Focus group areas of study have included student perceptions of specific advising programs and first year interest group (FIG) student experiences with orientation and freshman year advising encounters. The College of Liberal Arts (COLA) advising center conducted focus groups as early as fall 2005 to understand what students wanted to accomplish at the University, how students went about reaching their goals, and what they thought about how the college's academic advising was administered. The College of Liberal Arts advising center was also one of the earlier offices among the very few to have administered First Year Interest Group (FIG) focus groups. Its fall 2006 FIG focus groups rendered information that included why first year students saw advisors, how many times students saw advisors, what campus/web resources students utilized, what students thought about the orientation college meetings, and what students learned about the value of a Liberal Arts education.

Analytical Rubrics

Advisors in the College of Liberal Arts designed a rubric for them to assess students' understanding of general education requirements. A scale was developed to measure different dimensions of a task or skill performance. These dimensions were presented in separate categories and rated individually. Points were assigned for a student's performance on each of the dimensions and a total score calculated. The advisors hoped to measure the student learning outcome – "understanding the general education requirements." The criteria used to measure the outcome were arranged in a column along the left margin of a rubric table and the performance levels were labeled across the top margin. The advisors used a rubric guide (displayed in Table 4) as an example from available assessment documents to create their own rubric. Their modified rubric closely resembled the original guide but it specified a specific number of courses for each performance level and contained a simplified scoring system. Advisors used the rubric to ascertain whether their students could identify appropriate courses for registration (knowledge) and whether they could demonstrate how those courses fit in with their degree (comprehension).

At a specified time later, the advisors checked the students' registration records to determine if the students actually registered for the appropriate courses that they had mentioned previously (evaluation). Advisors stated the task of actually scoring and evaluating students for knowledge and comprehension, component #1 and #2 of the rubric was difficult without proper training. Consistency and reliability became an issue with so many different raters who were unfamiliar with performing evaluations. Therefore, the advising team directed their assessment committee composed of three advisors to practice calibration techniques, to determine guidelines for the scoring, and to perform all of the scoring for the advising unit. Nevertheless, the assessment committee discovered that scoring was not a clean process due to the lack of training time, student tendencies to change their minds unannounced in regards to their major(s) and degree direction, and course availability. Results of the assessment initiative were inconclusive.

Table 4

Analytical Rubric: Student Understanding of the General Education Requirements

	PERFORMANCE LEVELS				
CRITERIA	Novice	Apprentice	Master	Expert	Weight
Ability to recall General Education requirements (Knowledge)	Is unable to state any general Education requirements	Is able to state some general Education requirements	Is able to state most general Education requirements	Is able to state all general Education requirements	1
Ability to understand General Education requirements (Comprehension)	Is unable to elaborate on the rationale for any Education requirement	Is able to elaborate on the rationale for some requirements	Is able to elaborate on the rationale for most requirements	Is able to elaborate on the rational for all requirements	1
Selection of courses that fulfill General Education requirements (Evaluation)	Is unable to compile or evaluate course options and expects that the courses will be selected for them	Is able to compile a list of course options but is unable to evaluate these options without assistance	Is able to compile a list of course options and evaluate this list to select courses that meet either personal goals or institutional requirements	Is able to compile a list of course options and evaluate this list – using multiple perspective and resources – to select courses that fully meet both personal goals and institutional requirements	2

Note: Recreated from College of Liberal Arts assessment documents.

Summary

This Chapter chronicled the attempts of University committees and advising communities within the academic colleges to assess academic advising at the University. The Chapter reflected the discovery process of the research study, a process that involved discussions with the advising community, documenting and reviewing assessment initiatives for academic advising, and identifying assessment practices, instruments, and tools utilized within the various advising centers at the University through the years. The widespread usage of post-appointment advising surveys in all seven of the colleges was one important finding of the discovery process. This revelation provided substance for further examination, and the survey system data is the focus of study in the next chapter (Chapter 5). Other areas of exploration included the specific process of assessment taking place, the extent of assessment usage, and the incorporation of student learning outcomes in assessment instruments. These areas of interest are further examined as part of the administrator interviews in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5: SURVEY SYSTEM DATA

Analyzing Post-Appointment Advising Surveys - "Waitlist Surveys"

As described in Chapter 3, the waitlist survey system has been the primary tool used by colleges to assess academic advising at the University. How the survey statistics are used and how often the results are reviewed by advisors or administrators varies by college. Authorized staff can review statistics from the waitlists to learn more about peak advising times, the distribution of advising across the college, and assess the factors that affect student retention. The system was developed in 2003 and first utilized that summer within the College of Communications followed by Engineering in the fall, Natural Sciences and Fine Arts in Spring 2004, Liberal Arts in Fall 2006, and Education in Fall 2008. The Business School never used the survey system but implemented a similarly functioning one of its own instead in Fall 2009 after a period of using paper surveys. I was able to obtain the raw data and standardize the output to conform to the structure of the waitlist survey databases.

Data Continuity

Datasets were compiled from the stored output of each college's post-advising session survey or "waitlist survey" as commonly referred to by advising staff. All existing data for the colleges were collected at the end of Spring 2011 for Summer 2003 through Spring 2011. Each college's raw survey data were exported directly from the waitlist survey system into Excel and then prepared and loaded into SPSS for analysis. The dataset for each college began with the first semester that the waitlist survey was turned on for usage by administrators in the college. For the purposes of my study, I had each college's raw survey data exported directly from the waitlist survey system into Excel and then prepared and loaded into SPSS for analysis. For the most part, the data semesters are continuous and sequential (summer to fall to spring), but there are a few noted exceptions.

In Spring 2010, the College of Communications stopped using the waitlist survey system due to the launching of its Student Appointment Reservation system (STAR) - a massive online student appointment scheduling and advising system that integrated multiple systems (uTexas Enterprise Directory or TED, ITS MsSQL Service, ITS Exchange Service as well as the campus network and related systems) to provide online access to advising scheduling for face-to-face sessions or IM advising and additional features such as access to advising session notes for both students and staff, and statistics and reports for administrators. During the Spring 2010 semester transition to the new technology, the College did not administer waitlist surveys so data were not available for that time. Beginning with Summer 2010, post- advising session surveys resumed in the College but with the use of Survey Station, an online survey tool developed by IT staff in three different University departments. Electronic data in a usable format, one that could be easily adapted/modified to match the other datasets, were not available to me (only paper copies of survey questions and data could be secured) so the last dataset for the College was Fall 2009.

Some of the other colleges also had empty data semesters. The College of Liberal Arts decided not to collect survey results in the summer semesters until Summer 2010. The College of Fine Arts did not have any data for Summer 2005 or Summer 2009. The

School of Engineering did not have data for Summer 2004, and had incomplete data for Spring 2009. Administrators in Engineering and Fine Arts could not recall whether these gaps were due to technical issues or whether the survey system had been turned off.

The Post-Appointment Advising Survey Questions

Each of the seven colleges had its own set of survey questions. The questions and number of questions varied among colleges. However, questions within each college remained the same from semester to semester except for minor changes in the question sets for the College of Fine Arts and the College of Liberal Arts. Adjustments (alignment shifts and deletions) to the Excel and SPSS data columns were made to accommodate the reduction of a question set, Y/N type questions, and changes in the order sequence of a set. I created a questions key table in Excel to keep track of all the original questions for the colleges and to remind myself of any changes to the question sets. The original Excel table was simplified and then modified for inclusion into Word as presented in Table 5 through 11. I also identified similar question types/categories and assigned each question an identifier label (code) under the appropriate category to create a cluster list table. This process yielded 10 categories as follows: welcoming (front desk only), timely (front desk only), courteous/professional, knowledgeable/informed, trusted/confiding, met expectations/ satisfied, inspired confidence, helped/assisted, provided useful info, and better enabled. The top three categories represented in the most colleges were courteous, helpful, and provided useful info. All categories with the corresponding question identifiers are presented in Table 12.

Table 5

Survey Question Sets for College of Natural Sciences (20042 – 20112) and Liberal Arts (20069, 20072)

	College of Natural Sciences		**College of Liberal Arts (20069, 20072)**
Q1_NS	I felt welcomed at the front desk.	Q1_LA1	My advisor was courteous.
Q2_NS	The front desk staff person was courteous.	Q2_LA1	My advisor was knowledgeable about the issues we discussed.
Q3_NS	I received helpful and accurate assistance at the front desk.	Q3_LA1	My advisor provided me with useful information about University policies and procedures.
Q4_NS	I was treated in a courteous and professional manner by the advisor.	Q4_LA1	My advisor provided me with useful information concerning resources and services on campus.
Q5_NS	The advisor was well informed and effectively communicated information.	Q5_LA1	My advisor helped me clarify my academic, career, and/or personal goals.
Q6_NS	I received the assistance/information I needed from the advisor.	Q6_LA1	As a result of this meeting, I better understand the issues that brought about this visit.
		Q7_LA1	As a result of this meeting, I will be better able to address similar academic issues.
		Q8_LA1	As a result of this meeting, I feel more confident about my ability to carry out my academic plans.

Table 6

Survey Question Sets for College of Liberal Arts (20079, 20082) and College of Liberal Arts (20089)

	College of Liberal Arts (20079, 20082)		**College of Liberal Arts (20089)**
Q1_LA2	My advisor was courteous.	Q1_LA3	My advisor was courteous.
Q2_LA2	My advisor was knowledgeable about the issues we discussed.	Q2_LA3	My advisor was knowledgeable about the issue(s) we discussed.
Q3_LA2	My advisor provided me with useful information about University policies and procedures.	Q3_LA3	My advisor provided me with useful information about University policies and procedures.
Q4_LA2	My advisor provided me with useful information concerning resources and services on campus.	Q4_LA3	My advisor provided me with useful information concerning resources and services on campus.
Q5_LA2	My advisor helped me clarify my academic, career, and/or personal goals.	Q5_LA3	My advisor helped me to clarify my academic, career, and/or personal goals.
Q6_LA2	I would return to this advisor for help with degree planning, course selection, or other issues. (Y/N)	Q6_LA3	I would return to this advisor for help with degree planning, course selection, or other issues. (Y/N)
Q7_LA2	As a result of this meeting, I will be better able to address similar academic issues.	Q7_LA3	As a result of this meeting, I will be better able to address similar academic issues.
Q8_LA2	As a result of this meeting, I feel more confident about my ability to carry out my academic plans.	Q8_LA3	As a result of this meeting, I feel more confident about my ability to carry out my academic plans.

Table 7

Survey Question Sets for College of Liberal Arts (20092, 20099, 20102, 20106, 20109, 20112)

	College of Liberal Arts (20092, 20099, 20102, 20106, 20109, 20112)
Q1_LA4	My advisor was courteous.
Q2_LA4	My advisor was knowledgeable about the issue(s) we discussed.
Q3_LA4	My advisor provided me with useful information about University policies and procedures.
Q4_LA4	My advisor provided me with useful information concerning resources and services on campus.
Q5_LA4	My advisor helped me to clarify my academic, career, and/or personal goals.
Q6_LA4	I would return to this advisor for help with degree planning, course selection, or other issues.
Q7_LA4	As a result of this meeting, I will be better able to address similar academic issues.
Q8_LA4	As a result of this meeting, I feel more confident about my ability to carry out my academic plans.

Table 8

Survey Question Sets for College of Communications (20036 – 20099)

	College of Communications		
Q1_CO	I felt welcomed at the front desk.	Q10_CO	My advisor helps me to make informed decisions.
Q2_CO	The front desk staff effectively assisted me and was friendly and helpful.	Q11_CO	I have trust and confidence in my advisor.
Q3_CO	My advisor was notified promptly of my arrival for my appointment.	Q12_CO	Overall, I am satisfied with the services provided during my advising appointment.
Q4_CO	I was treated in a courteous and professional manner by the front desk staff.	Q13_CO	Overall, I am satisfied with the service provided at the Office of Student Affairs.
Q5_CO	My Advisor is knowledgeable about major and course requirements.	Q14_CO	This was a scheduled appointment.
Q6_CO	My advisor provides me with information about University policies and procedures.	Q15_CO	This was a walk-in appointment.
Q7_CO	My advisor assists me with resolving academic issues.		
Q8_CO	My advisor provides me with information concerning resources and services on campus.		
Q9_CO	My advisor assists me with clarifying my academic and career goals.		

Table 9

Survey Question Sets for College of Fine Arts (20042 – 20096) and College of Fine Arts (20099 – 20112)

	College of Fine Arts (20042 - 20096)		College of Fine Arts (20099 - 20112)
Q1_FA1	I felt welcomed at the Dean's Lobby, (College Work-Study), front desk.	Q1_FA2	I felt welcomed at the Dean's Lobby, (College Work-Study), front desk.
Q2_FA1	The Student Affair's Receptionist effectively assisted me and was friendly and helpful.	Q2_FA2	The Student Affair's Receptionist effectively assisted me and was friendly and helpful.
Q3_FA1	My advisor was notified promptly of my arrival.	Q3_FA2	My advisor was notified promptly of my arrival.
Q4_FA1	The front desk services were professional and courteous.	Q4_FA2	My advisor was professional and courteous.
Q5_FA1	My advisor was professional and courteous.	Q5_FA2	I received the information I needed from my advisor.
Q6_FA1	I received the information I needed from my advisor.	Q6_FA2	My advisor provided me with information concerning other resources and services on campus.
Q7_FA1	My advisor provided me with information concerning other resources and services on campus.	Q7_FA2	After meeting with my advisor on this occasion, I felt I could make an informed decision or take appropriate action.
Q8_FA1	After meeting with my advisor on this occasion, I felt I could make an informed decision or take appropriate action.		

Table 10

Survey Question Sets for School of Engineering (20039 – 20112)

	School of Engineering		
Q1_EN	I felt welcomed by the front counter staff when I entered.	Q9_EN	I received the assistance I needed from the Advisor.
Q2_EN	The front counter staff assisted me in a timely manner.	Q10_EN	I received the information I needed from the Advisor.
Q3_EN	The front counter staff was courteous.	Q11_EN	The Advisor assisted me with making informed decisions.
Q4_EN	The front counter staff was professional.	Q12_EN	I was treated courteously and professionally by the Advisor.
Q5_EN	I was able to schedule an advising appointment within 48 hours of my request.	Q13_EN	Overall, I am satisfied with the service during the advising appointment.
Q6_EN	I received helpful and accurate assistance from the front counter staff.		
Q7_EN	The Advisor was able to provide me with information about the Cockrell School of Engineering and University policies and procedures.		
Q8_EN	The Advisor was able to provide me with information about the Cockrell School of Engineering and University services and resources.		

Table 11

Survey Question Sets for School of Business (20099 – 20112) and College of Education (20089 – 20112)

	School of Business		**College of Education**
Q1_BA	My advisor provides applicable information about degree requirements.	Q1_ED	I felt welcomed by the front desk staff when I entered.
Q2_BA	My advisor refers me to useful resources and services pertaining to my academic interests.	Q2_ED	The front desk staff was courteous and professional.
Q3_BA	My advisor helps me make informed decisions.	Q3_ED	I received helpful and accurate assistance from the front desk.
Q4_BA	My advisor is someone with whom I feel I can talk freely.	Q4_ED	I received the assistance I needed from the Advisor.
Q5_BA	As a result of this meeting, I feel more confident about my ability to carry out my academic plans.	Q5_ED	The Advisor assisted me with making informed decisions.
Q6_BA	Did you utilize the BBA website to answer your questions before making your advising appointment?	Q6_ED	I was treated courteously and professionally by the Advisor.
Q7_BA	Did you utilize a peer advisor to answer your questions before making your advising appointment?	Q7_ED	Overall, I am satisfied with the service during the advising appointment.
Q8_BA	Did you utilize other non-BBA website(s) to answer your questions before making your advising appointment?		
Q9_BA	Did you utilize the BBA handbook to answer your questions before making your advising appointment?		
Q10_BA	Did you utilize any email advising to answer your questions before making your advising appointment?		

Table 12

Categories Derived from All Survey Questions in the Colleges

Courteous/Professional	Welcoming (FD)	Knowledgeable/Informed
Q2_NS(courteous-FD)	Q1_NS	Q5_NS(+communicated effectively)
Q4_NS	Q1_CO	Q2_LA1
Q1_LA1	Q1_FA1	Q2_LA2
Q1_LA2	Q1_FA2	Q2_LA3
Q1_LA3	Q1_ED	Q2_LA4
Q1_LA4	Q1_EN	Q5_CO(major/course requirements)
Q4_CO (FD)		
Q4_FA1 (FD)		
Q5_FA1		
Q4_FA2		
Q2_ED (FD)		
Q6_ED		
Q3_EN(courteous-FD)		
Q4_EN(professional-FD)		
Q12_EN(+professional)		
Trusted/Confiding	Met Expectations/Satisfied	Inspired Confidence
Q11_CO(+ trust)	Q6_LA2(w/advisor -would return)	Q8_LA1
Q4_BA(talk freely)	Q6_LA4(w/advisor - would return)	Q8_LA2
	Q12_CO (advising session)	Q8_LA3
	Q13_CO (service)	Q8_LA4
	Q7_ED(advising session)	
	Q13_EN(service)	

Table 12 *(Continued)*

Helpful/Assisted With	Provided Useful Info
Q3_NS (+accurate FD)	Q3_LA1(polices/procedures)
Q6_NS(similar)	Q4_LA1(resources/services)
Q5_LA1(clarify goals)	Q3_LA2(polices/procedures)
Q5_LA2(clarify goals)	Q4_LA2(resources/services)
Q5_LA3(clarify goals)	Q3_LA3(polices/procedures)
Q5_LA4(clarify goals)	Q4_LA3(resources/services)
Q2_CO (FD)	Q3_LA4(polices/procedures)
Q7_CO(resolve academic issues)	Q4_LA4(resources/services)
Q9_CO(clarifying academic/career goals)	Q6_CO(policies/procedures)
Q10_CO(making informed decisions)	Q8_CO(resources/services)
Q2_FA1(+friendly)	Q6_FA1(needed info)
Q2_FA2 (+friendly)	Q7_FA1 (resources/services)
Q3_ED(+accurate-_FD)	Q5_FA2 (needed info)
Q4_ED(similar)	Q6_FA2 (resources/services)
Q5_ED(making informed decisions)	Q7_EN(policies/procedures)
Q6_EN(+accurate FD)	Q8_EN(services/resources)
Q9_EN(similar)	Q10_EN(needed info)
Q11_EN(making informed decisions)	Q1_BA(degree requirements)
Q3_BA(informed decisions)	Q2_BA(resources/academic interests)
Better Enabled	Timely (FD)
Q7_LA1(understand issues)	Q3_CO (notified)
Q7_LA1(address similar issues)	Q3_FA1 (notified-FD)
Q7_LA2 (address similar issues)	Q3_FA2 (notified)
Q7_LA3 (address similar issues)	Q2_EN (assisted-FD)
Q7_LA4(address similar issues)	Q5_EN (scheduling)
Q8_FA1	
Q7_FA2	

The Survey Instruments

All surveys generated by the waitlist survey system contained a series of questions that ranged in total number from six to fifteen depending on the college. The survey response choices included the following: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree), and N/A (not applicable). A few colleges also included Y/N type questions in the surveys for specific semesters, and all colleges had a last question that was of the open comment type. The post-appointment advising surveys for the School of Business resembled the waitlist survey format for most questions but included a list type question with Y/N choices for each component and another list type question allowing open responses. Table 7 provides an example of the survey instrument which is referred to as the *Advising Appointment Feedback Survey* in the college. A numeric count of responses under each score for each question is displayed in the table which was derived from an unspecified semester in 2011.

Table 13. COBA Advising Appointment Feedback Survey 2011 (unspecified semester)

	BBA Website	**Other Website**	**Advising Email**	**Peer Advisor**	**BBA Handbook**	
1. Did you utilize any of the following resources to answer your questions before making your advising appointment?	58	16	24	23	15	
	Not applicable	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
2. My advisor provides applicable information about degree requirements	1	80	14		1	5
	Not applicable	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
3a. My advisor refers me to useful resources and services pertaining to my academic interests.	4	75	13	2	1	5
3b. Please list specific resources or services you discussed in your advising session.	Registration and taking classes, financial aid, etc, study plan	Summer School	Registration, CARE, degree programs, UT health services, ITS	1. Changing Majors 2. Courses to take during my upcoming study abroad	Actuarial Studies	Internship websites and undergraduat e web services
	Not applicable	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
4. My advisor helps me make informed decisions		80	15	1	2	5
	Not applicable	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
5. My advisor is someone with whom I feel I can talk freely		78	18	1	1	5
	Not applicable	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
6. As a result of this meeting, I feel more confident about my ability to carry out my academic plans		79	15	2	2	5
COMMENTS	(Advisor) is extremely helpful. She has been a valuable resource. Without her, I would be lost!	Great advisor! Very helpful.	I <3 (Advisor)	Awesome advisor!	(Advisor) is the coolest advisor ever	Nice guy, easy to talk to

The Waitlist Survey Data

The waitlist survey system stores information such as student (EID), visit date, visit reason, visit reason other, question type (Likert or Y/N), advisor seen (EID), number of questions responded, and rating score for each response from each question. It generates basic but useful information such as exact counts of the total number of student visits for a specified time period and/or advisor, type of advising visit (in person vs. email) and percentage conversions of score results from a Likert agreement scale. The system also has a different section of the database which maintains the open student comment responses. Although the waitlist survey system stores output generated by incoming survey responses, it does not provide diagnostic or analysis tools to review the data. This section of the research study provides fundamental analysis of each college's survey results to gain insight into the state of academic advising at the University. The student EID data column was removed and a column entitled "College" with associated label entries was added to distinguish datasets from each other. Student visit dates were converted to semester and year. Although the dataset for the School of Business was collected directly from the School's survey database that is independent of the waitlist survey system, all data was transferred successfully to Excel and then formatted and prepared for entry into SPSS similar to the waitlist survey data.

After the pruning process for data integrity as described earlier in the methods section, 34,252 total responses remained that were generated from summer 2004 through spring 2011. The breakdown of the number of responses yielded for each college is presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Survey Yields and Timeframe by College

COLLEGE	# Surveys Yielded	Beginning Semester	Ending Semester	Inactive Semesters, Exclusions, or Incomplete*
Business	1914	Fall 2009	Spring 2011	
Fine Arts	1531	Spring 2004	Spring 2011	Summer 2005, Summer 2006
Communications	7111	Summer 2006	Fall 2009	
Education	2871	Fall 2008	Spring 2011	
Engineering	5996	Fall 2003	Spring 2011	Summer 2004, Spring 2009*
Natural Sciences	7309	Spring 2004	Spring 2011	(Excluded 10,822 front desk)
Liberal Arts	7321	Fall 2006	Spring 2011	Summers Prior to 2010
TOTAL	**34,252**			

Calculated Means and Percent Agreement for Advising

The mean scores for advisors were consistently very high in all of the colleges. The semester means for the collective of advisors in each college regularly exceeded 4.5 out of 5.0 (Likert scale) with high collective mean scores of 4.80 for several semesters in one college and no collective mean scores lower than 4.29 for any semester in any college. A look at the calculated means of each college and each semester that data output was generated during the assessment period of summer 2003 – spring 2011 reveals a general upward trend in the advising scores across all colleges. Figure 6 shows a higher mean advising score in each college's last semester compared to first semester, and illustrates the rising patterns in the colleges over time. Table 15 supports the figure and provides a quick view of the semester means and the specific semesters that generated data in each college. The mean scores and patterns suggest advising improvement over time, but tests for significance and extraneous factors must be considered before a determination can be made; these are examined in a later section of the writing.

For now, let us take a different approach to analyze the data. We can obtain a better sense of the state of advising in a college if we obtain the percentages of agrees vs. disagrees from the survey responses. By calculating the valid percentages (percentages with the not applicable responses removed), we avoid having to make comparisons between Likert score means and deciding, for example, how much better a 4.70 mean score is than a 4.30, and whether it is important to know. The results for the colleges yielded total agree (agree + strongly agree) percentages of no less than 84.1 % for any question in any college, and yielded more than 90% for most of the questions in the colleges. Table 16 displays the percentages of strongly agree, agree, and total combined agree percentages for each college.

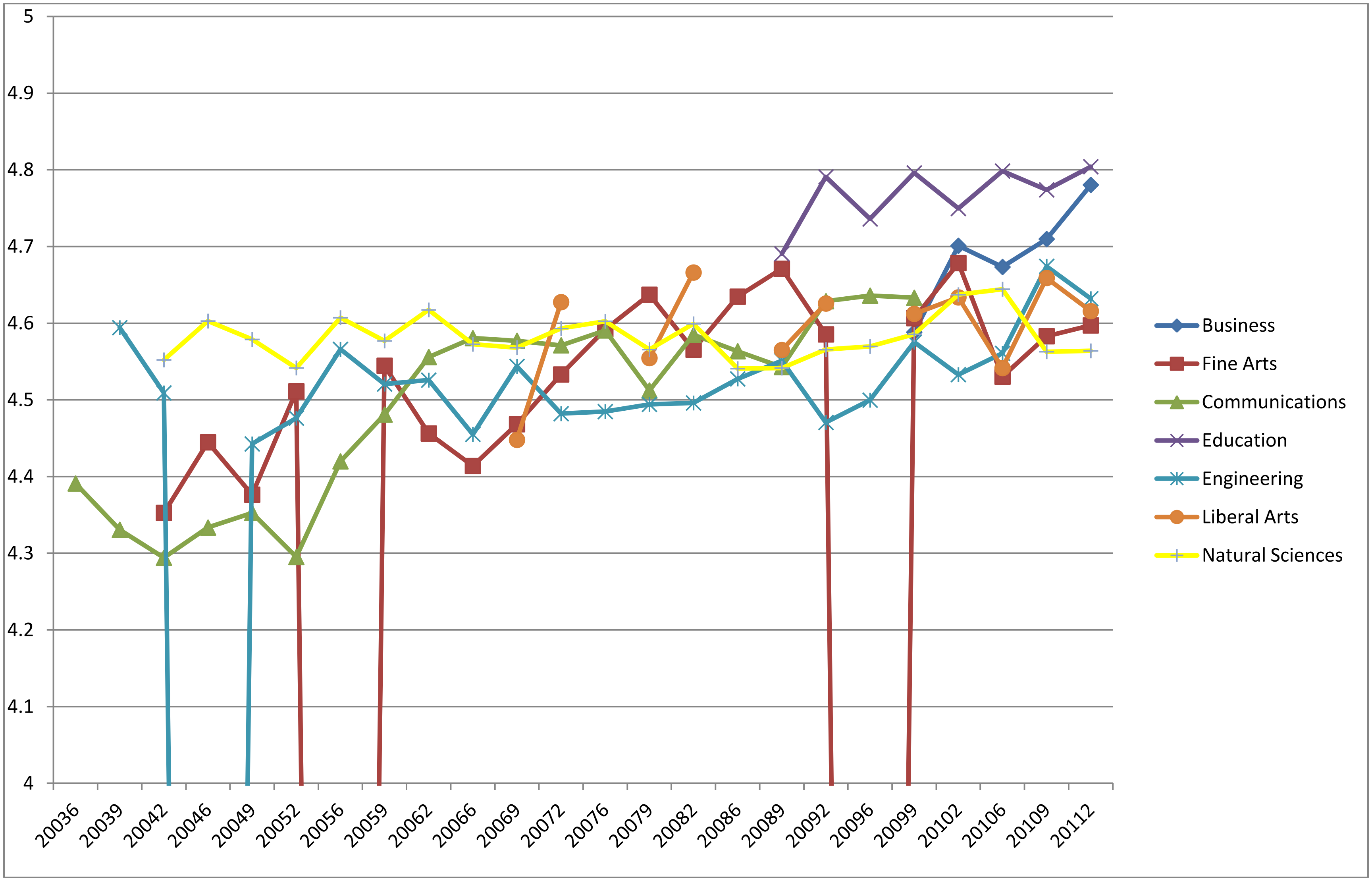


Figure 6. College Advising Surveys: Longitudinal Chart of Semester Means for Likert Scores, Summer 2003 – Spring 2011

Table 15

College Advising Surveys ("Waitlist Surveys"): Computed Semester Means in Excel

	Business	Fine Arts	Communications	Education	Engineering	Liberal Arts	Natural Sciences
20036			4.39				
20039			4.33		4.59		
20042		4.35	4.29		4.51		4.55
20046		4.44	4.33				4.60
20049		4.38	4.35		4.44		4.58
20052		4.51	4.30		4.48		4.54
20056			4.42		4.57		4.61
20059		4.54	4.48		4.52		4.58
20062		4.46	4.56		4.53		4.62
20066		4.41	4.58		4.46		4.57
20069		4.47	4.58		4.54	4.45	4.57
20072		4.53	4.57		4.48	4.63	4.59
20076		4.59	4.59		4.48		4.60
20079		4.64	4.51		4.49	4.55	4.57
20082		4.57	4.58		4.50	4.67	4.60
20086		4.63	4.56		4.53		4.54
20089		4.67	4.54	4.69	4.55	4.56	4.54
20092		4.59	4.63	4.79	*4.47	4.63	4.57
20096			4.64	4.74	4.50		4.57
20099	4.59	4.61	4.63	4.80	4.58	4.61	4.59
20102	4.70	4.68		4.75	4.53	4.63	4.64
20106	4.67	4.53		4.80	4.56	4.54	4.64
20109	4.71	4.58		4.77	4.67	4.66	4.56
20112	4.78	4.60		4.80	4.63	4.62	4.56

Table 16

Valid Percentages of Strongly Agree, Agree, and Total Agree by College

LA	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A	**FA**	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A
Q1	79.7	16.7	96.4	Q1	52.9	36.6	89.5
Q2	73.9	21.3	95.2	Q2	59.7	32.9	92.6
Q3	72.3	21.5	93.8	Q3	60.4	30.4	90.8
Q4	69.3	21.9	91.2	Q4	57.8	35.6	93.4
Q5	66.5	22.4	88.9	Q5	73.1	22.9	96.0
Q6	---	---	---	Q6	72.0	23.6	95.6
Q7	68.6	23.2	91.8	Q7	62.4	22.1	84.5
Q8	69.6	21.2	90.8	Q8	68.8	23.0	91.8
ED	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A	**NS**	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A
Q1	66.0	28.2	94.2	Q1	49.4	38.9	88.3
Q2	69.2	26.8	96.0	Q2	54.0	37.4	91.4
Q3	68.0	26.5	94.5	Q3	54.1	36.7	90.8
Q4	89.6	9.3	98.9	Q4	84.9	13.4	98.3
Q5	87.5	11.0	98.5	Q5	78.9	17.7	96.6
Q6	92.1	7.4	99.5	Q6	80.0	16.1	96.1
CO	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A	**EN**	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A
Q1	45.0	39.1	84.1	Q1	47.8	41.0	88.8
Q2	49.4	38.6	88.0	Q2	57.2	35.3	92.5
Q3	51.2	37.1	88.3	Q3	56.0	37.0	93.0
Q4	51.8	38.5	90.3	Q4	50.5	40.1	90.6
Q5	74.4	21.8	96.2	Q5	71.6	21.4	93.0
Q6	66.5	27.0	93.5	Q6	55.0	36.7	91.7
Q7	68.0	23.7	91.7	Q7	68.1	26.0	94.1
Q8	58.7	26.9	85.6	Q8	66.6	25.7	92.3
Q9	64.4	23.4	87.8	Q9	71.9	21.4	93.3
Q10	66.3	25.1	91.4	Q10	70.8	22.6	93.4
Q11	66.6	24.3	90.9	Q11	66.1	23.7	89.8
Q12	69.8	23.4	93.2	Q12	77.9	18.0	95.9
Q13	58.4	34.0	92.4				

Table 16 (Continued)

BA	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Total SA + A
Q1	80.3	17.8	98.1
Q2	75.8	19.6	95.4
Q3	71.7	24.3	96.0
Q4	74.6	20.3	94.9
Q5	72.6	22.6	95.2

SPSS Statistics: Computations, Frequency Tables & Histograms

General statistics that included standard computations, frequency tables, and histograms were generated for each of the seven colleges in SPSS and utilized for procedural purposes to assist me in my selection of an appropriate statistical approach to use in the analysis of the data. Frequency tables and histograms were particularly instrumental to me in the process of preparing and pruning the various datasets, and identifying potential cells or selections to exclude from the final sets to be used for SPSS analysis. For example, the output from the basic tests alerted me to the fact that a large proportion of student visits and interactions between students and advisors in the College of Natural Sciences took place at the front desk. I was then able to exclude the incomplete surveys that showed responses for only the first three questions that pertained to front desk interactions. Selected output is provided for this example in *Table 17, Table 18,* and *Figure 7.*

Table 17

SPSS Statistics Output for College of Natural Sciences Questions

		Q1_NS	Q2_NS	Q3_NS	Q4_NS	Q5_NS	Q6_NS
N	Valid	17966	17927	17817	7142	7120	7119
	Missing	165	204	314	10989	11011	11012
Mean		4.34	4.43	4.42	4.82	4.74	4.74
Median		4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Mode		5	5	5	5	5	5
Std. Deviation		.789	.736	.761	.483	.585	.602
Variance		.623	.542	.579	.233	.342	.363
Range		4	4	4	4	4	4

Table 18

SPSS Frequency Table: Output for Question 1, College of Natural Sciences

Q1_NS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	169	.9	.9	.9
	2	317	1.7	1.8	2.7
	3	1614	8.9	9.0	11.7
	4	6996	38.6	38.9	50.6
	5	8870	48.9	49.4	100.0
	Total	17966	99.1	100.0	
Missing	99	132	.7		
	System	33	.2		
	Total	165	.9		
Total		18131	100.0		

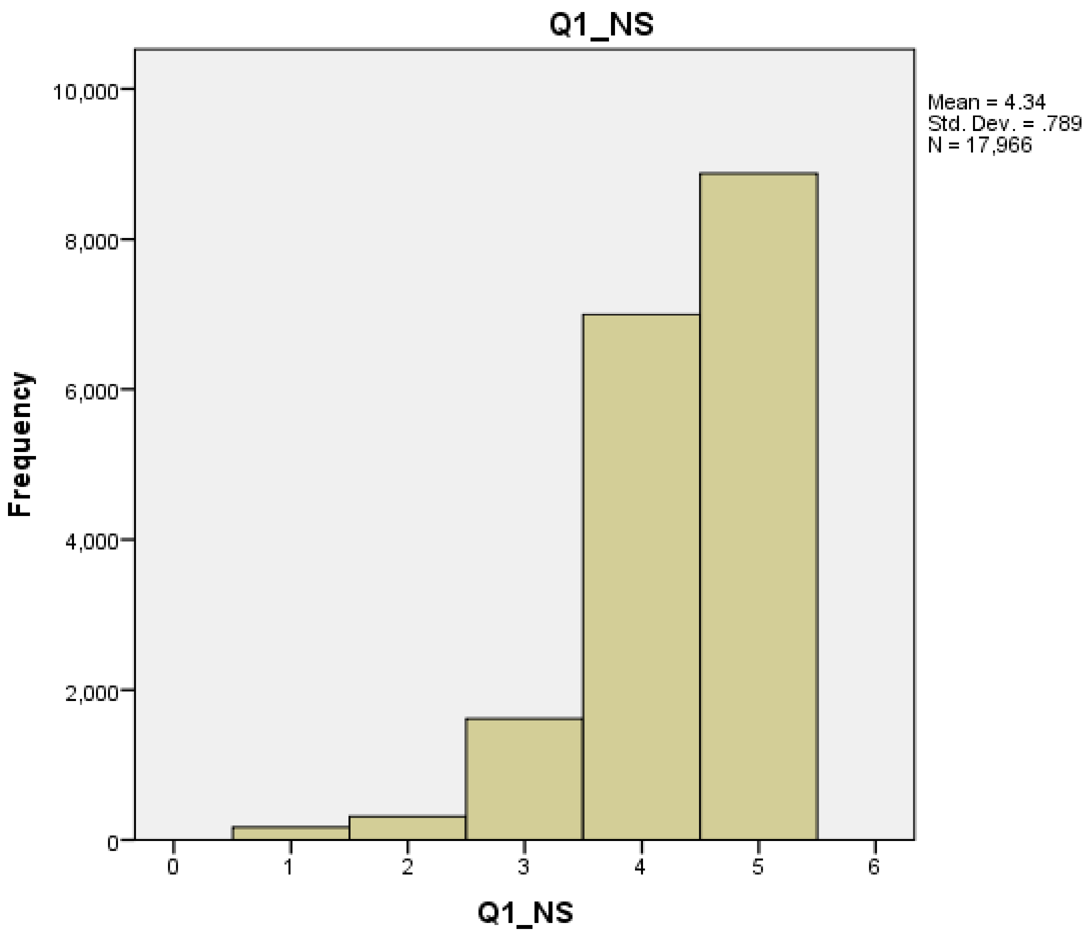


Figure 7: SPSS Histogram for Question 1, College of Natural Sciences

SPSS Analysis: Generalized Linear Model – Inverse Gaussian

Hundreds of pages of electronic output were generated from the statistical tests and model-estimated marginal means, standard errors, confidence intervals, levels of significance, etc. The majority of these pages were due to the pairwise comparisons and main effects, especially the output for the advisors*semesters interaction for each college. Due to the sheer volume of results produced, it was necessary to identify a few specific comparisons of interest and correlations to focus on for analysis. *Table 19* and Table *20* provide examples of two types of output tables generated from among the several different table types produced. These tables are followed by summaries of the outputs for the various tests conducted using the Generalized Linear Model for each college dataset as described in the previous methods chapter of this study.

Table 19

Partial Output of SPSS Generated Table: Estimated Marginal Means

Advisor Seen	Semester	Mean	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
(Advisor 1)	20079	2.0000	.82352	.3859	3.6141
	20082	1.2549	.03768	1.1810	1.3287
	20089	1.3071	.04865	1.2118	1.4025
	20092	1.3385	.09402	1.1542	1.5228
	20099	1.2161	.04260	1.1326	1.2996
	20102	1.1178	.03823	1.0429	1.1927
	20106	1.2406	.09230	1.0597	1.4215
	20109	1.1401	.07089	1.0012	1.2790
	20112	1.0956	.06096	.9761	1.2151
(Advisor 2)	20069	1.9142	.12043	1.6782	2.1503
	20072	1.5576	.05422	1.4514	1.6639
	20079	1.8144	.07501	1.6674	1.9614
	20082	1.4520	.05254	1.3490	1.5550
	20089	1.5955	.07222	1.4539	1.7370
	20092	1.5821	.06322	1.4582	1.7060
	20099	1.6335	.07372	1.4890	1.7780
	20102	1.5873	.06593	1.4581	1.7165
	20106	1.8834	.15052	1.5884	2.1784
	20109	1.4237	.06439	1.2975	1.5499
	20112	1.5494	.06912	1.4139	1.6849

Note. Displayed are estimated marginal means derived from reflected (flipped) efficacy scores of advisors with no previous advising experience in the College of Liberal Arts *(n_visits = 4168, new_adv =10).* Output shown is for only two of the ten advisors featured in this group.

Table 20

SPSS Column Headings for Pairwise Comparison Tables (Semesters)

Semester (I)	Semester(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	df	Significance (*p*<.05)	95% Wald Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper

Selected Output - Colleges

College of Liberal Arts

The effective data parameters were as follows: 20069-20112 (no summers except 20106), n_visits=7276, n_adv=18.

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows: $X^2 = 789.4$, df = 144, $p< .001$. The significance value of $p<.001$ (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was a significant main effect for semesters (X^2= 41.755, df= 10, $p< .001$). There was a significant main effect for advisors (X^2= 381.576, df= 17, $p< .001$). Additionally, there was a significant interaction for advisors *semesters (X^2= 207.499, df= 117, $p<. 001$).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The first semester, fall 2006, was statistically different from (worse than) the second semester, spring 2007 (p = .024), spring 2009 (p< .001), and each of the last three long semesters, spring 2010 (p< .001), fall 2010 (p< .001), and spring 2011 (p< .001). Fall 2008 was significantly different from (worse than) four semesters (spring 2009, spring 2010, fall 2010, spring 2011).

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). In general, advisors with the highest semester scores, for example, those who ranked within the top third of advisors for any given semester, consistently remained at the top during their time in the college whereas advisors with the lowest semester scores consistently remained at the bottom and advisors with scores falling in the middle stayed at the middle. One advisor, an exception to these findings, was able to make statistically significant improvement from the middle-third or bottom-third in the first five long-semesters to the top-third in the last five long-semesters (eventually achieving the top score).

The estimated marginal means (EMMEANS) for the top third of advisors were significantly different from the bottom third of advisors. Significance between advisors for the middle third of advisors varied depending on the specific semester and advisor-to-advisor comparisons. None of the advisors had first semester scores that were significantly worse than second semester scores, and five advisors had second semester scores that were statistically improved from the first.

School of Business (20099-20112, n_visits=1913, n_adv=8)

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows: $X^2 = 274.304$, df = 39, $p < .001$. The significance value of $p<.001$ (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was a significant main effect for semesters ($X^2 = 43.427$, df= 4, $p < .001$). There was a significant main effect for advisors ($X^2 = 48.415$, df=7, $p< .001$). Additionally, there was a significant interaction for advisors *semesters ($X^2= 86.529$, df=28, $p< .001$).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The first semester, fall 2009, was significantly different from (worse than) each long semester (spring 2010, fall 2010, and spring 2011). Of the four long semesters in total, the last two (fall 2010, spring 2011) were significantly different (better than) the first two (fall 2009, spring 2010) respectively. The overall results suggested statistically significant improvement during the assessment period for this college.

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). One advising coordinator with supervisory responsibilities consistently had the highest semester EMMEAN scores during the assessment period. The advisors' scores were statistically significant when compared to the other advisors' scores. Only one advisor had scores that were not significantly different from this advisor during specific semesters in the assessment period.

College of Education (20089-20112, n_visits=2858, n_adv=8)

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows: $X^2 = 191.669$, df = 63, $p< .001$. The significance value of $p<.001$ (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was a significant main effect for semesters ($X^2= 18.284$, df= 7, $p= .011$); however, the semester vs. semester comparison yielded a relatively higher *p value* ($p< .011$) for this effect compared to the results of other colleges (p< .001). There was also a significant main effect for advisor (X^2= 48.120, df= 7, p< .001). Additionally, there was a significant interaction for advisors *semesters (X^2= 85.117, df= 49, p= .001).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The first semester, fall 2008, was significantly different from (worse than) four out of seven of the other semesters (spring 2009, fall 2009, summer 2010, and spring 2011). Of the two summer semesters with data, summer 2009 was significantly different (worse than) summer 2010.

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). Advisors with advising titles higher than the rank of senior academic advisor had the highest scores in this college. This group (an assistant dean, two advising coordinators, and an academic counselor) accounted for half of all advisors during the survey period for the college, and their scores were significantly different from the scores of the other advisors. The advisor with the highest advising title of assistant dean had semester EMMEAN scores that were statistically different from all the other advisors' scores. The collective group of experienced advisors had very few semesters that differed statistically from one semester to the next.

College of Fine Arts (20042-20112, n_visits=1523, n_adv=11)

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows: X^2 = 277.340, df = 103, p< .001. The significance value of p<.001 (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was not a significant main effect for semesters (X^2= 27.865, df= 19, *p*= .086). However, there was a significant main effect for advisors (X^2= 28.212, df= 11, *p*= .003). Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect for advisors*semesters (X^2= 124.962, df= 73, *p*< .001).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The first semester, spring 2004, was different from (worse than) 8 out of 12 of the most recent semesters. Beyond this observation, however, a significant pattern between first few semesters and last few semesters did not exist.

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). The College of Fine Arts main waitlist survey drew from the staff of the Office of Student Affairs. The College also had waitlist surveys for each of the large departments such as Art/Art History, Music, and Theater/Dance, however; the department surveys were not part of the dataset collected for this study. Sixty-five percent of the survey responses from the first semester, summer 2004, through the last semester, spring 2011, were for two advisors. This college included not only academic advisors, but also career advisors, and degree evaluators from the Student Affairs office on the waitlist survey. The two people who had the most survey responses from students and who see the most students were academic advisors. The advisors were not significantly different from each other.

College of Natural Sciences (20042-20112, n_visits=7,309, excluded 10,822 front desk only responses; n_adv=24)

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows X^2= 866.069, df = 253, *p*< .001.

The significance value of $p<.001$ (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was not a significant main effect for semesters (X^2= 25.766, df= 21, p= .216). However, there was a significant main effect for advisors (X^2= 206.950, df= 24, p< .001). Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect for advisors *semesters (X^2= 419.149, df= 208, p< .001).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The first semester, fall 2004, was significantly different from (worse than) several other semesters (spring 2005, summer 2006, spring 2006, fall 2007, spring 2008, spring 2009, summer 2009, fall 2009, fall 2010). Summer 2008 was significantly different than (worse than) a few semesters. Overall, there was a lot of statistical consistency between semesters. Thus, there were no significant patterns in semester to semester comparisons.

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). All advisors in the College of Natural Sciences, including departmental advisors, were linked to the waitlist survey. In this college, the Assistant Dean, the academic advising coordinators, and counselors had the highest scores. Across the board, their scores were significantly different from (better than) the scores of every academic advisor with the exception being two senior academic advisors that didn't differ significantly from them.

School of Engineering (20042-20112, except for excluded incomplete/missing 20039 and 20092 semesters; n_visits=5805; n_adv=19)

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows: X^2 = 885.832, df = 201, p< .001.

The significance value of $p<.001$ (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was not a significant main effect for semesters ($X^2=$ 28.369, df= 19, $p=.077$). However, there was a significant main effect for advisors ($X^2=$ 354.946, df= 18, $p<.001$). Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect for advisors *semesters ($X^2=$ 267.570, df= 164, $p<.001$).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The last two semesters, fall 2010 and spring 2011, were statistically different (better than) 11 out of 18 of the previous semesters. The two semesters were not statistically different from each other. Fall 2007 was the only other semester that is statistically different (better than) other semesters; it was not statistically different from the last two semesters, fall 2010 and spring 2011.

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). In the School of Engineering, three senior academic advisors and a senior program coordinator had the highest scores that were statistically significant. Three senior academic advisors (EN_Adv2, EN_Adv3, and EN_Adv4) had scores of 1.2508, 1.2514, and 1.2530 respectively. A senior program coordinator of international programs (EN_Adv1) had a score of 1.1304. There was no significant difference among these scores. The highest score of 1.1304 was significantly different (better than) 11 out of the remaining 15 subjects (total of 19 advisors/staff). There was one subject, a senior academic advisor (EN_Adv19), who had a score that was significantly different (worse than) every other subject. The new advisor to the college had two semesters (summer 2007 and spring 2010) that were significantly different from multiple other semesters; summer 2007 was worse than several other semesters and spring 2010 was better than several other semesters. There was no significant pattern of improvement in the new advisor's scores, but the scores were significantly different from (better than) almost all of the scores of the other advisors.

College of Communications (20039-20099, n_visits=7061, n_adv=16)

Omnibus test. This test was a likelihood-ratio chi-square test of the current model vs. the null. The output results were as follows: X^2 = 1098.904, df = 150, p< .001. The significance value of p<.001 (less than 0.05) indicated that the current model outperformed the null model (or intercept only model) and was statistically significant.

Tests of model effects. There was a significant main effect for semesters (X^2= 70.400, df= 19, p< .001). There was also a significant main effect for advisors (X^2= 334.346, df= 15, p< .001). Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect for advisors *semesters (X^2= 179.776, df= 116, p<. 001).

Pairwise comparisons (semesters). The last semester, fall 2009, was statistically different from (better than) 16 out of 19 of the remaining semesters. The first semester, summer 2003, was not statistically different from any other semester except for the last semester, fall 2009, which it is statistically worse than. Spring 2005 was statistically the worst semester, and it was significantly different from 13 of 19 other semesters. A significant and important observation regarding the College of Communications was that there was a definite abrupt shift in scores starting with spring 2006. For example, almost each and every semester prior to spring 2006 was worse than almost each and every semester spring 2006 and after.

Pairwise comparisons (advisors) and (advisors*semesters). All advisors for the College of Communications were represented in the waitlist survey which included those advisors in a centralized Office of Student Affairs and the various advisors located in the departments. The College does not have any assistant advisor titles represented in the dataset. The College consisted of a majority of academic advising coordinators with a few senior academic advisors mixed in the dataset throughout the years. In general, the scores over time for the senior academic advisors were lower and differed statistically from those of academic advising coordinators.

Award-Winning Advisors

AWA-1 had been a multiple award winner in previous years and had the highest estimated marginal means for advisors over the semesters in College-7 as indicated by a reflected 1.0214 score (the lower the reflected, the higher the actual). This score was significantly different ($p<.05$) and better than every other advisor score in AWA's college. The advisor performed consistently from semester to semester, and there were no statistically significant differences among semesters for this advisor in this college's survey timeframe (20089 – 20112). AWA-2 also was a multiple award winner over the years and has the second highest mean score in College-7 as indicated by a reflected 1.0830 score; it was statistically better than each of the non-award winning advisor scores in the college and was below only that of another award winning advisor in the same college. The advisor has been very consistent throughout time and did not have any semesters that were statistically different from each other. There were two other award-winning advisors, AWA-3 and AWA-4, in College-7. These two advisors had scores that were statistically different from (better than) the scores of non-award winning advisors as well. The two advisors' scores were not statistically different from each other and were not statistically different from the scores of the second highest ranking advisor. AWA-3's scores have been fairly consistent over the course of many semesters. The only semesters that differ statistically from each other were fall 2008 compared with spring 2009, and spring 2009 compared with summer 2009. AWA-4 has been consistent as well; this advisor only had one semester, fall 2010, which was significantly different from another semester.

AWA-5 from College-2 consistently had high scores (low reflected scores) that ranked no lower than fourth best out of an average number of 12 advisors for any given semester of the college's survey timeframe (20069 – 20122). The advisor's fall 2006 score was not significantly different from any other of the advisor's semesters. AWA-5 only had one semester, fall 2007, which was significantly different from other semesters in this college.

AWA-6 has been a multiple award winner over the years and has the highest average mean over the semesters for College-6 as indicated by the advisor's reflected 1.1612 score. This score was significantly different and better than scores for six out of seven other advisors in the college. The advisor's last semester, spring 2011, within this college's survey timeframe (20099 -20112) was statistically better than the advisor's fall 2009 and fall 2010.

New Advisors

No advisors had final semester scores that were statistically worse than their first semester scores. Four advisors had second semester scores that were statistically better than (p<.05) their first semester scores. The seven other advisors' second semester scores remained statistically the same between first and second semesters. Of the four advisors that had second semester scores that were better than their first semester scores, three also had final semester scores that were statistically different (better than) their first semester scores.

NA1's first semester, fall 2006, was significantly different from each semester except for fall 2007. NA2's first semester, fall 2006, was significantly different from each semester except for fall 2007, and fall 2010. NA3's fall 2006 semester was significantly different from each semester except for the advisor's last semester in the College, fall 2008. NA4's fall 2006 semester was not significantly different from any other semester (NA4's last semester was spring 2008). NA5 had zero significantly different semesters. NA6 had zero significantly different semesters. NA7 had zero significantly different semesters. NA8 's fall 2006, spring 2007, fall 2007, and fall 2008 semesters were significantly different from the advisor's last six semesters except for summer 2010; the advisor's spring 2008 semester was significantly different from the last six semesters except for spring 2010 and summer 2010. NA9's fall 2006 was not significantly different from any other of the advisor's semesters. NA10's first semester, 20079, was not significantly different from any of the other semesters. NA11 had two semesters (summer 2007 and spring 2010) that were significantly different from multiple other semesters;

summer 2007 was worse than several other semesters and spring 2010 was better than several other semesters. There was no statistically significant pattern of improvement in NA11's scores across semesters, but each of NA11's semesters were significantly different from (statistically better than) corresponding semesters from NA11's peers.

Courtesy-Efficacy Relationship (Correlation)

A Spearman's Rank Order correlation was run for each of the seven colleges/schools to determine the relationship between all advisors' courtesy and efficacy scores. There was a strong, positive correlation between courtesy and efficacy scores in all of the colleges/schools. The School of Engineering did not have questions about courtesy for advising sessions, although it had courtesy pertaining to front desk. In place of the courtesy variable the college had trust/confidence in advisor as a variable, so I decided to run the test with its score instead. Similarly, there was a strong, positive correlation between trust/confidence in advisor and efficacy scores, which was statistically significant ($r_s(8) = .773$, $p < .001$). SPSS rounds to the third digit so the generated significance value of .000 is expressed as p<.001. The correlation output results generated in SPSS for each college are displayed in the *Tables 21* through *27*.

Table 21

School of Business: Results for Courtesy-Efficacy Correlation

			Courtesy	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	Courtesy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.768**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	1894	1893
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.768**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	1893	1907

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: Courtesy=Q4

Table 22

College of Education: Results for Courtesy-Efficacy Correlation

			Courtesy	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	Courtesy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.851**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	2857	2857
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.851**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	2857	2857

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: Courtesy=mean (Q1+Q2+Q4). Efficacy =mean (Q3+Q5+Q6+Q7)

Table 23

School of Engineering: Results for Courtesy-Efficacy Correlation

			Courtesy	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	Courtesy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.685**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	5557	5548
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.685**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	5548	5594

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: Courtesy=Q12. Efficacy=mean(Q7+Q8+Q9+Q10+Q11)

Table 24

College of Liberal Arts: Results for Courtesy-Efficacy Correlation

			Courtesy	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	Courtesy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.582**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	7259	7238
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.582**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	7238	7242

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: Courtesy=Q1. Efficacy=mean(Q2+Q3+Q4+Q5+Q6+Q7+Q8)

Table 25

College of Natural Sciences: Results for Courtesy-Efficacy Correlation

			Courtesy	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	Courtesy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.690**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	7142	7141
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.685**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	7141	7150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Key: Courtesy=Q4. Efficacy=mean(Q5+Q6).

Table 26

College of Communications: Results for Trust/Confidence-Efficacy Correlation

			TrustConfidence	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	TrustConfidence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.773**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	6945	6937
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.773**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	6937	7021

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Key: TrustConfidence=Q11. Efficacy=mean(Q5+Q6+Q7+Q8+Q9+Q10+Q12)

Table 27

College of Fine Arts: Results for Courtesy-Efficacy Correlation

			Courtesy	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	Courtesy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.736**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	1440	1420
	Efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	.736**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	1420	1426

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Key: Courtesy=Q5. Efficacy=mean(Q6+Q7+Q8)

The primary objective of this section of the research study (the reason for doing the analysis) was to gain detailed insight into the current state of academic advising in each college at the University. Study interests included examining new advisor improvement (efficacy) over time, if college advising centers improved over time, if a correlation existed between courtesy and efficacy, if award-winning advisors have higher total efficacy scores than other advisors, and if advising efficacy varied among groups of advisors based on experience in the field. Written discussion of the key overall findings commences in the final chapter, *Chapter 8 – Summary Discussion & Insights* for this research study.

Analyzing the Open Text Response Comments

Around two thousand total open text comments were reviewed for the fall 2009, spring 2010, summer 2010, and fall 2010 semesters. The first procedure for this part of the research study involved identifying and isolating all negative passages and negative comments, and the underlying purpose was to identify advising areas for improvement. The second procedure involved the coding of a sample consisting of roughly 500 comments, a quarter of the total comments, to identify and establish the major comment categories (themes). The five categories that emerged from the sorting of the sample were as follows: time, demeanor, dependability, communication, and knowledge (guidance). Each of these categories contained subcategories. Although most students left comment responses that were no more than two sentences in length, there were quite a number of students who left passages that contained a paragraph or several paragraphs. Some of these larger passages contained a variety of themes and had to be divided into separate categories. Also, a descriptive phrase could be difficult to code because it might seem at first to fit within two different categories. The context and wording of the phrase had to be carefully considered. For example, students' descriptions of advisors often contained the word "helpful," but an advisor could appear helpful (demeanor) or could be helpful in recommending resources and giving degree plan advice (knowledge).

Time Issues

Students made comments about front desk staff, advisors, and advising services. This category included issues that pertained to timeliness, office traffic, thoroughness, efficiency, scheduling, wait times, and advising times. Several common time-related and/or scheduling issues were identified in the colleges, although it was apparent that some colleges had a higher frequency of occurrences than others. This was the only category where the negative comments equaled or surpassed the positive comments.

Perhaps students did not feel compelled to leave satisfactory comments for aspects of services that they considered to be basic, fundamental, and expected. However, they certainly would feel compelled if inconvenienced by these elements that they considered to be fundamental for fulfilling a minimal-level of service. Additionally, remarks from students who left negative comments often referred to time constraints and pressures during course registration advising. One student remarked, “All of my classes were full and she couldn’t help me remake a new schedule because she had other people to see, so now, not only can I not register for classes, but I wasted two hours waiting to be seen for absolutely nothing.” Some other examples of the common types of negative responses from students (excerpted for brevity) were as follows:

- “The front desk was overwhelmed with phone calls.”
- “I waited almost two hours and then was rushed through the advising meeting.”
- “Phone messages, phone calls, and email were not returned.”
- “There was lack of organization for walk-in lines during busy student traffic.”
- “Advising felt routine and just a formality to remove bar.”
- “Felt rushed out, brief appointment, not thorough at all.”
- Advisors appeared to be stretched too thin and overworked.”
- “The advisor takes too long with individuals during walk-in advising when there is high traffic (took 1.5 hrs to see an advisor for an appointment that lasted only a few minutes to add courses for next semester).”
- “Appointment was not punctual.”
- “Does not respond quickly to urgent emails or phone calls.”
- “Waited 20 minutes to be seen for appointment because advisor ‘didn’t know I was out there’.”
- “There was a long wait time to see advisor and then meeting dragged too long for a simple matter.”
- “My advisor was 15 minutes late coming back from lunch, and I had to wait as others who came in after me were seen before me by other advisors.”

Demeanor

This category gave insight into students' experiences during their advising sessions in relation to how students perceived advisors' dispositions and outward behavior. In general, most advisors received all positive or mainly positive comments with one to three negative comments each semester. A few advisors had semesters with more than three negative comments per semester, and three of these advisors garnered polarized responses, often lengthy, which swung extremely positive or extremely negative. The most commonly used descriptors in positive comments left by students included the words "courteous," "nice," "friendly," "warm," "caring," "welcoming," "attentive," "understanding," "considerate," and "helpful." Negative single-word descriptors numbered about as many as positive ones, and there were many different phrases used to describe negative experiences. Some examples of negative descriptors and phrases extracted from different students' comments included:

- Impatient
- Rude front desk, impatient front desk
- Unwelcoming, rude, condescending, foul mood, appeared inconvenienced, sarcastic, appeared as if the advisor didn't want to be at work
- Adversarial
- Eating food during advising meeting
- Got a please leave now feeling
- Does not make an effort to get to know student
- Tone and facial expression portrayed annoyance
- Extremely condescending
- Appeared as if I were a burden
- Pessimistic, condescending, made me feel like an idiot; will never go see again
- Seemed uninterested in helping (apathetic), uncaring
- Laughed at me, was not nice, made me feel afraid to ask more questions
- Cold, harsh, uncaring, condescending, critical

- Condescending and discourteous, felt badgered about my understanding of policies and courses
- Extremely rude and uncaring
- Unsympathetic, impolite, inconsiderate, confusing, upsetting

The results from the previous section of this chapter revealed that a strong positive correlation existed between advisor courteousness and advisor efficacy as well as between advisor trustworthiness and efficacy. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that an advisor's demeanor affects the student's perception of the advisor's effectiveness and the quality of the advising session.

Dependability

This category of open responses pertained to the dispensing of dependable advising services. Attention to detail, accuracy, availability, reliability, and consistency were subgroups of this category. Of the five major open response categories, this one contained the fewest comments but accounted for the majority of substantial errors in advising, or what advisors call "egregious errors." The following are examples of negative student remarks, abbreviated and edited for this category:

- The front desk scheduled me with the incorrect advisor.
- I was given inaccurate information that was based on my previous major.
- I received contradictory advice about raising maximum hours for the semester.
- The advisor dropped the wrong class and made a few schedule mistakes.
- The advisor failed to turn in a form so I had to late register.
- My advisor was disorganized, and I received inconsistent service during different advising meetings with the same advisor.
- I was misadvised for courses in previous semesters which led to delayed graduation.
- I was surprised to find that I had 7 hrs lacking to graduate when I was told in previous meetings that things were fine.
- Inattentive, forgetful…the advisor did not send several petitions for decisions.

- This was not helpful; I felt that poor advice was received in regards to my situation.
- I had to see multiple advisors in different offices about a simple, shared issue.
- It was a challenge to make an appointment for a graduation check.
- My advisor failed to account for credit that I received for a course through an AP test.
- My advisor irresponsibly forgot to remove my advising bar; therefore, I cannot register at the moment… she has not returned any of my e-mails or calls regarding this matter.

Communication

This category contained the most student comments. Students elaborated on a variety of issues related to listening, clarity, elaboration, attentiveness, and concern (voiced). There were soft-skill elements of this category that were similar to the demeanor category. For example, a phrase with the descriptor “attentive” could be placed under either communication or demeanor category depending on subtleties in the language, context, and phrasing of the comments passage; a student could mean that an advisor was an attentive listener, one who was able to focus on what the student was saying and could remember, identify, or repeat a student’s concerns, or could mean that the advisor was attentive in demeanor (gestures, facial expressions, general behavior). Students’ remarked positively towards advisors who were clear, on point, reassuring, motivating, and provided good explanation. Also many students left positive comments about advisors that listened to them, took into account what the students needed, and spoke honestly with them; for example, one student stated, “My advisor remembered what I had discussed with him at the beginning, and spoke to me reassuringly about how I could still accomplish my goals. He even repeated information for me about a simple but important matter without appearing annoyed." Another student remarked, "My advisor told me in real terms what I needed to know rather than give me a run around."

Although students left plenty of positive remarks from student experiences with advisor communication, they were not shy in leaving negative student comments as well. Several students also left advice on how their advisors could communicate better. One student left the following remarks, "Although I understand it is important to tell students to think about other options in case they do not get into a professional school, telling them they could become parole officers is not exactly the way I would go about it." Another student left the following remarks, "I usually have 15 minutes worth of questions, but do not leave this office for an hour. [Advisor] spends the majority of the meeting sharing stories or discussing issues not related to [major]. He is very entertaining; however, I would much rather spend the time strictly being advised and be done in 15 minutes than spend an hour talking about movies, oil changes and funny stories." Other examples of students' negative comments (condensed) were as follows:

- Just pointed to websites already seen; needs work on communication skills
- Made me feel dumb when spoken to in that manner
- Lack of privacy in office space
- Vague with answers
- Did not ask what I was interested in… Told me all the classes I should take for a major I never said that I was interested in, which was a total waste of time… Did not explain p/f
- Had an adversarial approach while arguing with me about my plans
- Unnerving, deflating, and did not provide options
- Extremely condescending while talking down to me
- Vague answers, not much elaboration, too eager to refer to someone else
- Pessimistic, condescending, made me feel like an idiot; will never go see again
- Gave confusing advice
- Never replies to emails

- Never returns my phone calls
- Ignored my statements and instead promoted own and institutional views
- Cold, harsh, uncaring, condescending, critical speech
- Spoke condescendingly and discourteously - felt badgered about my understanding of policies and course
- Provided no options about transferring. Was spoken to in a rude, unsympathetic, unfriendly manner by advisor and person at front desk
- Ridiculous explanation. Impersonal bureaucratic administration that doesn't see students and treats us like a business
- Bias for own college, did not provide alternative ideas - only agreed with me
- Had to see multiple advisors in different offices about a shared issue which could have been explained by one person
- Ignored questions, uncaring, did not listen
- Disheartening administration and bureaucracy that doesn't meet or talk directly with students

Knowledge

Experience (proficiency with advising/advising tools), understanding policies and degree requirements, recommending valid resources, and providing guidance were subgroups of this category. The majority of positive comments for this category were left by students who commented about knowledgeable and informative advisors and students who stated that they received helpful guidance in regards to their academic direction and personal goals. However, some students commented on having negative advising experiences when discussing plans to transfer into other departments or colleges at the University, when discussing the transfer of credits from another institution to the University, and when discussing how study abroad credits fit into a particular degree plan. Other students stated that they had expected their advisors to be able to give them more specific information about professors and discuss specific classes beyond general degree plan requirements. Samples of negative responses (condensed) from the knowledge category were as follows:

- Was advised to take unnecessary classes
- Was placed into a biology course after the semester began by another advisor and was told it would count towards my part 1 natural sciences requirement; however, it didn't
- Was not knowledgeable about different degree plans… had trouble with advising beyond basics…took a lot of time to look up info about majors and courses
- Had difficulty giving out information to transfer to different majors
- Lacking more generalized knowledge of courses outside specific Engineering major
- Lacked knowledge of outside sources for tutoring
- Uninformed, unknowledgeable about changes in foreign language sequences
- Was referred to two different departments by one advisor before returning to speak with another advisor in the same office who was able to answer my initial questions
- Was not knowledgeable about new major or who to refer to
- Forgive me for the low ratings… was expecting to be supplied with information about how my classes would benefit my other requirements, or if one class was a little better than the other…really wanted someone to guide me on a least my first batch of classes
- Had to take a summer course due to an error on an advisors part and needed it to graduate… was misinformed many times about when the course needed to be finished and was never informed about the date I needed to apply to graduate
- Needed suggestions and more advice on academics and classes that will help out a student better and be beneficial academically
- Was not able to receive a direct response to specific questions I asked regarding graduation and policies
- Do not recommend UT online extension courses… goes way beyond reasonable expectations for what in reality are freshman and maybe sophomore level courses…horrible experience
- Had no knowledge of the different [new major] tracks to help me choose one.

Summary

This Chapter examined the post-appointment survey instruments of seven colleges and provided the results of analysis conducted on data sets for academic semesters 2003 through 2011 and for several semesters of open-response student comments. The Chapter provided calculated means and other standard computations, percentage of agreement, frequency tables, histograms, and selected SPSS output from tests associated with the Generalized Linear Model described in Chapter 3. Quantitative analysis focused on tests of model effects and pairwise comparisons for semesters, advisors, and advisor–semester interactions for each college data set. The Chapter also provided selected output results for three additional mini-studies focused on award-winning advisors, new advisors, and correlation relationships between variables such as courtesy and efficacy. The Chapter concluded with the results from the thematic analysis of several semesters of open-text student survey comments.

CHAPTER 6: STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

Participants were randomly selected from previously obtained First-Year-Interest Group (FIG) class rosters, registration waitlists, scholastic probation caseloads, graduation lists, and career services registration. As described in Chapter 3, the potential list of participants was narrowed considerably. The remaining candidates went through a screening process, and the final selections were invited to participate in the study. Three separate focus groups were conducted, and the same general topic areas were discussed in each meeting. Two interview versions presented a different grouping and minor variation of the questions, but the topic areas of inquiry remained the same for all groups. The interview guides, sans protocols, are presented in *Appendix D*. The focus-group questions addressed the overarching purposes of this section of the research study: to understand student perceptions (expectations and experiences) of academic advisors and to understand student ideas of effective programs (characteristics, preferences) based on their advising experiences. Individual perspectives and elaboration on situational experiences were encouraged. Dynamic discussions ensued as students discussed changes in their own expectations as a result of interactions with advisors, and several themes related to the areas of inquiry emerged. The major themes reflected from the focus groups are represented by the central headings in this Chapter. These major themes, or primary subject matter areas, represent the topic areas that emerged from the discussions and occupied the most time during the focus group conversations. The themes also inspired subthemes that are illuminated by student comments and quotes from the discussions.

Early Student Perceptions and Expectations of the Role of Advisor

Most students expressed either that they did not know what to expect of advisors or that they thought advisors were synonymous in function to high school guidance counselors. The extent of many students' understanding of advisors was limited and distorted in the belief that advisors were supposed to "help get you into courses" or "give you classes." Based on these initial beliefs, students expected advisors to be versed in the minutia of individual class meeting times, course syllabi, faculty teaching styles, and course-difficulty levels at the university. Moreover, some students inaccurately perceived academic advising centers as customer service offices with the sole purpose of seeing students and attending to their needs. Several of the participants, especially the first-year students, stated that they expected to be "handed a course schedule" each semester by their advisors. One student had the following expectations for her advisor: "to sit down with me to plan out class meeting times and provide course options that are not in time conflict with each other." Thus, one important finding was that students repeatedly described advising preferences that were characteristic of prescriptive advising. Although students, through summer orientation presentations and college handbooks, had been introduced to dozens upon dozens of courses that could fulfill their degree plan requirements, they still expected advisors to choose their classes and make decisions for them. One student described her early expectations of the role of an academic advisor as follows:

> I didn't know what to think when I got here. I went through orientation, but there was so much information and things were kind of chaotic because I didn't know if I would be able to get all of my classes, and registration was the same week.

> They didn't tell us at the orientation meetings if we would have a personalized [assigned] advisor, and I didn't know who my advisor was until just before the actual face-to-face meeting. At the end of the meeting, I had to ask whether she would continue to be my advisor when school started because nothing had been said about future appointments. It didn't bother me whether I had an assigned advisor, but I really just needed someone who would be there for me when needed and who could tell me about good classes.

Another finding was that the understanding a student held about the advising process affected the expectations that the student had for both the process itself and the outcomes of the process. Those students who described having less than close relationships with their high school counselors/school administrators expected less of a personal relationship and interaction with a college advisor than students who reported a close interpersonal relationship. Some students stated that they had been skeptical that they would be provided with enough time to meet with an advisor due to the large student population and size of the University, and others thought that maybe their future instructors could advise them.

Reasons Students Don't Utilize Advising

Most of the participants in the focus groups indicated that they had participated in advising during their academic careers, but the frequency of visits varied due to many factors. Whether advising was required depended on the specific college, the time of year and the student's classification (number of credit hours, academic status, and major). The most common method of enforcement for mandatory advising was the use of the registration bar which prevented the affected students from registering for classes until the bars were cleared. The most frequently mentioned reasons for students having bars included the following: not attending Orientation, missing a scholastic probation meeting, failing to meet departmental advising requirements prior to the registration period, withdrawing late within a semester, and transferring to a new college or major.

Some students stated that they had not visited their advisors except during mandatory advising times. A few other students mentioned that they had not been required to see advisors or had not spent much time with advisors because they were allowed to “just show up” (to get a bar removed) or to email their schedules to advisors and get cleared to register. Several students mentioned that they had not gone to advising much early in their academic careers but started going as they got closer to completing their degrees. An important finding was that these students expressed they had not understood the value of advising, whether it was learning about a new opportunity such as study abroad or undergraduate research, or developing a more strategic academic plan. There was some support for the notion that students sometimes prefer prescriptive advising in particular circumstances and that students tend to seek out this type of advising when they don’t understand the scope of advising or what advising can do for them. Although there were a couple of students who indicated that they had primarily self-advised throughout their academic careers to date, the majority of students indicated that they had at least some, limited interaction with advisors through mandatory advising and/or sporadic voluntary visits to advising offices triggered by academic or personal events.

Students revealed their most common reasons for not seeing advisors or not visiting them more frequently. Students provided many explanations in our discussions, but five main categories for reasons emerged as follows: 1) negative perceptions or impressions: a previously discouraging or lackluster advising experience; 2) inconvenience: advising place, time, availability, 3) lack of responsibility and accountability for one's own education: laziness, apathy, poor demeanor, entitlement, 4) lack of appreciation for advising: inaccurate or limited understanding of the advising process and benefits, 5) self-sufficiency: the abundance of advising aids, especially online resources such as degree plans, course syllabi/course description databases, course instructor surveys, MyEdu, and the interactive degree audit. Examples students' remarks for the categories included the following:

- "Advisors were not helpful… I felt rushed and received wrong information before."
- "My advisor discouraged me from aspiring toward challenging goals."
- "I believe that I already know what I need to know."
- "I didn't know who to ask or where to go for my particular issue. I emailed the Dean a couple of times; I didn't know that Deans don't usually respond to students directly."
- "It's probably silly, but I felt a bit awkward going to see an advisor because I didn't really know what to ask."
- "I haven't sought out advising, but I plan on doing so when I'm not so busy."
- "I think I was just being lazy. There were plenty of times when I could have just dropped in to see an advisor, especially in the mornings. I shouldn't be telling you this, but I skipped out on an advising appointment once because I was exhausted from going to classes earlier in the day."
- "I don't like crowds and prefer to avoid the chaos that surrounds them when possible. It's like that whenever registration advising begins, and I would prefer just to advise myself first and ask questions later."
- "My previous advisor was inaccessible. I prefer to meet in person and there aren't enough drop-in times, and it has been a hassle to make an appointment because there are always time conflicts or times when my advisor is doing other things."
- "Advisors never responded to my email questions so I just figured that they didn't care about my issues…Based on that, I didn't feel that going to the advising office would help me much anyways.
- I had some bad advising experiences with advisors at previous institutions so it took me awhile before I started seeing advisors regularly, but so far things are good here."

- “I don’t need an advisor to tell me what I can and can’t do with my education. I don’t like to be told what to do from people who don’t understand or know me.”
- “My advisor was impersonal so I stopped going except when I had no choice.”
- “I didn’t understand all the choices available to me and how advisors could help me.”

Experiences with Advising

The large majority of students had very positive experiences with advising overall. Several students described informative and engaging first-time experiences with advising such as during Orientation, and many students mentioned that their impressions of advising had improved as they progressed through their time at the University. Joselyn, a Liberal Arts freshman remarked, “I thought I was just going to be a number in such a large college, but from day one I’ve been surprised. I couldn’t believe that I was scheduled for a meeting with an advisor on a one-to-one basis; I was almost certain that my registration advising would be in a large group.” Howard, a junior with a Business major, described his overall experience throughout the years with his advisor as follows:

> I’ve had the same advisor since I started here at UT. He is always helpful, knowledgeable, and has given me great advice and guidance. He has kept me on track for graduation and has recommended resources and events to enhance my experience at UT. I always look forward to our meetings because he puts me at ease and helps me to clarify my plans each semester. It’s great to have someone who believes in you and who will work with you continually to help you become even more successful.

Sharing another positive experience about advisors, Cindy, an Education major, shared the following:

> I transferred colleges at the university early on and have had a few different advisors who have been fine. But, my current advisor who I’ve had for a few semesters now is just extraordinary. I always appreciate her smiling face and all around positive attitude despite all that she has on her plate. She really cares about

> my success as a student, understands my special circumstances, and advises what I can do to reach my full potential. She genuinely cares about students and believes that people should love and appreciate life and those around them and that every stranger is an opportunity for kindness.

Students widely acknowledged that advisors have the “unique and challenging role of being some of the first adults to interact with the students on campus” and that “from the beginning of orientation through graduation, advisors can provide students with an opportunity to build a relationship with someone who can assist them in their transitions to college and development throughout”. The advising system, a network of professional, faculty, and student peer advisors was a focal point in many of the discussions. Accordingly, several students described how various forms of advising had been useful to them.

After much back-and-forth rationalization about the "right major," Tamera found that her decision to major in Ethnic Studies was a "decision from the heart and soul”, and she had to follow her interests despite concerns from some of her family. Tamera found interaction with faculty easy in African and African Diaspora Studies, a smaller and more intimate department. Indeed, having faculty who knew her and were her advocates on campus was "better than getting an A" in helping to build academic momentum toward success. She credited her staff and faculty advisors for introducing her to various events such as faculty seminars which she said was "a huge step" towards expanding meaningful interaction with faculty.

David, who is headed to Insead ‘s MBA program after he graduates, began his discussion of his advising experience by admitting that he had seldom been in to see a college advisor. However, David’s experience showed that there were many modes of advising and that even limited person-to-person advising interactions had a positive impact on his college experience. Even though he hadn't been in to see an advisor in person as much as he had hoped, he had become proficient in using the interactive degree audit system and other advising resources, and he often used his college’s interactive FAQ or email for quick questions. He credited his first couple of meetings with advisors for motivating him and establishing his mindset for academic success. He mentioned that advisors were responsible for demonstrating the usefulness of online registration and advising tools, teaching him to be more self-sufficient in taking charge of his education, and encouraging him to be more proactive with campus opportunities.

Kasie, a second year student, spoke to the importance of peer advising. As a Gateway Program scholar she was paired with an older student, a peer mentor, who helped her with the big picture. Kasie mentioned that lower-division students can be overwhelmed as they keep in mind the checklist of requirements while simultaneously trying to explore their interests and make career and life decisions. She suggested more coordination in campus advising so that, for example, students caught between colleges can get useful advising.

Overall, only a few students commented about the occasional negative encounter with advising, and a couple described having feelings of indifference. Interestingly, most of these students’ experiences were not due to the general professionalism or ability of advisors but rather the disappointment of students’ uniformed expectations, communication problems, or policy related issues. Of the few encounters that referred to lack of professionalism and ability/knowledge, students described advisors as “rude,” “condescending,” “unsympathetic,” or “impatient,” and the advising experience as “disheartening,” “stressful,” or “unhelpful.” These students pointed to verbal exchanges with advisors in situations regarding transfer advising, restricted/multiple majors, course/degree/career practicality, registration issues (raising maximum hours/course restrictions/late registration), and appeals/petitions. Nevertheless, of the handful of students who described unhelpful advisement encounters, many of these students were quick to point out that the majority of their advising experiences were positive ones and that they had participated in many more useful advising sessions than unsatisfactory ones.

Perceptions Change through Advising Experiences

Several students described their changing perceptions of the advising process as they became more cognizant of their student responsibilities, academic/life skills, college purposes, and personal goals/interests. Many of these students reflected on how initial frustrations with advisors stemmed from students’ own educational immaturities or a lack of understanding about the role of advisors and the advising process. Joseph, an undeclared, sophomore in Liberal Arts, responded:

> I remember feeling quite frustrated after advising sessions with my previous advisors during the first couple of meetings or so because I expected them to tell me which classes to take and to explain which classes were easy or hard, but they basically would say that it depended upon my major direction… that it was up to me and that I should take some time to look at a couple of degree plans and explore the online resources first. I would feel irritated and even mad at the advisors whenever I left the meetings because I never would come away with what I wanted out of the advising meetings. I mean I was thinking that I paid all this money to go to school, so I was expecting more from advising, and I didn’t feel things should be so complicated.

The student continued:

> But eventually, I began to realize that maybe they were making a point about how I should approach my education, and I discovered that there was some intrinsic value to what they were saying since the general message from them was the same. I did not understand this message until I completed an advising session with a third advisor who has since become my permanent advisor of choice. My previous two advisors were right on point with their message, but I think their approach, the communication, could have been better - their delivery was too direct for me to handle at the time, and I felt like they could have spent more time to explain things about the degree plans and other resources.

The student further explained:

> I'm not sure if I would have been ready to listen to everything they had to say because we hadn't met much, and we didn't have much time to get to know each other… So, I hadn't developed a certain level of trust to be able to accept some of the things that they were telling me. It was different though with my current advisor; when I first met him, he just seemed genuinely interested in getting to know more about me and my academic situation. He also was very patient and thorough, and he spent the time to explain the benefits of the resources available to me and sat there with me to show me how to use some of them. One of the things that he explained to me was that he wanted all of his students to be proactive and responsible in their own education and to better understand their own motivations for moving forward. He also expressed that he felt it was important for us to learn the tools to be able to become more self-sufficient in routine advising, and he explained how just a little time spent on learning how to read degree plans and use tools such as IDA (interactive degree audit) would go a long way and provide benefits many times over. At that moment, that's when I really got it, and I truly understood how to get the most out of advising.

The example that Joseph provided was just one among several similar experiences about student development and evolving perceptions of advising that students shared during the focus group sessions with me. An important theme that emerged from these discussions was the element of trust and its importance in establishing and facilitating effective student-advisor interactions.

Establishing and Developing Trust

Students overwhelmingly stated that they based their trust initially on a welcoming demeanor and the knowledge level, or the level of expertise that they perceived their advisors to have. Said Lisa, an Engineering student, "I wouldn't feel confident if my advisor needed to look up a lot of things; my advisor needs to know her stuff for me to follow her advice." Michelle, a Natural Science freshman, stated, "I just feel comfortable talking with my advisor because she is always warm, receptive, and non-judgmental. I think that is why I'm able to confide in her and take her advice." Another student, Rachel, revealed the following:

> My advisor knows requirements like the back of her hand, and has personal experiences that she can draw from when I ask for advice. I don't think I could ask for a better advisor. She has gained my respect not only in a professional manner, but my trust as a mentor-mentee and a friend due to her job knowledge, insight, and personality.

When asked about how trust was established further, students consistently described specific advisor characteristics that they valued such as honesty, integrity, concern, and accountability; they also mentioned important practices of advisors such as respecting others, communicating effectively, building rapport, and providing motivation and guidance. Marcos, a Communications major expressed the following:

> I don't trust people who talk like they know everything, but don't know me. I'm not going to listen to someone who isn't genuine and who doesn't really care about what I'm trying to accomplish. At the very least, an advisor can listen to what I have to say first and not be so condescending about my pursuit of a specific major. You don't have to agree with me, but take some time to get to know me first and allow me some time to work on my plan. Show some sincerity or concern, and provide me with some other options to reach my goals.

Perhaps, Alicia, a dual-degree senior in Communications and Liberal Arts, summed up the student-advisor interaction best with her sentiments on the matter:

> Trust has to run both ways, and I've benefited more from advising because I put more into it. I feel an obligation to honestly express my abilities and interests to the advisor while respecting the advisor and placing my trust in him to guide me appropriately. Likewise, I expect this same respectful honest communication from the advisor in return. I also expect my advisor to demonstrate some concern for my development and to be accountable for things such as providing current and accurate information.

Seeking Support and Information

Students' discussions about what they sought and valued most from advising sessions revolved around two themes: support and information. After establishing reciprocated trust and respect with advisors, students developed the expectations that they would be supported in their educational and student life endeavors. They also inquired about different types of information as they became more assertive in asking for help.

Support

Students described various forms of support, and their collective responses revealed four subthemes of motivation, insight, care, and responsiveness. Students expressed that motivation was a determinant factor in their academic and personal successes and that advisors played an integral role. Students relied on advisors for the following:

- "…lending the occasional spark…"
- "…strategies to remain engaged in a class…"
- "…someone to push or motivate me, to figure out my motivations for my major or attending college…"
- " …how to keep up my good grades…"
- " …becoming proactive with my education…"

- "…to explore my reasons for wanting to pursue a particular career path…"
- "…applying for scholarships, internships, and using campus resources…"
- "…getting to know my TA and instructor, focusing during finals week…"

Another subtheme, insight, was revealed to be a key component of support, and it was mentioned almost as frequently as the subtheme of motivation. Students often asked for their advisors' insights into various matters and considered them when contemplating and making important decisions. "Good advice…" said one student, "Being away from home, I rely on my advisor to help me get ideas rolling in my mind and to talk things through so that I can create a plan and make the most appropriate choices." Another student remarked, "My advisor is someone who has worked with many people in my field and can discuss where the industry is headed and put me in touch with upperclassmen and faculty who can assist me with my goals."

A third subtheme and component of support, care, yielded perhaps the most heartfelt and elaborate responses from students. Several students acknowledged the importance of advisors being present in their lives and described them as being "warm", "open", and "receptive". Maria, a college freshman, explained:

> I came from the valley and had no idea what to expect from the college experience. I didn't even know what my goals were when I got here, other than knowing that I needed to graduate from college. I was the first to attend college in the family, and my parents were very proud that I had gotten into such a great University. But, I felt very lost and a bit homesick throughout most of my first semester because I had so many aspirations but didn't know my true direction, and I missed my friends and family back home. I thought that I might disappoint my family and that made me really sad and often left me frustrated with school. Gradually, things got better though, and I've become a lot more comfortable in this new environment. I believe that my advisors had a lot to do with that. One of my advisors reached out to me and worked with me on adjusting my outlook and managing my stress. Another advisor contacted me and helped me with my academic and career goals, and recommended resources and special programs for

> me. Because of my advisors, I feel more focused and less stressed out. I've also made several new friends from student organizations and study groups that they have recommended to me. But more than anything, I feel more secure and content with myself and knowing that I can succeed here and that there are people who actually care about my academics and my well-being. I'm extremely grateful for their support.

An important finding that was revealed from discussions with students such as Maria was that the notion of the advisor as a caring expert had as much to do with tangible outreach as it did with advisor approaches in programs such as orientation or specific advising strategies in individual advisement meetings.

The fourth subtheme of support, responsiveness, was based on student remarks about how approachable, available, and dependable advisors were to students. Students reported that their experiences with advisors' responsiveness, especially those from their initial meetings, had a huge impact on their perceptions about the quality of the advisor and the level of support that was received. All students, regardless of their scholastic status or propensity to visit advisors, expressed the desire for dependable and responsive advisors. An honors-level college senior stated, "From the time I entered the University, my advisors have been extremely supportive and have been very accessible. I appreciate that they frequently reached out to me and took an active interest in my plans." Another student commented:

> I know that some of my friends have had problems with advisors getting back to them whenever they call or email, but those situations seemed to be during busy times such as registration advising. Personally, I've never had a problem with getting a hold of my advisor because she is always quick to respond to phone messages or emails. When she is busy, she will sometimes send me a quick message to check on me first and then contact me to discuss details later. I think she is excellent at prioritizing my questions because she will always get back to

> me immediately if I have a temporary crisis or time-sensitive issue to discuss. I feel that I can always count on her for support.

A third student described dealing with her feelings of whether to see an advisor ever again after the student's deflating experiences with an impersonal and unresponsive advisor. The student mentioned that those experiences had her feeling unsupported and lost about her purpose and direction at school. The student remarked:

> My advisor frequently seemed impatient and annoyed during meetings, and would not discuss matters beyond what was immediately apparent. Several times, I felt like I was being rushed out. A typical meeting with the advisor would last less than five minutes. I had to schedule subsequent appointments to get additional follow up questions answered because he never responded to emails – not once! I mean, it could be a simple question, but he never gave me a response, and I would end up having to repeat the process all over again. During my final appointment, I left feeling more confused about my major and courses than before I had gotten there, and I couldn't believe that my questions were met with condescending remarks and expressions from the advisor.

Information

If the need for support was the second most mentioned reason why students sought out their advisors, then the need for information was the top reason. Students reported that the majority of their interactions with advisors were to inquire about, gain, and understand information. This included information about majors and degrees, about policies and procedures, and about options available. The information that students needed from advisors varied as much as the students did, with "getting the details" and "maintaining progress" being major points of emphasis. Specifically, students stated that they required big picture advice as well as detail-oriented information. Procedural knowledge was valuable to students, and many reported that they wanted to know what they needed to do in various situations.

Flow of knowledge - communication exchange. The importance of accurate, timely, and relevant information was manifested in the desires, expectations, and/or experiences of students to have advisors serve as "central hubs" and "one-stop sources" of information. Several students reported having expectations that academic advisors would have "general knowledge about all things" such as majors and minor requirements, financial aid, career services, internships, housing, stress/anxiety counseling, and graduate school matters, but they discovered that there was a decentralization of student services within most colleges and at the University in general. These students reported that although many academic advisors were able to assist with all sorts of matters, some were unable perhaps due to more specialization in their roles (the scope of academic advising), less experience with matters beyond "academic" advising, or the preferences of individual advisors to "stick with the academics."

Although students acknowledged that most academic advisors had strictly defined roles and that there were more appropriate sources for information (other student services offices designated to handle relevant matters), students indicated a desire for their academic advisors to have fundamental knowledge in all common matters pertaining to students and to be more hands-on when referring students to other campus offices. One student elaborated:

> I've gone to advising many times, and I've seen many different advisors. It seems that there is quite a bit of incongruence in what [academic] advisors know and what they are willing to share with me, and there is much variance in the level of familiarity that advisors have with academic or non-academic matters outside their departments. My first two advisors were very knowledgeable about all sorts of student matters and knew plenty about various academic majors, whereas my last two advisors seemed to lack general knowledge in other areas or

> were reluctant to discuss these areas with me. I think it would be useful if every academic advisor knew general information about areas of studies, the core, and things like study abroad, scholarships, and university policies and procedures.

Another student who shared similar thoughts remarked:

> I'm seeking multiple majors, and I often find myself getting referred to other offices, sometimes seemingly unnecessarily, and spending a lot of time trekking across campus to get the information I need. I understand that this is a huge university and that resources are scattered everywhere so that it is not physically possible to have all the different types of advising services centralized in one place, but maybe all advisors could be trained to be more mindful of referring students to other offices only when it's truly necessary and doing a better job at formalizing and streamlining the referral process so that a student doesn't have to explain her entire situation all over again. At the very least, advisors should make a greater effort to update their knowledge pertaining to general policies in other student service offices.

Attempting to explain experiences such as those mentioned in the examples above, students reported that insufficient communication among advisors and weak inter-department relationships contributed to a lack of understanding of other programs and services across advising units and departments. Students also suggested that insufficient communication contributed to an inefficient and untimely flow of information, especially regarding policy and procedural changes. In general, students expected and relied on their advisors to share current, relevant, and pertinent information with them and to be timely and accurate in doing so. Additionally, students expected their advisors to advocate for them when presenting information with other staff or administrators.

Acquiring details. Students reported their need for obtaining detailed information such as process, procedural, and clarifying details from their advisement sessions. Even students who rarely visited their advising centers stated that they had sought out advisors for this type of information. From freshman to senior, probationary to honors, a wide range of students expressed that they appreciated advisors who spent time to explain "the details." Students explained that process and procedural details provided context and clarity to their situational issues whereas clarifying details provided students with the confidence and assurance to move forward with their plans. The content of students' conversations for details most often centered on topics such as degree progress, navigating and utilizing resources (campus and online), and getting the most out of the college experience. Types of questions that students asked advisors were often of the "how do I …" and the "what do I need to do…" variety. Examples of students' questions included:

- What do I need to do to receive credit or to ask for a substitution?
- What is the process for submitting a petition or appeal for a decision?
- How do I use the degree audit?
- What do I need to do to graduate?
- How do I transfer or declare a double major?
- How do I register for/drop classes?
- What's an appropriate semester schedule?
- What do I need to do to return to the University?

Effective Advisors and Advising Programs

Participants in the focus group sessions were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and discussing "effective" advising as they explored the impact of advising and reflected upon the nature of "quality" advising. During these discussions, students explored what they have received and learned from advising, what they want more of, and what they think could be changed or improved. These areas served as general areas of focus and drivers of our conversations. Students were asked to reflect upon their current and previous experiences with advisors and advising programs and were challenged to elaborate on developing themes during our discussions.

Discordant Ideas and Facing Reality

An important subtheme that arose throughout the different focus group sessions was the idea of "facing the truth" and "moving out of denial". It was clear from our conversations that some students had difficulty dealing with academic reality and demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to properly gage their own efforts and abilities within the context of their perceived interests and academic performance. Students provided examples that demonstrated that they lacked the emotional maturity to consistently manage cognitive dissonance and respond properly to changes affecting their plans. They also lacked the introspective intelligence and conscientiousness to process and assess their plans in order to make sound, informed decisions that relied on proper self-assessment and evidence rather than hope, speculation, and unsubstantiated beliefs. Pride, disillusionment, inexperience, false confidence, and apathy were reasons mentioned by students for falling into denial and not being able to accept the truth about themselves and their experiences. One student commented on his previous scholastic situation and shared what several students with similar experiences had expressed. The student confessed:

> It was easier for me to remain in a state of denial about my scholastic situation and deflect the blame onto everything and everyone but me. I had known for quite some time that I was having trouble, but continued in school like nothing

> was wrong… And I suppose I became so disenchanted with school, and I just kept going through the motions. It hurt me that I had been so successful in high school but I wasn't meeting my expectations here in college and that I couldn't get into the restricted major that I wanted. I didn't want my friends and family to know, and I wasn't ready to accept my situation yet at the time. I guess my pride and inability to take responsibility for my situation led to me just going through routines in school and not making any changes or taking action to correct my behavior.

Another student shared her experience with evolving interests and academic direction:

> I thought I had so many things that I was interested in and wanted to pursue for a major, but I wasn't being honest with myself about these things, and I didn't have enough perspective to understand what I wanted to get out of school, what a major really was and what my goals were. I mean, I used to pursue things that sounded good or that I thought would look good on paper for my future career. The fact was that I didn't really know what I wanted to do for an occupation, and I hadn't thoroughly researched any of the majors. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit this, but I was simple-minded in that I didn't really care about the major but rather I wanted to know which major would put me on track with the highest paying career. Due to this narrow-minded thinking, I thought that I needed to get into the Finance major or to pursue something that sounded powerful like the corporate communication studies major or the international relations and global studies major. To this day, my advisor still teases me about my previous tendency to go blindly chasing after majors that sounded cool. Without me doing any research into them, I was suckered by the names and unable to recognize that there were other majors that would fit me better and that would allow me to accomplish the same career goals.

A third student provided the example of overconfidence or "false confidence" that contributed to denial about his early academic performance:

> Even after I did poorly my first semester and barely avoided a first dismissal after my second semester, I still had not changed my study habits, class preparation, or my approach to my education in general. In fact, I was encouraged that I was able to avoid a dismissal and got by with little effort and attention to my academics. I never expected to earn unsatisfactory grades, and when I received my first 'D' at the end of the first semester, I just ignored it as a fluke and attributed it to my own disinterest in the class. When I received a couple more unsatisfactory grades in the second semester, I still was not concerned because I felt like I was in control and attributed my performance to part of the college learning experience. I had taken Calculus twice and was about

> to sign up for it a third time when I was informed by an advisor that I was out of chances and that I would have to take it at a different institution.

Effective advisors were able to present the truth or reality of a situation and motivate students to confront unrealistic expectations and recognize and understand the true inclinations and motivations for students' actions. Students mentioned that the best advisors were able to communicate and give constructive advice without "being condescending … coming across as uncaring", "making one feel like an idiot" or "leaving one frustrated and more unsure of one's academic plans or direction." Students further explained that effective advisors "weren't afraid to call things as they see them," "didn't just tell me what I wanted to hear," "provided multiple options and possibilities for accomplishing my goals," "encouraged me to ask myself the difficult questions I had been avoiding," and "made me recognize and own up to my real intentions for wanting to pursue a specific major

Taking Responsibility – Being Accountable

A second subtheme that arose from our discussions on effective advising was taking responsibility for one's education. This involved students' accepting responsibility for their decision-making as well as taking an active interest in their academic direction and student development. Several students stated that effective advisors were able to help them understand what it takes to be successful at the university and how to handle challenges by moving forward with purpose and direction. According to students, effective advisors challenged them to think about their courses and degree requirements, to learn to use advising tools such as degree plans, course instructor surveys, and degree audits rather than repeatedly having to rely on others for advice. Students commented that effective advisors “didn’t just do everything for you” nor did they “abandon you to do everything yourself,” rather they “taught you how to make informed decisions by exploring and utilizing various resources” and “pushed you to be more proactive – less talking and more doing.” One student elaborated on the thoughts of others as follows:

> I think, as a student – especially if you’re just starting college, it is not always apparent what you should be doing or what you should be trying to get out of meetings with advisors. I remember my first meeting was during Orientation and all I could think of was that I needed to get good classes. I just wanted my advisor to give me a list of courses and say that everything was ok. Besides that, I also had tons of questions that I wanted to ask, but I was all over the place when presenting questions to my advisor.

The student continued:

> Very patiently, he prioritized my questions for me in the order of relevancy and urgency. He quickly broke down the degree plan in five minutes and showed me how to use it. He provided me with several options almost immediately, but emphasized that I would need to do some research and make the informed decisions ultimately. He then introduced and explained to me the degree audit tool and other online resources such as the course syllabi database and course instructor surveys. He was aware of my high stress level, and he assured me that for my first semester there really weren’t any wrong decisions that could be made but rather better decisions through an informed process. I’ll always appreciate how my advisor taught me how to take responsibility for my education from day one, and gave me the tools and confidence boost to succeed. I’ve heard other students talk about how nice a certain advisor is or how accommodating, but I think sometimes advisors’ actions or behaviors can encourage more dependency on them from their students. My advisor is courteous and helpful. From the first several advising experiences, I learned how to take control of my education and to be more proactive in my goals.

As exemplified in the student’s description above, effective advisors encouraged students to be active learners and to be critical thinkers responsible for their own success. In addition to assisting students to become more responsible and proactive, effective advisors also helped students to recognize their own excuses and identify productive ways to move forward. However, this process of recognizing and being accountable to oneself often took time as well as multiple advising interactions before changes occurred. As an example, one student mentioned that he would partially tune out advice from his advisor because the student thought that it was too early to admit that he was a poor student, and he blamed his academic performance that semester on everything from instructors who graded unfairly to college adjustment issues. Nevertheless, the student stated that his first advisor was the first person to hold him accountable and not make excuses for his academic and personal situation. The student stated that mandatory advisement meetings with two different advisors over the course of three semesters helped him to get on track with his studies. The student also credited his second advisor's effective communication skills for getting through to him and focusing on the students' strengths and interests in order to move forward.

Seeking Guidance: Making Informed Decisions, Exploring Possibilities

This third theme that emerged from the focus groups elicited the most responses from the students in our discussions about effective advising. In our discussions of effective advisors, all students regardless of academic standing or grade level stressed the importance of effective advisors in helping them make informed decisions, maximizing opportunities, and realizing their goals. Topics of particular importance included major exploration, study and learning strategies, degree requirements, and progress towards degree. Almost all of the students' comments were about positive student-advisor interactions, and students most often mentioned finding suitable academic options and remaining on track for graduation. According to students, effective advisors helped them to focus their scattered and uninformed thoughts about their academic direction. Perhaps most importantly, effective advisors helped students to maximize their efficiency towards completing academic goals while getting the most out of the overall college experience. Karen, a college senior, represented the thoughts of many of her peers as she expressed the following:

> I think that some students rely on advisors too much for information that they should be able to find themselves online or they depend unnecessarily on advisors for affirmation and reassurance on simple decisions. From my perspective, I've had a great advisor – someone who has encouraged me to think for myself, to better understand my own goals, and to go beyond the classroom boundaries in search of campus opportunities. Another thing that makes my advisor so effective is his meticulousness and attentiveness to details and understanding of academic policies. I was more than capable of understanding a degree plan and reading the requirements, but my advisor was able to identify areas of overlap and other options that I had not fully considered. My advisor even saved me from making a potential mistake with a duplicating science credit. With my advisor's guidance, I am going to be able to graduate a semester earlier than I had planned, and I already have solid opportunities awaiting me post-graduation. I recall my advisor asking me early in my college career why I was in such a hurry to get out without knowing what I wanted to do afterwards, Not only did he encourage me to remain on track for graduation, but he made sure that I had plans in place to move on afterwards. I don't often give praise to others, but my advisor has been one of the few exceptions. He's so down to earth that whenever I thank him, he just deflects the praise. He says things like: 'Karen, you've done all the hard work; you've taken feedback well; and you've been successful in making good, educated decisions.'

Secondary areas of relevance to students included special advising initiatives and exploring educational opportunities. One student described effective advising as "not necessarily a single, profound interaction or life-changing moment of clarity but rather a series of multiple, sustained, quality interactions consistent over the course of several semesters from pre-admission outreach initiatives through post-graduation advisement."

Another student added, “When I think of effective advising, I think of my advisor, someone who has guided me past the bureaucracy of a large research institution and who has introduced me to a world of educational opportunities such as study abroad , internships, and undergraduate research.”

CHAPTER 7: ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS

A Comprehensive Look into Advising Centers

College advising administrators were asked to discuss various aspects of their advising programs and to share their thoughts about effective advising. Each administrator had decades of work experience in the field of advising and student services ranging from 20 to over 30 years. All of the administrators either started in the advising field or a related student services department such as Admissions or the Registrar. Several had attended the University as undergraduates. The highest obtained education level ranged from bachelor to doctorate. Among the seven top-level advising administrators (Assistant Dean/Director level) for the colleges, only one had earned a doctoral degree (Ph.D.), three had obtained a master's degree, and three had completed a bachelor's degree. There were two Hispanic/Latino Assistant Deans, but there was no African American or Asian American Assistant Dean or Director in any of the advising centers. Of all the academic advising coordinators or assistant directors in the advising centers (including those who were not selected to be interviewed), there were three African Americans, four Hispanic/Latinos/Latinas, and zero Asian Americans.

My experiences and discoveries from the first interviews in the College of Fine Arts and Natural Sciences made me realize that I needed to provide more structure and to ask better, more focused types of questions to obtain the type of information that was sought. The practice of conducting these first interviews allowed me to develop more relevant and better tailored (response-inducing) questions for the remainder of the administrator interviews. Two sets of discussion questions were derived: one for the subsequent administrator interviews and another set for a follow up. The interview guides are presented in *Appendix E*.

How Post-appointment Surveys Are Used

In general, administrators indicated they looked at both survey scores and open-response comments for individual advisors, but viewed open-response comments more frequently. Overall, the frequency of review ran the gamut (weekly, monthly, bimonthly, semesterly, annually) and emphasis placed on survey results varied greatly among the administrators in the different colleges. For example, one administrator indicated that comments were printed out only once a year during annual evaluations. Negative comments did not count against advisors and copies of negative comments were not placed into advisors' personnel files, but positive comments were discussed and used on evaluation forms. The administrator explained:

> We do have to enforce policy, and we do have to tell students no… And we hope that our advisors are trained and well-versed to say 'no you can't do that, but what you can do is…' Give them options… 'And have you thought of X, Y, and Z?' Even with that, students will still be mad, so we have to be careful with the qualitative feedback. I talk with advisors on how to receive feedback, and self-reflect.

An administrator in a different college stated that survey comments were reviewed frequently, about once a week, only to help with advisor development and improvement, and survey results such as scores and comments were not used at all to determine merit increases during annual evaluations. The administrator further remarked:

> I had a problem with one advisor that this advisor wasn't doing anything the other advisors were doing. And students [had] talked to each other, and they said, well, they [other students] were getting this, and 'we don't get this.' I said ok. I can fix this. So, for over about a six month period I worked with this advisor one-on-one,

> and told the advisor what I wanted. I said you bcc me on every email you send out. I want to see how they [advisors in general] address the student. Were they being cordial? Were they being rude? In other words, what I consider rude [is] giving just the facts and nothing else. Interact with the student via email and say why you were being late and give an explanation; they [students] appreciate that. And, I've gotten comments from other people around the classes [sic] that this [advisor] is a different person. I said it's because no one has ever sat down and told her what we want structure-wise. And it worked, students love this advisor. I use the surveys to help constructively develop the advisor. I don't use them to determine if they get a merit raise or not because if they turn themselves around, then they are doing what an advisor should be doing.

In contrast to the previously mentioned administrators in other colleges, a third administrator stated that all survey comments, positive or negative, and survey scores were considered during annual evaluations for advisors but that survey results were printed out and discussed periodically throughout the year (at least once a semester) with advisors even before the formal evaluations, and that these survey results were not the only determinants of performance and effective advising. The administrator stated the following:

> I usually compile the results (it used to be our registration manager) and give them back to the advisors before our advising retreats. We usually have two advising retreats, one in summer and one in winter, and I would give copies to the two advising coordinators who report to me. The advising coordinators would distribute the individual results to the specific advisors. We use them for annual evaluations, but we don't use them solely. We look at comments and numerical results. That's one of the things we do find helpful because we can provide some of that data to administrators so we can show that 98% of this advisor's evaluations were exceed expectations, and we can say this advisor is really good about this or that.

The administrator also commented about the need for ongoing, regular assessment and review of survey instruments and advising results. The administrator stated the following:

> The one thing that I feel like we don't have is that we haven't used them to the extent that we should. It has varied over time from administrator to administrator

> [when Deans change]. In the past our previous Dean liked to see data from semester to semester. We haven't seen that much with our current Dean because she is new and doesn't tend to want statistics. But, at my level we are still looking at these on a regular basis. We do look at these surveys at least once a semester and our advisors do look at their surveys regularly, and the advising team has helped revise parts of the survey. Currently the assessment committee has been put on hold since one advisor [who had led assessment efforts] left the college and another went on maternity leave…We had multiple people out in fall 2011. We just had a short period of constant turnover and people being out of the office for an extended period of time so assessment was put on hold. But, we do know that this is important and we plan to get back to it as soon as possible.

Other Forms of Assessment and Student Learning Outcomes

Besides post-appointment surveys, the most prevalent forms of assessment found in the colleges included formal measures (the occasional survey/group interview) focused on specific programmatic areas, and informal measures focused on advising unit efficacy by administrators. The use of these surveys to measure aspects of advising programs was sporadic at best and varied greatly across colleges. One administrator remarked:

> We have a graduation survey with one or two advising questions, but [we] really don't have any other survey instruments. We don't really have anything for orientation, and we never have. We do the general survey that New Student Services asks us to do, but there's nothing on there that deals with advising or advising orientation meetings.

An administrator in another college described a separate scenario for assessment:

> We've put together a pre-orientation survey and we also have a post-orientation survey. We have done periodic focus groups in the past as well. Another survey that we did was to look at students and why they come in for advising or don't come in for advising and their levels of satisfaction (we only did this survey once, but we probably should do this again in the future). We used to do something called graduation orientation or senior orientation, a program to get seniors ready for graduation and give them info about commencement and forwarding email accounts etc. We would survey them for that program but we don't have this program and survey anymore due to budget constraints. We also have a survey that we don't send out but is sent out by career services and has questions about

> our advising on it. It is sent when students are about to graduate – it's kind of like an exit survey but I'm not sure if it had anything about student learning outcomes.

Some of the more commonly-assessed, programmatic areas of advising in the colleges included freshman/transfer orientation and graduation, however; some colleges did not attempt to assess either of these advising-related, programmatic areas at all. Besides the common programmatic areas, there were also college specific program initiatives that colleges attempted to assess such as Senior Orientation in the McCombs Business School and special population programs such as the Women in Engineering Program and Equal Opportunity in Engineering to name a few. Both the WEP and EOE programs, with the exception of the Director's position, were entirely self-funded programs that had to be assessed in order to receive continued funding.

Informal measures of assessment included meetings and interactions with faculty, staff, and students, supervision of training, self-reflection (relying on one's own experience or intuition), and observations of advising practices. Speaking about the importance of interacting with others and maintaining clear channels of communication within the college, an administrator stated:

> We have other ways to get a pulse of what's going on in the College. For example, we can get a sense through our weekly advisor meetings, and also through student organizations. The energy level is something you can kind of grasp. All of our advisors work with student organizations that are sponsored out of the Dean's office. You hear things at events or in the hallways from students about advising.

Another administrator recognized the importance of understanding both academic and career concerns of students in order to improve advising services while providing the most current and relevant information. The administrator stated:

> I spend time with faculty members and listen to what they are doing and the types of jobs that are out there. I get invited to department chair dinners and talk with faculty about career trends. I try to keep well-connected with what's going on in the industry so that I can help students with courses in relation to career advising (I do not step over career advising counselors, I work with them.) Most administrators revealed that student learning outcomes were not measured in their advising units and that few attempts, if any, had been made to formalize a process to define and assess outcomes. Only two colleges had advising units that attempted to evaluate their assessment practices. The push to examine advising and student learning outcomes began in the first college with an advisor who had attended a NACADA annual conference and in the second college with advisors/administrators who had attended a NACADA administrator's institute. These individuals saw the value in assessment for their respective advising offices and worked with their advising teams to analyze and refine their assessment practices.

Facilitating Change after Assessment: The Process of Improvement

Most of the actions for change that took place in the advising centers were the results of informal assessment practices that stemmed from general attentiveness and the desire to improve within advising centers rather than formal practices such as conducting official surveys, focus groups and program reviews. Several of the advising centers used the waitlist survey system periodically to view peak times for student traffic and to determine walk-in times vs. appointment times. One advising center had an administrator who went so far as to focus on the number of students seen by individual advisors and placed pressure on advisors to either see more students or to see fewer students depending on an advisor's "numbers" relative to others. The goal of the administration was to balance out the student workload among the advisors and to improve the consistency of service by having "speedy" advisors take some extra time with their students and having other advisors to streamline their conversations and to shorten the time between seeing students.

Administrators provided examples of how the recognition of both students' and advisors' concerns and needs contributed to the improvement of advising programs and how improvement was achieved through open channels of communication, general attentiveness, the capacity to respond quickly, and the ability along with the desire to make changes. For example, one administrator described a situation with an advisor who was being asked by a department chair to answer phones in the afternoon, and this unexpected delegation of administrative phone duty took away from the advisor's time to perform primary advising responsibilities. The administrator stated that the problem was promptly recognized and corrective action was fulfilled through careful communication with the department chair. The same advising administrator also recognized that students wanted to be able to remain with their same advisors throughout their four school years so changes were made to the advising structure which went from a split system of advising to a team system. Another administrator in a different school stated that she had identified a similar issue with students wanting to remain with specific advisors for the duration of their undergraduate education; however, she discovered another issue that pertained to students who enrolled in Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs). The administrator stated, "Another thing we found out was that students would get really attached to their FIG advisor and did not want to move on to their major advisor. Now, we try to keep students who are in our FIG as our students for future advising so that we have that continuity with them throughout."

Many of the improvements made in advising centers were small-scale initiatives or procedures to enhance general efficiency and to facilitate communication. For example, the Communications advising center created a student appointment system to make it easier for students to schedule and remember their advising appointments. The center also attempted ways to improve communication between advisors and students. An administrator in the College of Communications remarked:

> We have a student organization that surveys all the students in their respective departments. Some questions deal with offering of facilities and many things that pertain to students. We do very well on the advising part of that survey. We learned that students responded that email was the most productive way of contacting them, but then when we send emails, they don’t seem to read them. So, this is funny isn’t it? Why do they say that then? We’re not going to text them. I think they just get flooded with emails. We’re getting away from Blackboard. We’re using blogs, Facebook, and twitter for one-way communication.

The same administrator credited the adoption of a new structural advising model that met the approval of the students and reaching out and responding proactively to students as keys to improvement of advising services in the college. When I pointed out that the center’s waitlist survey scores appeared to have increased in the past few years, the administrator provided the following explanation:

> I attribute our survey results going up starting in spring 2006 and after to our switch to the team advising. I believe the fall 2009 semester was one of our best semesters because of our COMM Be Advised initiative. We advertise a contest which occurs about three weeks before registration advising. We put banners outside the building. We send out emails. We give out special shirts and prizes, and we pick one champion to give BEVO bucks to. The initiative gets students to come in earlier for advising. This reduces the traffic and stress level during registration advising, and the advisors get to spend more time because of traffic being spread over several weeks of advising.

A few administrators indicated that assessment was used to identify potential areas for re-training with their advisors. One administrator stated that at the very least, waitlist surveys in particular, made advisors more cognizant of how they advise because advisors know there are specific measuring outcomes.

It was a rare occurrence among administrators to make significant changes based on formal assessment results, and only one advising center had considerable changes made to key areas of the advising program. As a member of the Liberal Arts advising center team during that time, I witnessed four straight years of progressive changes to the summer orientation program. These changes were sparked by orientation survey results, and the changes were structural, procedural, and pedagogical almost every year during that period. There were also significant developments within programs geared towards students on scholastic probation and dismissal which eventually led to the creation of UTurn, a new academic enrichment program with its own office location, as system of staff, faculty, and student mentors and multiple resources for academically at-risk students. A student handbook, additional learning materials, and college-funded tutoring services were provided as well.

The improvement attempts in response to the assessment of summer orientation programs were many. First, there were the structural changes to the orientation schedule and format changes to the college meeting presentations and orientation group meetings. Then, there were changes to the orientation program to make it more informative, and interactive so as to allow students to retain critical information and to remain focused throughout the program. These changes included the creation of new college and faculty introduction videos, inviting the Associate Dean to speak directly with students, creating student skit presentations about various college situations, utilizing live student question polls during presentations, streamlining messages, providing new student handbooks and useful orientation materials, etc. Finally, a stronger academic focus along with an emphasis on cohorts and future graduation within four years was applied throughout the entire orientation program.

Organizational Structure of the Advising Centers

Each college had a centralized advising center that advisors referred to as either the Dean's office for advising or the Student Affairs office. Each advising center was led by a staff member with the title of Assistant Dean, specifically an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs or Student Services, except for one center that had a Director of Advising. In most colleges, the Assistant Dean reported to an Associate Dean such as the Associate Dean of Student Affairs or the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Curriculum (College of Natural Sciences) with the lone exception being the School of Engineering that had the Assistant Dean reporting directly to the Dean of the School.

The Assistant Dean of a college was responsible, whether directly or indirectly, for all advisors of a college. In regards to the main advising centers, the Assistant Dean for a college directly supervised between one to three academic advising coordinators as well as other central office staff with non-advising duties. Each academic advising coordinator was responsible for a small group of advisors with titles ranging from assistant advisor to senior advisor. Some of the advising coordinators also supervised front desk staff (student peers and peer supervisor). One college had an advising counselor that functioned virtually similarly to and on the same level as the academic advising coordinators in that college.

Not surprisingly, Assistant Deans saw fewer students than their advising coordinators and other advisors due to their supervisory and leadership responsibilities; however, the number and types of interactions with students varied greatly among administrators. Whereas one Assistant Dean rarely met with students except for isolated instances of extremely disgruntled or difficult students who had already met with advisors previously, others met with students more frequently to discuss a variety of student concerns and some still participated in academic advising and course selection.

The advising centers for the colleges ranged in overall staff size from 5 to around 20 with 3 to 13 staff having direct advising responsibilities. These centers were housed in the Student Division or Dean's office of the colleges. Besides the academic advising staff, these centers also contained administrative staff, and some centers had other academic support staff such as student development specialists, program coordinators, international program advisors (study abroad), graduate assistants, and registration managers. One college, the College of Natural Sciences, has two Student Division staff (Master of Social Work/Licensed Master Social Worker) with the official title of academic advising coordinator but who are designated to serve as counselors and handle primarily life counseling and mental health issues instead of academic advising.

In every college, academic advising services were separated from career counseling services. Most colleges had someone solely in charge of career services, typically a Director of Career Services, who reported to an Associate Dean. In general, colleges had two or three Associate Deans with the designated title of Associate Dean of Student Affairs being the most common. Examples of other Associate Dean designations found in the colleges included: Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Associate Dean of

Research & Graduate Studies, Associate Dean of Development, and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs.

Advisor-Staff Office Meetings

Each Student Division or equivalent undergraduate center held at least one weekly staff meeting that included the full staff of advisors and all academic or program support personnel; the one exception was an advising center that held weekly advisor meetings (administrators present) as well as weekly advising administrator – only meetings in lieu of entire staff meetings. A couple of centers conducted both full staff meetings and advisor meetings weekly, while two advising centers held weekly advising administrator-only meetings in addition to the full staff meeting each week. The composition of the regularly attending staff at a full staff meeting varied from one college to the next, and the types of staff members in attendance included, but were not limited to the following: executive assistants, advisors of all levels, student development specialists, a senior program coordinator for international programs, Semester in LA personnel, Latina media studies personnel, scholarship and transfer administrative personnel, student development specialists for front counter support, new student services and general office maintenance, peer desk supervisors, administrative associates, grant specialists, counselors, registration managers, and college administrators.

Effect of Institutional Budget Cuts

Recently, public institutions of higher education in Texas have been forced to make financial cuts due to already declining financial support as a percentage of the state's budget and also the state's anticipated budget shortfall for several years to come.

Hiring and salary freezes, layoffs, elimination of programs, increased tuition, and rising student-to-faculty ratios became constant occurrences beginning in 2008. University advising services were impacted both directly and indirectly by these changes. Sudden and substantial losses to academic support personnel such as administrative staff, IT staff, and instructional support/assessment staff became commonplace across the University. One administrator informed me that her college eliminated 28% of the entire staff in the college from 2008 through 2011. Another advising administrator stated that two positions were lost directly from the advising center during the same period. Several other administrators also mentioned losing administrative personnel and not filling vacant advising positions.

How Advising is Structured and Administered

Administrators discussed the distribution of advisors (advising space/physical layouts), advisor ratios/caseloads, scheduling (walk-ins vs. appointments), assigned advising, methods of advising, and channels of communication in the advising unit. Each advising unit consisted of a different mix of these structural elements and operational aspects. Advising structures and the administration of advising services developed organically and idiosyncratically within advising offices. There was no clear model, and offices adapted as necessary to the various college environments and cultures.

Office Space/Layouts

The majority of advising centers provided each advisor with an individual office that allowed for privacy during discussion of sensitive student matters or other issues. However, two advising centers, Liberal Arts and Communications, did not have individual office space for advisors and had advisors occupy cubicles instead. The administrator for the School of Communications explained that advisors would be transferred to private offices once the new communications building was built and that all advisors would be moved to a student center in the new building. The College of Liberal Arts did not have plans to restructure or move advisors to private offices even though FERPA violations were common occurrences and the advising layout with cubicles surrounding a central waiting area was the least private of all the centers. Nevertheless, most office layouts improved over time. One administrator provided the following example: “We all have our own offices now. But, when I first started, in 1998, the office here was just one big area and it was two offices divided by bookshelves. It was great for training, but there were times when we would have to step out of the advising space or go to the conference room to advise.”

Some advising centers had offices divided between two advising units in different locations. For example, the College of Education has three advisors (an academic advising coordinator and two associate advisors) based in the Belmont building and five members of its advising staff based in the Sanchez building. The College of Natural Sciences has its advising staff divided between two floors; the upper floor houses the Transitional Advising Center (TrAC) and the lower floor houses the First Year Advising Center (FYAC). The School of Engineering has one office with an advising coordinator located in the Jester West building to oversee the study tables.

Advisor-to-Student Ratios

In general, the advising centers in the colleges operated within the suggested

NACADA advisor-to- student ratio of 1 to 300. A couple of the centers had lower ratios, and only one center had higher ratios (1 to 400+) for a few advisors, the non-supervisors in the advising unit. There was much variety in the way that advising centers distributed advisor caseloads. Examples of how caseloads of students are distributed to advisors include alpha breakdown (based on first letter of student's last name), orientation/FIG cohorts, random numeric assignment, student major distribution, or a combination of the above depending on the time of year.

General (Non-Specific) vs. All-Majors vs. Major-Specific

Each advising center was organized with advisors trained to accommodate the advising of students according to one of the following models/scenarios: the general advising for any major within the college (generalists/non-specific major advisors), complete advising for all majors within the college (all-major advisors), or complete advising for a specific major within the college (major specific advisors).

Examples of the first model included the advising centers in Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences where all advisors accommodated large populations of undeclared and transitional students and advised for major exploration, core degree requirements, and additional college requirements. Students would move on to specific departments for major advising once they had declared a major(s). In the largest colleges such as Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences, the relatively large number of students, major options, and degree plans necessitated the use of the current advising structure. The advising centers for the School of Engineering and the College of Fine Arts utilized an extreme variation of the generalist model with two very important distinctions from the first model: 1) advisors were not responsible for registration (course) advising; 2) the advising centers did not have incoming undeclared students or, unspecified majors because all new and transfer students admitted to the college had to specify majors. Thus, the advisors in the Engineering and Fine Arts advising centers conducted general advising (usually in cases of overflow from the departments) and mainly advised students on academic standing and policy issues, program events, graduation, study abroad pre-departure, and transfer/equivalent coursework. In general, degree plan and major advising was handled by department advisors or faculty advisors outside of these central advising offices.

In a second model as exemplified by the advising centers in the School of Business and College of Education, all advisors advised for the various majors and degree plans. The relatively fewer number of students and major options allowed advisors to advise a cohort of students from the time they enter the college through the time they graduate. The advising center for the School of Business originally had a system in place that was similar to the first model, but an administrator explained:

> About five years ago (maybe in 2007), we actually changed models. We used to have a model where all students would enter Business and have a core advisor the first year until they declared and then they would switch to an advisor who was like a department advisor based on what their major. But we found that students would continue to go back to their core advisor even if they really needed specific major information. So, we changed our model where we advise for all majors now except for Business honors and MPA students, and we did a whole bunch of cross training. Now we stay with the same students throughout their academic career from orientation through graduation. We still have some faculty advisors but mainly what they deal with are exceptions and more content questions and career questions a lot of times.

The College of Education's undergraduate advising center was divided into two advising centers located in separate buildings: the main (central) location in the Dean's office of the Sanchez building (SZB) and a secondary location in Belmont Hall (BEL). All advisors were cross-trained and could advise for all majors; however, the general understanding between staff and students was that applied learning and development majors would see SZB advisors and kinesiology majors would see BEL advisors when possible.

In a third scenario as displayed in the advising center for the College of Communications, each advisor specialized in one major. An advising administrator in Communications described the switch to this model as follows:

> Originally, there were no teams for advising like there are now in the College. We had generalist advisors who knew a little about all the majors and general requirements in my office and department advisors upstairs. So, students would come here for general advising questions and then we would send them upstairs for specific department questions. But eventually, we received feedback from students, and they wanted to stick with their department advisors. So, we went to advising teams. For example, RTF has 950 students so we have three advisors, and PR/ADV has 1200 students so we have four advisors for them. Each advising team specializes in one area or department. Although PR and Advertising are different majors, we consider these as one department for the purposes of advising. A student is assigned to one specific advisor, but can see another team advisor if their advisor is not available. We tell our students that they will be assigned one advisor when they start [in Communications], but let them know if they aren't getting along with specific advisors they should tell us.

All seven of the advising centers had utilized the first model previously, but Business and Communications switched to different models after staff received feedback from students that they wanted to continue with an advisor from the beginning through the end of the academic journey. These colleges had considerably fewer major options and students than Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences so the changes were able to be implemented successfully and quite seamlessly.

Appointments vs. Walk-ins and Assigned vs. Random (First Available)

Except for the Liberal Arts and Fine Arts centers, the college advising centers handled students on an appointment basis rather than walk-in basis for the majority of time during a calendar year. Advising sessions in the Communications advising center were almost always scheduled by appointment. Any correspondence requiring access to student records had to be in person, but call-in, email, or online advising was available for quick, general questions. To set up an appointment, students had the option of making the appointment themselves through an online scheduling system which was a unique option available only in Communications. The center had limited walk-in advising times, only two days a week, two hours per day. The Natural Sciences advising centers consisting of the First Year Advising Center (FYAC) and Transitional Advising Center (TRAC) offices maintained appointments except when indicated otherwise on the calendar, for example, the first week of classes. The Education advising centers consisting of the SZB and BEL offices utilized appointments during non peak times, but each advisor was responsible for walk-in advising on one day of the week for quick student questions and emergency issues; each advisor had a different walk-in advising day from the other advisors. During peak times such as registration advising, the offices were on appointments only. An administrator for Education explained that the central advising offices had recently transitioned from mostly walk-in advising to appointments throughout most of the year, and described the change as follows:

> We went to appointments for two reasons. One, so that students don’t have to camp out and be worried about going to class. But two, it was also a way to keep advisors

> on pace. For example, registration advising is not the best time to be doing long-term planning with students. We can do short triage first and then ask them to come back to do long-term planning. The system has worked well for us. We looked at the Belmont office, appointments only, and Sanchez advisors, walk-ins, and noticed that we actually saw more students when on an appointment schedule than on walk-ins. This is one of the reasons for going to all appointments during registration advising in Sanchez.

The Business advising center was in an appointments-only mode throughout the calendar year with the exception of the first eight class days of a long semester when advisors dealt with more registration issues. The Engineering advising center accepted students only by appointment and did not have regular walk-in advising hours.

The Fine Arts advising center was open for walk-in advising throughout the calendar year. Since the advising of courses was handled by the individual major departments of the College, the advising center dealt primarily with procedural, policy, program, registration and credit issues. Due to the urgency of these student matters and the availability of fewer staff relative to other advising centers, the advising center's approach of utilizing walk-in advising instead of appointments allowed for expedited service and the accommodation of more students during periods of high student traffic. The Liberal Arts advising center had the most varied distribution of walk-in advising and appointment times during a calendar year. For the majority of each long semester, the center operated on a near 50-50 split of advisors on walk-ins versus those on appointments during non-peak times. The ratio was adjusted as necessary depending on advisor projects, paper work blocks, committee meetings, and other advising program priorities. Certain types of student requests required the scheduling of appointments and were deemed unsuitable for walk-in advising. For example, the scheduling of an appointment was usually required for an official degree check, probationary (at-risk students) program advising such as UTurn or SUCCESS, ROTC four-year plan advising, etc. During registration advising periods, typically lasting three weeks during each long semester, the center was relegated to walk-in advising. Contrastingly, during summer orientation advising, the center went to an appointment-only schedule.

Two of the seven advising centers, Business and Communications provided students from the 1st year through graduation with assigned advisors. A student was assigned the same advisor throughout his/her undergraduate enrollment. In Natural Sciences, advisor assignments were typically completed by the second week of a given semester and a student's advisor assignment usually remained the same unless a student's status changed due to meeting entry-level requirements, switching majors, or entering a second academic year. Thus, a student could possibly have had as many as three different assigned advisors during the course of a four-year period if the student started out in the FYAC office, then moved to the TRAC office, and finally transitioned to a departmental advising office. The advising center for Liberal Arts had assigned advising only for special populations such as new students during their first registration advising meetings at summer orientation and students on scholastic probation. The advising center for Fine Arts did not need assigned advising because most of the course advising was done in the departments and the central office was relatively small compared to other college advising centers. Since each department had only one advisor, it was essentially assigned advising by a student's major. By contrast, the advising centers for Education did not have assigned advising, and advisors were cross-trained for all majors.

Advisor Duties and Distribution of Responsibilities

There was a vast diversity in the duties and responsibilities of advisors with variation found not only across different levels of advisors, but also across advising centers in the seven colleges. However common activities included directly advising students, communicating with members of the university community (students, colleagues, etc.), and serving on various committees. Some of the advising centers had both academic advisors and program coordinators who worked with students, but in general, academic advisors saw more students than program coordinators. Also, there was less variation in duties between the second and third advisor rank (titles) of associate academic advisor and senior academic advisor respectively; the variation was much more apparent between the fourth advisor rank (academic advising coordinator) and the other ranks as well as between the first advisor rank (assistant academic advisor) and the other ranks.

Course Selection

In general, all academic advisors in the college advising centers with the exception of those in Engineering and Fine Arts spend a lot of their time with course selection or advising for degree requirements especially during summer orientation, registration, and degree check periods. The administrator for the Student Affairs Office in Engineering explained:

> We do very little course selection except with new freshman who are in the honors program; otherwise, course selection and registration advising is done in the departments. Some departments utilize faculty advisors, others don't. We have no undeclared students coming in since all students must choose a major when applying to Engineering. Undeclared [student status] in this college means they

> are on their way out. We do not have caseloads based on major in the Student Affairs Office, and we see students from every major for issues that the departments don't handle.

Communication and Information

Advisors functioned as hubs of information gathered from various offices around campus. They served as the point of contact between the institution and the students as well as the knowledge distributors for intra and inter-department communication. Advisors facilitated and secured information flow between and among the student community, faculty, staff, administration and other constituents.

Key Advising Program Areas and Committee Work

In every advising center, advisors were responsible for overseeing specific areas of an advising program and/or serving on committees to coordinate and facilitate key programs. Either a single advisor or an advising committee was tasked with the execution of specific program elements. Some advising centers had formal committees led by committee chairs while other departments had informal committees based on a general understanding among advisors regarding specific office or program tasks. In some colleges, an advisor's responsibility to a specific committee or program component was written in the official job description while in other colleges it was not.

The most common advising program areas included the following: orientation, first year interest groups (FIGs) registration, scholastic probation, graduation certification, and NCAA certification. Among these areas, there were differences in the number of advisors who participated which depended on the particular advising center. For example, all advisors participated in programmatic areas such as summer orientation, specifically the college meetings or presentations for new fall students and fall transfers, and most or all advisors in each advising center participated in FIGs either through involvement with the information sessions during the summer or the facilitation of weekly FIG meetings during the fall. However, other programmatic areas such as graduation certification involved only one to two advisors or one non-advising staff member per advising center except in the Liberal Arts and Communication advising centers where all advisors participated in graduation certification.

Other advising program areas included: veteran affairs (VA) certification, supplementary instruction (TA training, study tables, tutoring, mentoring), policy and procedures, publications, and training. In general, course scheduling and catalog updates were primarily handled by non-advisors such as program coordinators or administrative support staff (records/registration managers), although academic advising coordinators conducted these tasks in, for example, the College of Communications.

It is difficult to fully capture the variations in advisors' roles in the colleges without including some of the administrator comments. An administrator for the College of Communications described the situation in his advising center:

> Most of my advisors are advising coordinators, and the rest are senior advisors. A lot of my advisors have Masters Degrees now. My advisors do everything. One of my advising coordinators does catalog stuff and another advising coordinator does course schedule updates. I do the finalization once they send me everything. The faculties rely on our advisors' opinions. All advisors participate in summer orientation and FIGs. We assign a student to one advisor during orientation and that advisor is their advisor from day one. Our FIGs consist of major-centric FIGs: 17(students) RTF, 17 Journalism, 17 PR, etc. All advisors participate in graduation certification.

An administrator for the College of Education revealed a different distribution of advisor responsibilities and commented on advisor committees as follows:

> Advisors don't do certification. There is one administrative staff who does certification and who reports directly to the Associate Dean. I sign off on everything for certification once the admin has completed the work. We have some committees. Not everyone has a formal committee. It's not written into our assigned duties for our Sanchez advisors, but Belmont advisors do have them written in. Here in Sanchez, there are no formal committee assignments, but we'll have a liaison to the Bilingual Ed program or the special Ed program who will assist, but someone else can help the person and bring the issue to me or to an advising meeting. We don't have a VA committee. We don't have a schopro committee. We do have a study abroad committee which consists of the advising coordinator from Belmont and me. All advisors do the NCAA forms and one person from the Belmont group and one person from the Sanchez group signs off on them. We don't do course scheduling, but we do help with course restrictions and class limits. We get the input from the faculty and departments. Three of us do the physical settings in the system. We have an advising coordinator who oversees orientation. All advisors participate in college meetings, but there is just one person coordinating orientation. She trains the OAs (orientation advisors), comes up with the agenda, and we interject and contribute ideas for Orientation.

An administrator for the School of Engineering described how advisors in the advising center for Engineering functioned very similarly to program coordinators because the advisors did not participate in course/registration advising and each advisor was strictly responsible for a specific programmatic area of the advising center. The administrator stated the following:

> We do very little course selection except with new freshman who are in the honors program; otherwise, that is done in the departments where they do registration advising. Some departments utilize faculty advisors, others don't. We have no undeclared students coming in - they all must choose a major when applying to Engineering. If they are undeclared that means they are on their way out. We do not have caseloads by major in Student Affairs Office. One previously, now two advisors, one coordinator and one senior, do certification. Departments will do overrides for dept. specific requirements and our office [Student Affairs] does general overrides. Everybody participates in Orientation and everybody participates in FIGs except for one of the advising coordinators. We also have some big

programs that need to be coordinated, for example, the general engineering program has supplemental instruction courses which require the hiring, training, and supervising of TAs, and all the details of course scheduling for the program. Also, one of the advising coordinators is responsible for the coordination and supervision of a student tutoring and study tables program. We do have committees, but the program areas and duties are fixed so that an individual advisor is solely responsible for the coordination and execution of one of these areas and that advisor is evaluated on the areas annually.

An administrator in the Business advising center described a few of the advisors' committee duties and shared yet another arrangement regarding graduation certification and course scheduling. The administrator explained:

> All advisors participate in orientation and also FIGs. We have one advisor who does certification and goes through the audits, and one backup in case something happens to the other advisor. We used to have everyone participate about five to six years ago, but due to technology, online application and degree audit checks/reports, we no longer have to do this. We used to do triple checks, but now we feel comfortable trusting the audit reports and are able to rely on them. Course scheduling used to be in the departments, but then they centralized course registration and course scheduling and brought it under our office. Our advisors don't do this though. Our current registration manager, a former advisor, handles the course schedule, registration errors, paperwork for withdrawals and drops, etc.

Scholastic Probation

Although all of the colleges had initiatives to track and contact students who were in academic jeopardy, the extent of the approach to reach out to students and get them to respond, the requirements placed upon these students, and the level of attention or assistance granted to these students ranged greatly. The approaches included the following: sending out periodic emails, sending secure academic notes (SANs), contacting students by phone, and barring students from registration. Students were either strongly urged or required to complete a few simple tasks or a series of tasks while on probation. The required tasks depended upon a student's college and included the following: completing a simple online form, completing a detailed academic contract (emphasis on acknowledging academic situation and exploring issues, understanding available resources, and planning for success), or one of the above and attending one to several meetings with an advisor via email, messenger, or in person during the semester. While some colleges only required students to complete and submit a grade contract online, other colleges required students to meet in person with an advisor to complete a grade contract. The level of assistance and support offered by the advising centers to students in academic jeopardy depended upon the efforts of the individual advisors, the culture and funding of the advising centers, and the quality and thoroughness of the program geared towards this student population. Some examples of college scholastic probationary programs included SUCCESS, Care, and Combat to name a few. The newest and most extensive program, UTurn, provided students with specially trained, assigned advisors who served in a mentor capacity and led a hands-on approach in helping students address their issues.

Student Appeals and Petitions

In general, the same distinction was made between student appeals and student petitions among the colleges. Appeals dealt with student policy matters not directly pertaining to the degree plan such as late drops, retroactive withdrawals, and raising maximum hours allowed for registration, while petitions involved academic matters associated with the degree plan such as course substitutions, waivers, and reducing in-residence degree requirements.

Decisions on appeals were issued by an appeals committee, an assistant dean, or an associate dean for student services depending on the particular college and the particular circumstance. All of the advising centers handled decisions for appeals, but an advisor's responsibility in the decision making process varied among the centers. In one center, advisors were not involved at all in the decision-making process. However, in most of the centers, for the majority of circumstances, advisors gave input on the cases and weighed in on the final decisions as part of a formal or, sometimes, informal appeals committee. In a couple of advising centers, advisors were able to make decisions directly without a committee or consultation with an administrator if the issue was a clear case outlined in a policy manual. However, very few centers had detailed and frequently updated policy and procedure manuals for responding to appeals.

In addition to managing student appeals, the advisors in the advising centers also handled the processing and, in some colleges, the decision-making for student petitions. However, in the College of Liberal Arts, the largest college, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs maintained authority over all petitions and reviewed the majority of petitions for final approval.

A few colleges designed and implemented their own online routing and petition tracking systems for students to use. The two largest colleges, the College of Natural Sciences and the College of Liberal Arts, utilized online systems to improve efficiency and regulate consistency in regards to the handling of a relatively large number of petitions. In most colleges, the process for student petitions involved the following steps: 1) the advisor completed or assisted a student with a paper or online petition form and the student provided the required supporting documentation to an advisor; 2) the advisor submitted the form with the required documentation to the advising center for general college requirements, to the major department if petitioning for a specific major or minor degree requirement, or to the School of Undergraduate Studies if for a general university core requirement; 3) the student eventually received approval/denial from the respective office for general college requirements and university core requirements, or a recommendation for approval/denial from a department for major or minor requirements to be sent for final approval to the authorized college administrator, usually an academic director or associate dean of academic affairs; 4) the required overrides or substitutions were applied to the student's record and degree audit.

There was much variation in the decision-making procedures (how decisions were made) for appeals and petitions, and no two colleges handled the processes for the combination of appeals and petitions in the same manner. In most advising centers, decisions were made for appeals during a formal meeting such as a full staff meeting or advisors-only meeting each week, but there was one center that allowed the majority of decisions to be made through individual advisors, though these advisors often consulted with other advisors before making decisions on student appeals. Most colleges reserved the authority for making decisions on petitions to a single administrator such as an academic advising coordinator, assistant dean of student services, or associate dean of academic affairs. However, in a couple of colleges advisors were allowed to make decisions as a collective group during the weekly advisor meetings. Also, in one college, individual advisors were allowed to make decisions on their own for specific types of petition issues. The distribution of authority, the level of faculty influence, and the specific staff allowances for making decisions on appeals and petitions varied among the colleges. For example, one administrator described the following scenario:

> There are two appeals committees divided six and six… the communications transfer advisor does not deal with appeals…And, they are responsible for reviewing appeals. If there is a split then it either goes to me or the Associate Dean. Retroactive withdrawals only go to me and the Associate Dean. There is a policy handbook with guidelines for appeal issues. Most petitions, for example, substitutions are handled by the advisors. Usually the chairs of departments just defer to the advisors on these decisions. Any kind of University changes such as 24/30 hours in residence [etc.] goes to Assistant and Associate Dean who make decisions together.

Another administrator in a different college described a second scenario:

> Dismissal appeals or late drop petitions are handled by the student's advisor, the Associate Dean [name omitted], the Director for Academic Services [name omitted], and me. We don't get that many late drop requests… only had about three this semester. We don't really have a say in petitions. It is in paper form and we send it to a faculty advisor in the department for their recommendation, and it then goes to the Director for Academic Services [name replaced by title] for final approval. We do weigh in on run of the mill requests such as raising max hours for registration, 24/30 rule, etc.

An administrator in a third college revealed the following:

> We decide on appeals and petitions during our Friday advisor meetings. We don't break it up like this is going to the Dean and this is going this other route. The only thing that we don't decide on during the advisors meetings deals with a teacher certification issue which goes to Dr. [name omitted] who is in charge of the field experience office. In this special situation, I will meet with Dr. [name omitted] and the Associate Dean to make a decision. We vote during advisor meetings. We don't really have a policy manual to follow… it's just case by case because we have a lot of advisors who have been here for a long time and have institutional knowledge. Appeals are a little bit easier to deal with because there is more flexibility and less protocol, whereas petitions we mostly follow precedence – have we done this type of thing before.

Another administrator in a different college shared the following:

> We used to have two separate meetings, one for advisors and one for administrators each week. However, due to downturn and our staff shrinking, we

> do things differently now. All staff from Student Affairs (13 total – 8 advisors, 1 executive assistant, 1 student development specialist, 1 senior administrative associate, 1 sr. program coordinator for international programs, and the Assistant Dean) from Student Affairs Office meet every Monday for 1 ½ hours. Also, advisors will meet separately to decide on student appeals (late drops, withdrawals ...) Advisors follow specific guidelines and can make decisions on their own. Only one academic advising coordinator handles all academic petitions though.

Training

Administrators described their training practices in the advising centers. The initial length of training depended on the skill set of the hired individuals, and it referred to the period of time before a trainee was permitted to advise students regularly on their own. The reported initial training times for new advisors ranged from four to ten weeks. Two administrators stated that they only considered hiring advising staff with direct advising experience while the other administrators stated that they also considered candidates with transferable skills, especially those with teaching, student development, or program coordinating experience. Thus, the experience level of a newly hired advisor impacted the length of training. An administrator explained:

> Depending on the individual - if they are coming from within the University - we only take about a week to go through university policies. Then we take about three weeks to go over degree requirements, and next they [advisors] do advising side-by-side with their training advisor. We listen to them and the trainer decides if they are ready to advise by themselves. If they don't know anything about the University then it would take about 6 weeks.

Another administrator in a different college shared the following:

> We do hire advisors without direct advising experience (Fine Arts doesn't). We have a month long training with an extensive list of what the new advisor needs to do. We have the new advisor sit with whoever is the expert in that specific area. We'll also have them sit with people in career services and other Business offices to meet other staff and learn about resources. We have the new advisors sit with

> advisors who are available to shadow for about two weeks. The whole training is about two months. After the initial training period, the advising coordinators often have individual monthly meetings with the advisors who report to them to discuss any concerns and to give input if there are any concerns.

After the initial training period, advisors continued to develop fundamental knowledge about policies, procedures, and campus resources. The advisors also continued to improve their usage of office technology, advising tools, and online systems as well as to develop their advising approaches and communication styles. Several administrators stated that the actual time for new advisors to learn everything necessary to be comfortable as advisors and to have mastery over all the essential functions was at least a year due to the alternating cycle of events and programs within an academic year.

Most advising centers did not have written training manuals or online training modules. Most of the advising centers utilized a method of training new advisors that involved a trainer and the "shadowing" of the trainee or vice versa during advising sessions with students. With this method, the experienced advisor (trainer) sat in the same office or cubicle with the new advisor (trainee) during several advising meetings with students. In some cases, the trainer sat quietly to observe and in others, the trainer offered suggestions either throughout the advising session or only at the end of one. When the shadow roles were reversed, the trainee sat and observed advising sessions between students and the trainer. The advisee took notes, followed along with written policy manuals, or quietly observed and asked the trainer questions between advising sessions. Only one administrator stated that her advising center did not use shadowing in the training of new advisors because the center only hired individuals with direct advising experience. The administrator discussed the training situation as follows:

> Everybody participates in helping new people. The direct supervisor [academic advising coordinator] oversees the training for a new person. We don't really sit in on new advisors starting in our office. We tend to hire experienced people with advising experience and transferrable skills. Each advising coordinator, three in total, supervises advising personnel that are responsible for specific areas such as orientation, graduate teaching assistant training, and student tutoring/study skills. If a new advisor is new to the campus, we have them physically go out to all the different places across campus that students would utilize. We do inter-office training.

Continued training after the initial new hire training period was necessary for all levels of advisors due to policy revisions, catalog changes, and ongoing developments such as the addition of new policies, programs, majors, and degree plans. Additionally, training was required to gain mastery over new advising tools and online systems as well as degree overrides, substitutions, and other modifications. Other forms of ongoing training resulted from college offerings, university initiatives, changing office structures, and additional advisor responsibilities in the wake of budget cuts.

Professional development was encouraged and opportunities were provided either directly by the advising center or via workshops and conferences. Advising centers often covered membership dues for the Academic Counselors Association (ACA), the Association of Professionals in Student Affairs (APSA) or another professional organization on campus and several provided funding for national professional organizations such as NACADA, NASPA, NAFSA, and NACUBO. In general, advising centers also provided funding for regional/national conferences and travel expenses every year or two, although some centers reduced spending in light of recent budget concerns.

A few centers provided occasional funding for specific training at NACADA sponsored workshops for academic assessment, leadership, etc. Advising center staff were encouraged to attend professional development day which was hosted once a year on campus by ACA and APSA to provide a venue for the sharing of knowledge in the field and the exchanging of new ideas.

Advising centers periodically hosted speakers from other departments and university offices to learn from them about student programs and student opportunities or to discuss issues pertaining to students and advisors. An administrator shared the following details about her center:

> Once a month we have our monthly advisor development, not really training issues, but we have invited a consultant in to discuss, for example, the growing pains of changing our office structure. We have had faculty members come in to talk. Sometimes staff from the advising office or other offices such as the Office of Student life will share their research and talk about retention issues.

Advising centers also organized and participated in staff retreats annually to improve intra-office communication, to promote teamwork, and to focus on specific training issues. The College of Liberal Arts, the largest college at the university, held an advising center staff retreat and a college-wide advisors retreat once every year.

Administrator Insights: Current Topics in Advising

Administrators commented about advising practices and discussed current topics in advising. Although not present in advising centers and much less prevalent on campus than academic advising staff, faculty advisors continued to remain an important part of the advising process for students in a few of the colleges, namely the professional colleges. Nevertheless, the ratio of faculty advisors to students has dwindled over the decades and faculty advising roles in undergraduate education have diminished with the ascension of full-time professional advising staff. The expansion of student services such as academic advising allowed faculty to have more time to concentrate on research, teaching, publications, and supervising graduate studies whereas undergraduate students benefited from having more access to advising through full-time, dedicated advising staff. Academic advisors were more likely to be familiar with undergraduate resources and policies and to have more time devote to overall student development and the college experience. One administrator commented that as a former undergraduate student at the University several decades ago, he had all faculty advisors. The administrator added, “They would always advise for rigor and not necessarily understand my experience. So, what I did not get from advising when I was an undergrad, I try to bring here in the advising that goes on within Student Affairs.”

On another note, an administrator who also attended the University, but more recently than his elder counterpart, provided examples of how advising and admissions practices have changed since he was an undergraduate. The administrator explained:

> I was a student here at UT in 1987. When I started working in Admissions in ‘93, I remember seeing the stats and noticing that from ‘87-‘90 anybody could get into Business, and they had like 1000 freshman. I think in ‘91-‘92 they started putting in the new criteria to get into Business and Engineering. At the time, the Business and Engineering schools were not as restrictive with college admissions and were not as highly regarded as they are today.

As the number and type of students changed in the colleges, the advising evolved to accommodate the new changes in the admitted population. The most recent example of this at the University was the creation of the School of Undergraduate Studies, a school that was created to house undeclareds, students in search of their major(s), for up to their first two years of college. Its creation impacted several of the advising centers in significant ways ranging from changes in the number and duties of personnel to changes in programmatic areas and advising services such as orientation and registration. Nevertheless, the advising services of today have advanced far beyond the resources and offerings available when the administrators were students, and perhaps that understanding of the times has caused some frustration among administrators with some of today's students. The administrator who commented previously continued:

> When I was a student, which came before telephone registration, you just had to turn in a scantron (sheet) and get a counselor to sign off on it until you hit 60 hours and then after that you were on your own. You didn't even have to see anyone in person to register. I get some students who think they are too cool for school and think they don't need an advisor but rely on bad info from secondary sources like friends or siblings who haven't attended UT for years.

Administrators shared some of their most heated advising topics, current issues, and frustrations in their advising centers. Although there were a few very important topic issues and controversial areas for discussion that were unique to specific schools, most issues were common areas of importance shared among the majority of the advising centers.

NCAA Certification and Student Athlete Issues

One of the concerns brought up in a few advising centers had to do with student athlete issues regarding the inconsistent treatment and support of student athletes by the athletics department, the interpretation of academic policies (degree progress and athletic eligibility), various allowances extended to some elite-level student athletes, athlete-friendly faculty, and general academic politicking or alleged deal-making between specific college administrators and their counterparts in the athletics administration. One advising administrator, who had spoken to me on several occasions prior to this study, had acknowledged that the college had been approached by athletics administrators in the past to reverse certain decisions on student appeals or to allow greater flexibility on certain academic policies or rules interpretations. Armed with this knowledge, I raised the issue during several of my interviews. Most administrators preferred not to discuss the topic or stated there were no issues, while some provided general statements that supported what I had been informed. One administrator, smiling, declined to speak about specifics but referred to athletics as “the dark side [of the force]” when the subject was brought up.

Degree Audits

The degree audit program was part of the UT Austin administrative computer system, a larger system that was known across campus as “Mainframe.” This system was responsible for nearly all of the University’s administrative applications, including student admissions, registration, degree audits, billing, financial aid, UT Direct, etc. Through the NRDEGR function, an advisor was able to access the degree audit system and corresponding rules. Different levels of access and permissions were granted to various staff depending on their title and association with the program.

The degree audit system was a complicated system with many different programming rules and many different levels, and so each college required trained specialists to maintain the degree audit system for their respective colleges. The system contained all of the degree rules for degree catalogs (active and inactive) including majors and minors, and required constant maintenance due to updates or changes and additions to degree programs and catalogs. Degree audit complications also arose from there being so many courses that could count in different areas of a degree plans. For instance, some degree plans allowed for a course to count either in the major or minor, but not both. Several complications resulted from specific programming issues that resulted from the variations of rules that might apply in one instance but not another or from masking rules. In addition, there were issues between the university core curriculum section of degree plans and the specific college requirements.

Students were not able to access the mainframe system until the creation of a new interface for all university users a couple of decades ago. The Interactive Degree Audit system (IDA) pooled data from the mainframe and had a user-friendly interface that was accessible online. The system was created a couple of decades ago, and eventually all degree audit systems including the original IDA and the degree audit functions of the mainframe were migrated and absorbed into IDA 2.0 in 2012. The plan was to completely eliminate the degree audit programs of the mainframe system, and to create a new system and single point of access for all users. Unfortunately, changes were happening so rapidly that advisors often encountered inaccurate degree audits for specific rules due to migration errors or rules that were not functioning properly. One administrator remarked, “You have this tool that the University wants advisors to use and trust, but often it is not a clean or accurate audit. Can we not try to revamp things all at once and instead try to gradually roll out things so that we can see what the problems are and have time to respond to them and correct them?”

Catalog Changes and the Core Curriculum

The emergence of the School of Undergraduate Studies and the University core curriculum in 2008 created a new level of complexity because it required the development and programming of new rules and reprogramming of sections of the degree audit to work with the new structure as well as catalog changes. Each college had to create, restructure, and reprogram the rule systems to accommodate the changes to curriculum and to find solutions for conflicts or errors as a result. In addition, the subsequent introduction and roll out of the University flag requirements further complicated matters.

Administrators across the University agreed that degree audit complications and catalog changes were among the top sources of frustration for advising centers throughout the past decade. Undergraduate degree catalogs were created every two years and expired six years after the last year of coverage. For example, a 2010-2012 or 10-12 catalog would activate in the fall term of 2010 and expire at the end of the 2018 summer term. Thus, there were four active catalogs at any given time. However, it was not the number of catalogs, but the variety of changes in a relatively short period of time, the increase in the types of substitutions and degree audit overrides, and the general territoriality of offices and departments that caused the problems. One administrator stated the following:

> Introducing the core [curriculum] sparked the first wave of issues, and now the flags have created other issues. In the audits, there are some things that you are limited in doing. For example, let's say that you are a student with a Business

> minor… well in our college we allow Economics to count in the Business minor, but you can't really program this in the audit because the audit is only programmed to pick up the Business courses. It requires an override all of the time. It would be easier if you could go in for your college and modify things that would be accepted in the degree audit.

The administrator continued:

> I think it's some of the colleges not giving up control and colleges can be territorial. For example, with natural science, can they allow our students to have BIO 311C and BIO 301L count since they are really two separate courses? Also, we see the limiting of choices in some parts of the core such as options for VAPA. Sometimes colleges don't consider the student experience/perspective before implementing these rules.

Four-Year Graduation Rates

Administrators discussed the University's current agenda and emphasis on improving four-year graduation rates. All acknowledged that the issue of four-year graduation was among the top priorities of the College Deans, the Provost, and the University President. However, several indicated that the goal of reaching 70% by 2016 within a four year period (2012 entering cohort) from the current rate of 51% was near impossible. When I proposed that a fundamental culture shift needed to take place at the University in regards to graduation, not a single administrator disagreed, so perhaps the high-reaching goal would create a sense of urgency and serve as a catalyst to spark the necessary changes in the right direction.

Administrators stated that they have begun immediately to evaluate their practices and several advising centers have initiated changes to college policies and areas of the advising programs. These actions included making several changes to summer orientation programs to emphasize academics and graduation cohorts, strengthening outreach and retention programs, conducting academic assessment, re-evaluating late registration/drop/withdrawal procedures, revising policies regarding the declaration of a major or multiple majors, and enforcing previously unenforced policies. Also, administrators expected advising centers to be involved either directly or indirectly with future university initiatives from the Provost's office that focused on financial aid incentives, college readiness, data-driven analytics, and modernizing the University's degree pathways.

University Policies: Consistency and Enforcement

Administrators provided examples of situations that required the tightening or enforcement of previously unenforced or lax university, college, and office policies affecting graduation rates, and discussed policy areas that needed revisions. Administrators also provided examples of areas that required more awareness and consistency in the handling of student matters. Some examples of the questions under contemplation by administrators included the following:

1) Do you put a limit on how many times a student can transfer to another college?
2) Do you only allow students to transfer if they can graduate in 4 years?
3) Do we enforce the rule that we already have to not allow students to transfer after they have 60 hours of college credit? (We currently don't do anything to restrict students from transferring.)
4) Do you put a limit on how many times a student can declare a major at a specific point in the academic career?
5) Do you limit how many majors a student can pursue depending on the student's

degree progress in a four-year period?

6) Can we get the financial aid office to enforce the funding caps for excessive hours towards a degree?

7) Can we gain more consistency among the colleges in the way we handle medical withdrawals, late withdrawals, and late drops?

Summary

This Chapter presented findings from the interviews with advising administrators. The major themes developed around topics pertaining to the advising system rather than individual advisor attributes or advising approaches which featured prominently in the student focus groups. Areas of significance included the following: the characteristics of advising centers, the role and extent of assessment, the facilitation of change after the assessment process and examples of improvement from the advising centers, the organization and structure of advising, advisor duties and responsibilities, leadership insights, advisor training, outreach to at-risk students, policy-related issues, and current topics in advising.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY DISCUSSION, INSIGHTS & IMPLICATIONS

Concluding Summary

The previous four chapters revealed important findings about the nature of effective advising and the process and outcomes of academic advising assessment at a large public institution of higher education. *Chapter 4* provided a glimpse into the assessment practices of seven major colleges through the chronicling and reviewing of assessment documents past to present. The chapter documented the approaches (methods, tools, and instruments) that advising units have utilized to assess the various aspects of an advising system and highlighted the attempts of advising units and the institution to engage in assessment and to improve advising in general. *Chapter 5* focused on SPSS analysis of longitudinal data (seven different colleges, varying time periods from 2003-2011) from five-point Likert-scale scores and the coding of textual data from over two thousand open-ended student survey comments. *Chapter 6* revealed students' perceptions of and experiences with academic advising, and conveyed students' ideas and expectations of effective advising from the student focus groups. *Chapter 7* explored some of the themes uncovered from the interviews with administrators and the advising leadership. Areas such as the administering of advising services, advisor training and development, structural organization, advisor responsibilities, assessment of programs, and current issues were addressed.

Unlike *Chapters 4– 7* which focused primarily on data analysis and the reporting of findings, *Chapter 8* addresses the research questions while revisiting some of the important findings from the previous chapters and introducing implications for further research. A few themes from the findings are explored more thoroughly, and insights that I have gained from the observations and self-reflection phase of the study as well as the relevant literature contribute to my insights in this chapter. Some of the themes such as leadership and advising culture that were not included in the previous chapters' findings will be explored in the critical reflections and recommendations sections of this chapter. As I have mentioned earlier, my intent has been for this study to serve as an action-research project, therefore; any concluding discussion would not be complete without recommendations to move forward and suggestions for further investigation. As is customary with action research practices, an analysis of uncovered issues and themes will utilize critical reflection from experiences in the field, and I will pull from my knowledge base as an experienced advising practitioner throughout the years to address the findings and implications of the study. The first-person narrative voice is used to facilitate the discussion where appropriate in order to allow for richer and more connected commentary. For this study, I spent a considerable amount of time to get to know the various stakeholders of an advising system: students, advisors, and administrators representing the institution, and I was both a researcher and active participant at times during parts of the study. Gaining employment as a full-time academic advisor at the University immediately prior to this research study allowed me the opportunity to learn about the advising system and programs. Throughout the 7 ½ years on the advising job, I worked to improve my advising throughout and documented my advising experiences and office interactions in journal format during the last year before my resignation when I left to complete the writing for the current research study.

This chapter will be guided by the research questions as headings with my insights and observations supported by the findings and references from the literature appearing under the headings. Three foundational documents will be used as frameworks through which to examine effective advising and discuss the findings for this research study in this final Chapter. The three “Pillar” documents of advising endorsed by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) leadership address different areas of an advising system: the Concept of Academic advising specifies the pedagogy and student learning outcomes of academic advising; the Statement of Core Values provides a framework to guide professional practice and reminds advisors of their responsibilities to students, colleagues, institutions, society, and themselves; the CAS Higher Education Academic Advising Standards and Guidelines identifies good practices and focus areas for the assessment of an advising system.

The overarching area of inquiry that resulted from a review of the literature and one that this research study attempts to address is: What is effective advising (how is it manifested and in what ways is it measured at the University)? As I explained earlier in the methodology chapter, the process of arriving at the supporting research questions for the topic of inquiry stemmed from the inductive approach towards doing research, and the study began with general advising observations and the chronicling of assessment in academic advising at the University. During the initial whittling down process, several issue questions emerged, and the areas of inquiry were consolidated and transformed into the following research questions: What is the general state of academic advising at the University? How are advising systems (advisors, students, programs) assessed at the

University? What specific attitudes, behaviors, and actions contribute to effective advising? What are some things that limit the effectiveness of advising systems or that impact the quality of advising? Finally, at the end of this chapter I will discuss my recommendations to move forward with the findings of this study and suggest future areas for research and practice.

Status of Academic Advising at the University

The CAS Higher Education Academic Advising Standards and Guidelines, one of the three advising document "Pillars", provides 12 different focus areas for the assessment of advising programs and exemplifies the standards for good practice within any advising system. These areas to be considered in the comprehensive assessment of an advising system include the following: mission, program, leadership, organization and management, human resources, financial resources, facilities/technology/equipment, legal responsibilities, equity and access, campus and external relations, diversity, ethics, and assessment and evaluation (White, 2006). To address the first of the research questions for this study, I have referenced this document and the described areas to help frame my discussion for the first research question. However, some areas are explored to various extents under the other research questions, and not all areas are covered since a program evaluation is beyond the scope and purpose of this research study.

Understanding effective advising and the advising system required a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that involved the collection and analysis of many different forms of data from a variety of sources and over an extended period of time. More specifically, it required getting a grasp on how advising is manifested at the

University and how the various participants' perceive and experience the advising system. The various components to this study can be viewed as jumbo pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Similar to pieces of a puzzle that combine together to create a complete picture, the various parts of the research study contribute to the understanding of an effective advising system. Imagine for example, a picture of the Eiffel Tower; we are still able to ascertain what the resulting picture of the structure should be even if there are a few faded or missing pieces. Likewise, the results of this study give us insight into the current state of academic advising at the University.

The academic advising system at the University is an intricate network consisting of large advising centers, smaller departmental advising units, and supporting offices as well as a variety of advising personnel with various roles and diverse advising duties. Advising mission statements are not common among the colleges. The institution utilizes a decentralized structure that is termed a satellite model which Habley (1997, 2004) described as a structure in which each school, college, or division within the institution utilizes its own established approach to advising. For example, the College of Liberal Arts uses a split model system of advising whereas the School of Engineering uses a modified supplementary model. All lead advising administrators (e.g. Assistant Deans) at the University - head advising supervisors of the colleges with primary duties that include the supervision of advisors and advising policy development – are non-faculty. In general, college advising administrators at this institution are heavily practitioner-oriented and do not engage in theory development or advising research.

The college advising centers in this study operate within the recommended NACADA student-to-advisor ratio of 300:1; although, special circumstances in a college during peak times have forced a slightly higher ratio closer to 400:1 for a few advisors during limited periods. Institutional-wide budget cuts from 2007 -2013 affected advising operations across the University. Although advising units had to cope with hiring and salary freezes as well as the closing or consolidation of open positions, advising offices were able to avoid the mass personnel layoffs that occurred in administrative units, IT, and assessment/evaluation offices. The training of advisors relies primarily on a practice referred to in the advising community as “shadowing” which was described in an earlier chapter. Training focuses primarily on an advisor developing proficiency with advising tools, understanding academic policies/procedures/degree information, and becoming comfortable advising students. Very little to no attention is placed on understanding student development theory, diversity issues, or how to improve communication and mentorship skills. However, advisors are granted opportunities to attend or participate in professional development days, monthly ACA meetings, periodic training workshops, and regional or national conferences on average of once a year.

Advising technology is supported by college IT departments, central ITS, and/or the Registrar’s IT team and includes tools, applications, and resources. Advising technology has been one of the strengths of the advising system at the University, and many developments have garnered awards or received national recognition. Some examples of advising technology include Advisor’s Toolkit, Interactive Degree Audit, Wayfinder, Course Instructor Surveys, Course Syllabi database, interactive FAQs, STAR appointment system, OPORS for petitions/overrides, advising websites, and integrations of social media; a designated advisor or administrative staff member usually makes the updates to the advising pages of a college division or department website. Additionally, some colleges have one or two in-house IT staff members assigned to service an advising unit throughout the year, while other colleges have IT personnel assigned for specified periods of time to work on approved projects. Students spend a lot of time with technology, particularly social media, so advising offices have moved quickly to engage them in their comfort zones. While not a replacement for face-to-face interaction, advising technology has found a prominent role in the student-advisor relationship. By using advising blogs, interactive advising FAQs, Facebook, Twitter and instant messaging, advisors can quickly answer procedural questions and generally make themselves more accessible to students. Of course, advising centers vary in the extent of their usage of online communication. While a few colleges have designated times for online advising through instant messaging, others do not participate in this form of advising at all.

Advising initiatives and special programs are important components of advising programs that support the missions and core values of advising units within an advising system. College advising centers are associated with Deans' offices and are well-connected with other advising units and university offices. Not only do these centers serve as valuable hubs of information, they also function to develop and facilitate some of the colleges' most important programs. Across the advising centers at the University, the most common advising initiatives appear to be those that involve student retention and graduation issues. However, it is difficult to ascertain the level of success of these program initiatives since most have not been appropriately evaluated using reliable methods. Through the years in my capacity as an academic advisor, I have witnessed various college personnel make claims that their advising programs contribute to higher retention or graduation rates. Unfortunately, many of these claims appear to be speculative and presumptive due to the lack of proper analysis or evaluation. Although it may be inspiring for college personnel to attribute the increase in graduation rates to intrusive advising, doing so without establishing proper cause and effect and without reliable methods of evaluation is irresponsible. For example, a 2% scholastic probation rate among students in the College of Communications is remarkable, but there are many factors that may lead to this relatively low probation rate that are not related to academic advising. Nevertheless, one can argue that advising personnel have a responsibility to reach out to students facing difficulty regardless of measurable affects on outcomes.

In the wake of a priority mandate by the University leadership to increase four year graduation rates, many college administrators have increased their attention towards programs that target student retention and methods to measure them. One of the more promising programs that was actually developed before the renewed emphasis on four-year graduation rates is UTurn, a spring 2009 product of the College of Liberal Arts. The range of students on academic probation varies among the colleges, with the College of Liberal Arts having a relatively high number (not necessarily ratio) of students on probation ranging from 300 to 500 depending on the semester. Roughly 165 students participated in UTurn during its first two years, and two-thirds of students in UTurn avoided academic dismissal, compared to about half of students who declined the program's invitation. The program is a sustainable model due to its cost-effectiveness and operates within existing College resources. Since many colleges already have academic persistence programs in place, it would not be difficult to transform these programs by using the UTurn program as a model to move forward.

Another proactive idea from a college advising center is the Comm-Be-Advised registration initiative by the College of Communications. The initiative is responsible for getting more students in earlier to see advisors about classes thereby reducing the number of students' who have to rush and frantically search for classes – a process which can lead to an undesirable class schedule or enrolment in inappropriate courses that can lead to untimely graduation. According to a college administrator, the advising initiative helps to reduce the stress on both the students and the advisors during the registration period because it effectively disperses the advising loads over several weeks and reduces students' wait times for advising. Thus, a resulting benefit is that a student gets to spend more time on any given day with his/her advisor. The administrator also expressed his belief that the fall 2009 semester was one of the best semesters statistically according to post-appointment surveys because of the implementation of the Comm- Be-Advised initiative. The advising initiative involved the advertisement of a contest which occurred about three weeks before registration advising through banners placed outside buildings, emails, student organizations, and word-of-mouth. The advising center handed out special shirts and prizes, and one student champion was awarded BEVO bucks as the grand prize.

Assessment procedures for advising vary among the colleges, but are for the most part scarce and inconsistently applied. In general, the assessment of advising appears to be a casual engagement with little attention paid to the mechanisms, instruments, or the analysis of results. In other words, existing practices are rarely purposeful and there is very little attention aimed at student learning outcomes in most colleges. A post-appointment advising survey, or waitlist survey, that is accessed online through an auto-generated email to students after each checked-in advising appointment has been the best source for the consistent and ongoing collection of evaluative data on advising in each of the colleges; it remains the primary source for advisors and administrators to receive consistent feedback on the advising program, and in most of the colleges, the only source. Although the survey quality (number/type/design of questions) varies among the colleges, the post-appointment advising survey is a good foundational assessment piece that harbors potential for the institution moving forward. In general, administrators of advising have been content on allowing the survey system to collect evaluative data, but have failed to use the generated data to provide training or other concrete efforts to improve the quality of academic advising. Likewise, advising personnel have not taken a disciplined and intentional approach to using the results for self-evaluation and individual advisor improvement.

As reflected in my analysis of 2003 -2011 post-appointment survey responses (five-point Likert type) as well as a comprehensive review of the results from previous and overlapping advising studies at the University, students' perceptions of advising are overwhelmingly positive. Students responded to questions about their advisement experiences: their satisfaction with particular aspects of the advising services, their advising relationship, their ability to carry out specific goals, their ability to utilize relevant resources, their understanding of policies and degree information, and their perceptions about the ability of their advisors in helping students to develop positive and productive behaviors, to learn various academic tasks, and to accomplish various objectives among other things. The mean scores for advisors from the post-appointment surveys have been consistently high across all colleges and semesters throughout the survey years. All seven of the colleges in the research study had collective advisor means above 4.50 for more than half of the semesters within their survey periods, and several had calculated means above 4.50 for every semester. A chart that I created from each college's collective advising means for the available data semesters from summer 2003 through spring 2011 displayed a general upward pattern of improving scores in every college. However, statistical analysis through SPSS indicated only a few sequential semesters of significance and revealed mostly scattered or indiscriminate patterns from the output of most colleges. Although four of the seven colleges had significant main effects (overall effects) for semesters, only two produced any noticeable patterns of improvement marked by definitive moments in time. When looking at individual advisor performances, I was not surprised to discover that award-winning advisors most frequently earned the best ratings in their respective colleges and remained remarkably consistent in their overall efficacy scores across the semesters. On another note, I had expected to see more new advisors with statistically significant semesters of improvement than the results indicated. As it turned out, some new advisors did not have any semesters that differed significantly, either positively or negatively. Also, I found it surprising that there were very few advisors overall with consistent patterns of sustained improvement for multiple and consecutive semesters. In general, improvement did not occur steadily or gradually over time, rather it was sporadic and intermittent for most advisors. Nevertheless, a large majority of advisors had significantly better last semester scores than first semester scores during their assessment periods and produced more semesters that were positively significant in the second half of the total assessment period than the first half.

Students' responses from the focus group section of the research study and students' open comments from various advising surveys, including the post-appointment surveys, are mostly favorable and also support a positive perception of advisors and academic advising. Students' comments provide details about advising strengths as well as advising areas that might need improvement. Since open survey comments often represent the extremes of student advising experiences whether negative or positive, these comments provide clues to the most important issues relevant to students. One of the beliefs that has long been held by the advising community and that emerged as a theme from students' comments is that of personalized advising being the key to building strong personal relationships between students and advisors. This personalized approach includes building rapport, providing support, exploring opportunities, facilitating goals, encouraging responsibility and holding students accountable. Trust, confidence, courtesy, and respect are all foundational elements of the student-advisor relationship in this approach. The data analysis from the quantitative section of this study revealed strong positive correlations between these elements and advising efficacy.

Exploring Assessment at the University

To address the second of the research questions, I begin by consulting NACADA's Concept of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2006a) as a guide to understanding assessment within the realm of academic advising. The Concept specifies that regardless of the diversity of our institutions, academic advising consists of three components: curriculum, pedagogy, and student learning outcomes. These components represent what advising deals with, how advising does what it does, and the result of academic advising. In accordance with the Concept, it is appropriate that outcomes differ among institutions and advising systems, with each advising program establishing its own learning outcomes based upon its mission, goals, curriculum, co-curriculum, and assessment methods (White, 2000). Nevertheless, the Concept provides a representative sample that specifies the expectations that students will:

- craft a coherent educational plan based on assessment of abilities aspirations, interests, and values;
- use complex information from various sources to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals;
- assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements that articulate the meaning of higher education and the intent of the institution's curriculum;
- cultivate the intellectual habits that lead to a lifetime of learning;

- behave as citizens who engage in the wider world around them (NACADA, 2006, p. 10).

According to Winston and Sandor (2002), who created the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI), the evaluation of advising programs helps institutions answer two central questions concerning an academic advising system: How well are the programs doing and what are the outcomes of the programs? By answering these questions, institutions can obtain a better idea of the effectiveness of their advising programs. However, before these questions can be addressed, the assessment process itself must be established and assessment practices reviewed.

A comprehensive review of the University's assessment practices for advising has yielded important information regarding the nature of assessment, the extent of assessment practices, and the general culture and attitudes of the advising community. The assessment of academic advising has rarely been a focus of the University administration or the individual colleges throughout the years. Although research into quality teaching practices and the assessment of classroom outcomes continues to garner wide-spread institutional interest, the practice of academic advising continues to receive very little attention from the highest levels of academic administration at the University throughout its history. Even during the most recent decade (2000-2010), only a couple of Provost sponsored initiatives have attempted to engage academic advising programs and practice. Unfortunately, neither initiative had any impact upon the advising community. The initiative in spring 2005 consisted only of the creation and distribution of an advising survey for that spring semester to gather information from students; there was no focus placed on the assessment cycle nor was there any intent to improve on advising practices. Moreover, data analysis was limited to certain sections of the survey and results were made available only through the Provost's or faculty council's special requests. Thus, a comprehensive report of the results was not available for the greater advising community at the University to utilize. A separate assessment initiative in fall 2009 consisted of the development of a comprehensive advising survey that would measure different advising components and outcomes for students, advisors, and advising programs in general. However, the initiative never got beyond its spring 2010 test run due to several complicating factors that included the changing of Provosts, the disbandment of the assessment committee, layoffs to key survey consultants, and the lack of urgency and interest associated with the assessment project after the aforementioned events.

At the department and college levels, the assessment of academic advising has been of low priority as well, and virtually all assessment initiatives have originated from the main advising centers. As mentioned earlier, post-appointment surveys are the primary assessment instruments of advising in the colleges. Not all of the advising centers use the same online system, and the extent to which student learning outcomes is measured varies according to the design of each center's advising survey. Whereas a few survey instruments have been modified to include learning outcomes, most instruments continue to resemble simple student satisfaction surveys. In most colleges, advising administrators do not take the time to formally analyze survey data and prefer instead to take occasional glances at selected portions of the general output generated by the survey results program. The post-appointment system is an excellent, foundational assessment piece that remains underutilized, but harbors much potential for advising personnel that wish to improve their offices' assessment practices. The system is currently available to all of the college advising centers, and departmental advising units can be easily added to the system with the help of IT personnel. Also, the survey instruments and data analytical tools should be easy to modify and improve. Some suggestions for improvement are discussed later in the recommendations section of this chapter.

In addition to post-appointment surveys, other assessment instruments that have been utilized by a few colleges to assess academic advising, though scarcely, throughout the years have included focus groups, periodic surveys targeting special student populations (probationary, sophomores, seniors), general surveys aimed at advising or student-related activities (orientation, registration, graduation), and specialized, quick-strike surveys to gage student behaviors such as drop tendencies, program preferences, etc. Only one college was identified to have personnel engaged in a majority of these measures on a reoccurring basis, as for the rest of the colleges, utilization of these instruments ranged from zero to three of these measures and tended to be inconsistent and non-reoccurring during the past decade. None of the advising centers have implemented formal assessment cycles, and only two have reviewed assessment practices. In general, most colleges devote very little to no time for the actual assessment process and assessment planning. Most of the previously mentioned survey initiatives were created spontaneously at the request of upper-level administrators solely to retrieve general information about their students and advisors: they wanted to have the information at their disposal when they needed it, but did not necessarily have any plans to analyze or immediately use it.

Although awareness regarding the importance of assessment and attention towards student learning outcomes has increased throughout the years, only two advising centers have made significant attempts to evaluate assessment procedures and to understand and formalize the assessment process while improving on practices, implementing changes to assessment instruments, and executing new assessment initiatives. Unfortunately, even these centers have recently encountered setbacks with their assessment practices. Within one of these advising units, the loss of a key advisor involved with assessment and top-level administrators who were enthusiastic about assessment led to a stalling of assessment efforts. In another advising unit, assessment teams that consisted of advisors were dissolved and a top-down approach towards assessment was implemented which virtually eliminated any further advisor input and created an environment where survey results were no longer shared with the advising community.

These examples provide us with clues as to why assessment is not conducted more frequently in advising units and why it often has been difficult to sustain. Skilled leaders in academic advising who possess assessment expertise are rare, and those who also possess an understanding of organizational dynamics are even rarer. Advising administrators at the University moved up the ranks to their current positions through internal promotions or appointments within their departments, and none of the administrators came from outside of the institution. In fact, the employment histories of advising administrators have been very stable, and most administrators have served in either the same department or the same and one other for their entire professional careers. Advising administrators began their careers at the institution within either academic advising or a related student services position with very little diversity in their professional backgrounds. Furthermore, advising administrators' educational backgrounds hail from the non-science and non-technical fields, and several of the top-level advising administrators do not have advanced degrees – only four of seven hold advanced degrees and only one has earned a terminal degree. Thus, administrators' perceptions of advising and their practices have been shaped primarily by their own experiences from within this singular institution. Learning about assessment techniques and planning assessment initiatives requires the advising leadership to expend time to learn new practices – time which many administrators have stated that they do not have or are reluctant to invest. As such, administrators are more comfortable relying on "a feel" for how things are going in their advising centers rather than data-driven assessment, and their lack of familiarity with assessment techniques is one reason why advising offices at the University have been slow to engage in assessment practices. However, the success or failure of assessment initiatives often comes down to the level of support garnered from advising personnel. The colleges that have experienced the most success with the assessment process are the ones with at least one enthusiastic, dedicated advisor that recognizes the value of assessment and the need to measure programmatic and/or student learning outcomes. Ultimately, whether assessment practices are effective depend on a variety of factors such as attitudes towards assessment (desire/buy-in), leadership, time, and commitment.

My observations have led me to believe that most advisors maintain a cautious attitude towards assessment: they do not particularly see assessment as a bad thing, but they do not always recognize the need for it. Many advisors have specified that their pre-existing perceptions of assessment or lack of understanding have caused them to be apprehensive towards engaging in assessment and have kept them from immediately supporting initiatives in their offices. Advisors may view assessment as a waste of their time and energy if they are unable to see the value in it. Assessment can be directed at students, advisors, or advising programs, however; advisors have demonstrated that they are particularly wary of assessment which is implemented top-down as well as assessment that specifically targets advising personnel. In the absence of effective leadership, advisors may view these types of assessment efforts as unnecessary intrusions and have apprehensions about how results will be used. Therefore, it is important for advising administrators to have a clear understanding of their assessment goals and to be inclusive of their advising teams' input. Advisors have stated that they are more likely to support assessment initiatives when they are given the opportunity to be involved in it from the beginning or when they are consulted before practices are implemented.

Effective Advising Perspectives - Attitudes, Behaviors, and Actions

It is widely understood among the advising community that effective advising depends largely on efforts from the advisor, as well as the student. The findings detailed in previous chapters of this research study revealed many reasons why some students who are in need of assistance have chosen to participate in advising infrequently or not at all. Where the effort or the proper mindset is lacking from students, advisors must step up their efforts to inspire students in a myriad of ways and to help students to become proactive in seeking educational opportunities, exploring interests, identifying goals, and taking responsibility for their actions. Advisors must be more assertive with outreach to these types of students and must provide campus resources and opportunities, as well as guidance and support while building the student-advisor relationship.

The advising literature provides plenty of examples of advising approaches, or advising styles, over the years that have been supported by the academic advising community. Theories of academic advising and student development are useful because they reduce a complicated interpersonal situation to an understandable number of elements, but, even so, they have their shortcomings. Since reality is more complex than any theory can fully describe, advisors must synthesize multiple theories to craft a multilayered response to a student's specific situation (Creamer, 2000). Although there is no consensus on the most effective of these advising approaches, there are generally accepted principles in regards to the nature of an effective advising relationship. Many of these principles surfaced as themes within the analysis of the student focus groups and open survey comments for this study. My observations of advising interactions during this research study also uncovered many instances of these important principles at work. The most effective advising relationships are those in which advisor and advisee know each other well and can speak candidly about goals and challenges. Additionally, effective advising relationships are predicated upon trust and respect where both advisor and advisee are accountable to each other and make genuine and reciprocal efforts to enhance the advising relationship. Participating in multiple advising interactions (advisement meetings) facilitates the establishment of an effective advising relationship. Because each student's advising experience builds upon the last, it is important for advisors to engage in effective actions and behaviors from the very start. There are only a limited number of chances that an advisor has to capture the attention of an advisee before the student decides whether it is worthwhile to continue the advising relationship or to utilize advising further in any capacity. The first advising meeting with a student is a crucial period in the advising relationship because it is often the first experience that a college student has with a university official, and it is when perceptions about the advisor and advising are formed. Because the majority of these first meetings often occur during busy advising office times such as Orientation or Registration, many advisors are unable to devote enough time to establish the advising relationship and must focus on answering students' questions, getting through a list of immediate concerns, and dispensing accurate information about resources and requirements. Therefore, it is particularly important that advisors are able to establish positive and memorable, first advising experiences that will elevate students' perceptions and create opportunities for advisors to build upon the advising relationship in the future. If students develop early positive perceptions of advising then they will be more likely to seek out additional advising in the future which can lead to truly significant and meaningful advising relationships over time. When faced with time constraints, advisors must be able to quickly assess the priorities for an advising meeting based on the students' needs and the relevant situation. Students' accounts and depictions of quality advising interactions and effective advising experiences from first meetings with advisors revealed that students most appreciate and respond to advisors who are cordial, sincere, knowledgeable, helpful, focused, and assuring. Although some students mentioned “friendly” and “relatable” as traits that their ideal advisors would possess, students did not mention these characteristics as essential in regards to effective advising. Said one student, “I don’t need my advisor to be my friend – I mean I don’t feel that it’s necessary to chat all the time.” The student continued, “I don’t expect my advisor to have to talk to me like he’s my classmate or that he knows everything about me. I like his professionalism, and I respect him; I’m also satisfied knowing that he respects me too and has my best interests at heart.”

On the issue of achieving successful advising outcomes, both students and advisors overwhelmingly agreed that effective communication is essential. Key communication principles identified in the study include acknowledgement, clarity (meaning + delivery), and reinforcement. Acknowledgement is facilitated by advisors through occasional questions that engage the student and test their understanding. Clarity refers to the content, organization, and delivery of ideas and of advice given. Reinforcement commits important messages to memory. The effective utilization of all three of these principles by advisors leads to more productive and meaningful advising sessions for students because it reduces conversational tangents and the chance for confusion and misunderstanding that may develop over the course of a long and complex advising discussion.

It is important for advisors to allow the advising relationship to develop naturally. Effective advisors prepare, engage, support, and challenge their students. Successful advisors' practices observed throughout parts of the research study include motivating students, reinforcing successful habits, introducing opportunities, and clarifying goals and academic purpose. The most effective advisors are the ones who are the most consistent in applying these practices in their advising meetings. In addition, effective advisors demonstrate a high-level of commitment towards facilitating student success, as well as a desire to improve their own advising practices and approaches. The most common characteristics exhibited by effective advisors as identified in this research study include being attentive, detail-oriented, dependable, knowledgeable, caring, sincere, and helpful. Students' expected outcomes of effective advisors include helping students finding the right fit of major, maximizing the college experience (exploring opportunities), identity development, and graduating on time.

Factors that Impact Effective Advising

While the student focus groups and post-appointment surveys provided useful insight into qualities and characteristics of effective advisors and programs, the administrator interviews and the observations of the advising environment revealed more about the advising system itself. Although the presence and availability of effective advisors and advising programs to meet students' needs are important components, there are several other factors that contribute to a highly-functioning advising system. Identifying some of these factors at the University could help to spark meaningful conversations about the advising environment and attempts to assess the impact of these factors which can be difficult to measure within a complex advising system. To facilitate this process, we should obtain at least a fundamental understanding of how the advising system operates. Hutchens (1996) identified ten areas of investigation that must be examined in order to understand any system: 1) Each system must be considered in its wholeness, not its parts; 2) There is interconnectedness among all systems within a system; 3) A system is more than the sum of its parts; 4) It is not possible to assign a single purpose to a complex social system; 5) A system cannot be understood until one understands the multiple functions of the system; 6) A system's structure determines how it functions; 7) The boundaries of any system-of-interest must be defined; 8) Understanding how a system achieves its purpose(s) is essential to understanding the system of interest; 9) All systems must adapt to their environment if they are to survive; 10) Systems are always changing. By utilizing system theory principles and applying them to the academic advising realm, we can move past the surface issues of advising to address the more deeply-rooted systemic issues.

A year's worth of research observations, the study of current literature, and critical reflection from many years of experience in the advising field have provided me with an in depth understanding of how the various components can affect a system. Observed components to an advising system include the following: mission/goals (operating principles), structural organization (advising environment), leadership, culture (perceptions/beliefs/values/practices), programs, and resources (human/financial/structural). How well an advising system functions depends on the synergy and interplay among these components as much as the quality of each individual component. The advising system at the University is decentralized and consists of several subsystems that are bound by the different colleges and that operate largely independently of each other. The challenges within each advising subsystem are to maximize the efficient and effective utilization of the organization's resources, to manage its responsibilities to the students and the institution, and to identify and achieve short-term and long-term organizational goals. Threats to the health of an advising system originate from stressors in the advising environment, as well as missed opportunities. An advising organization's reaction to internal and external stressors of the advising environment can either negatively impact the advising system or catalyze improvements for positive change. Stressors can appear spontaneously and affect any number of an advising system's components. For example, a budget shortfall marked by layoffs, hiring freezes, and restrictions on merit increases would surely impact a system's resource component, but could also impact the ability of an advising system to carry out its mission or goals. Also impacting the quality and effectiveness of an advising system is the advising organization's ability to identify and pursue opportunities for improvement. Establishing and maintaining a comprehensive assessment program is an essential step for advising organizations to materialize their commitment to improvement. A highly-functioning advising organization anticipates potential threats and uses informed decision-making to evaluate the potential impact on the advising system while creating strategies to prioritize and deal with challenges. Thus, an effective advising organization is one that engages in self-assessment, responds positively to challenges, and capitalizes on opportunities to meet the needs of the campus community.

Critical Reflections and Moving Forward

This research study presented many challenges throughout the research stages that included multiple and iterative phases for planning, data collection, and analysis. Of these challenges, the three most significant included the following: the amount of time and effort that was required to understand the various components and subcomponents of a large advising system, the difficulty collecting, organizing and synthesizing large amounts of information from multiple sources of data, and the effective leveraging of advising knowledge and experience while accommodating an inductive approach to the research in my dual role as researcher-practitioner. Thinking back upon my learning experiences as an academic advisor, I am encouraged by how I was able to utilize assessment to elevate my individual effectiveness as an advisor and to maintain a high-level of consistency throughout the years. For example, the post-appointment survey scores and open-ended comments helped me to refine my communication style and to tweak my message delivery to students which allowed me to be more connected with them. At the beginning of my advising career which began at the University, my end-of-semester survey scores were about average among all advisors' scores within our college. The advising center that I belonged to at the time had just initiated its post-appointment survey system a few months after I was hired. As a new advisor during that time, I found the feedback from the survey results and comments to be very helpful. As I gained more experience and knowledge with advising, I became better equipped to make use of the survey results. Specifically, I became better at discerning the important areas for self-improvement and understanding how to enhance the advising experience for students. A firm commitment to learn and improve with each advising interaction and experience elevated my survey scores to the highest among all scores in the college. Although I was able to achieve statistically significant and sustained improvement in semester scores, this type of outcome was more the exception than the norm among the advisors in this study who began their full-time professional advising careers at the University. It would be interesting to interview the advisors in the group to determine their level of commitment to improvement and to learn if they did anything with the feedback from students. What I have discovered about assessment is that there is value in the process as well as in the results, and that assessment is only an instrument for positive change that cannot occur without a sincere and sustained commitment to improvement by both the advising leadership and staff. If advisors are left out of the assessment process and are directed to follow through with top-down mandates from the advising administration then advisors will perceive little value in the process and will be less motivated to invest the time and effort to critically reflect and utilize the results of assessment.

Ideally, a comprehensive assessment program would reach all components (including subcomponents) of an advising system; however, the reality is that advising organizations don’t usually have the time or staff available to address everything. Furthermore, advising units may not have the expertise to assess immediately the more complex components (culture, structure, leadership) which involve organizational dynamics and are difficult to measure directly within a large system. In light of this reality, it is not surprising that attempts to improve the quality of advising within colleges at the University have focused on student satisfaction (perceptions of advising, availability of advising, ways students interact with advising), some specific programmatic areas of an advising program, and individual advisor performance (annual evaluations). Although it is important to assess advisor performance, we must not overlook the importance of other areas such as hiring, training, and advisor retention practices that also impact the quality of the human subcomponent within an advising system. Because academic advisors belong to the resources component, human subcomponent, of an advising system, collective improvement in this area would elevate the overall functionality of the advising organization. Ultimately, the effectiveness of advisors should be evaluated on how well they contribute to their assigned responsibilities in supporting the mission and goals of the advising unit (advising and programmatic outcomes), as well as their impact on the success of student learning outcomes. Although students are ultimately responsible for their own success, an advising unit must be accountable to the institution and be able to fulfill its role in supporting its students.

As suggested in the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) guidelines for academic advising programs, an operating principle of an academic advising unit should be the design and maintenance of a program that is:

- Intentional;
- Coherent;
- Based on theories and knowledge of teaching, learning, and human development;
- Reflective of developmental and demographic profiles of the student population; and

- Responsive to the needs of individuals, special populations, and communities.

CAS provides several guidelines, or operating principles as I like to refer to them, that are organized under twelve identified “parts”, or focus areas (components), of an advising system as follows: Part 1 – Mission; Part 2 – Program; Part 3 – Organization and Leadership; Part 4 – Human Resources; Part 5 – Ethics; Part 6 – Law, Policy, and Governance; Part 7 – Diversity, Equity, and Access; Part 8 – Institutional and External Relations; Part 9 – Financial Resources; Part 10 – Technology, Part 11 – Facilities and Equipment; Part 12 – Assessment and Evaluation. Collectively, these guidelines provide a solid framework for advising units to achieve operational excellence in regards to nationally developed standards. Designed to be applicable to and adoptable by all varieties of institutions, *CAS Standards and Guidelines* should be a primary reference source for any advising unit. What I have found to be directly relevant to this study on effective advising and assessment and what I believe will be useful to professionals interested in the process are the following sections: Part1 - Mission, Part 2 – Program, and Part 12 – Assessment.

One of the main points of emphasis expressed in the CAS literature is that advising programs must promote student learning that is purposeful and holistic. To support its practices and achieve success in meeting the needs of the campus community, an advising unit must identify relevant and desirable student learning outcomes and administer programs and services that encourage the achievement of those outcomes. Just as importantly, an advising unit must provide evidence of its impact on the achievement of those outcomes. Examples of relevant and desirable student outcomes proposed by

CAS include the following: intellectual growth, effective communication, realistic self-appraisal, enhanced self-esteem, clarified values, career choices, leadership development, healthy behaviors, meaningful interpersonal relationships, independence, collaboration, social responsibility, satisfying and productive lifestyles, appreciation of diversity, spiritual awareness and achievement of personal and educational goals.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, NACADA's Concept of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2006a) specifies that student learning outcomes should differ among institutions and be based upon the mission, goals, curriculum, co-curriculum, and assessment methods of the institution. The evaluation of assessment practices at the University revealed that most of its advising centers had not formalized the process to identify and measure student outcomes, and several had not given the subject of assessment and core values (learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, responsibility) any serious consideration at all. Further, there is little evidence to suggest that advising units are focused on developing comprehensive assessment programs for advising or dedicating time and resources to such endeavors. The absence of formalized assessment practices and comprehensive assessment programs can largely be attributed to three things: perception, leadership, and priorities. In general, advisors and advising administrators have voiced support for assessment, but individually and collectively they have been hesitant to take action.

Although assessment is an essential part of establishing and maintaining a high functioning advising office, the practice is not sufficient in and of itself to achieve that status. This is because assessment only measures what we design for it to measure, and the complexity of an advising system makes some elements difficult to assess directly. In addition to conducting regular and systematic assessment, an effective advising organization is one that is highly in tune with its mission and goals, is vigilant in maintaining a positive and supportive learning environment for students and staff, and is committed to developing a culture of leadership, innovation, inclusiveness, teamwork, and operational excellence. Through my research interactions and discussions with the various constituents within an advising system, observations of the advising environment, and analysis of college and institutional assessment documents and data, I have gained a comprehensive understanding and critical perspective into characteristics of effective advising as it relates to the advising community at the University. Any action-research study would not be complete without exploring areas for improvement or highlighting areas for further study. Critical reflection of my advising experiences from the field and the research study have brought me closer to understanding best practices and identifying ways to develop and support a high functioning advising system. In the following passages I share my insights into an assortment of themes from the advising context of the University and provide recommendations, or focus points, for an overall strategic vision of advising that incorporates these elements for the institution to move forward.

Focus 1: Reaffirm Our Commitment to Advising

Advising units should consider how the programmatic and daily advising activities of their offices can incorporate the institution's operating principles in achieving a high functioning advising system. Within that context, advising teams can proceed to develop a mission statement, values, and operating goals that are tailored to their advising units. Identifying and developing core values (mission/purpose) and advising goals can serve to reaffirm an advising organization's commitment to advising. To facilitate the process, administrators and advising personnel should make a concerted effort to review and to become familiar with the three pillar documents of NACADA. Described in an earlier chapter, these important foundational advising documents serve as guiding principles that affirm the role of academic advising in higher education and provide the framework for a coherent approach to implementing a well-functioning academic advising program. The three "Pillar" documents of advising endorsed by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) leadership are the Concept of Academic advising, the Statement of Core Values, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education: Academic Advising Standards and Guidelines.

The process of examining values and establishing goals is an essential first step in developing an effective advising culture which facilitates the establishment of an effective advising system. It is necessary to have this culture in place before we can start to discuss the improvement of advising programs. Many advising administrators and personnel are largely unfamiliar with nationally recognized advising literature and standards of practice. Instead of operating within a silo and waiting to react to internal situations, advising personnel should become more familiar with nationally recognized best practices and the current advising literature. By doing so, they will be armed with a better understanding of the prevalent issues that other advising offices have faced and be poised to respond proactively to institutional developments.

Focus 2: Explore and Determine Expected Outcomes

Advising units should identify what each of the stakeholders in advising expects from the process of advising, and establish a standardized set of outcomes for advising. These outcomes include programmatic outcomes, process/delivery outcomes, and student learning outcomes. Relationships, information and clarity in roles are core expectations for the different constituents. Each player's understanding of the advising process is influenced by past experiences and relationships, and awareness of development and learning style affects expectations about the process. To function effectively, advising teams need to adequately address institutional expectations as well as students' expectations for academic advising and facilitate positive perceptions and experiences throughout the college process. Perhaps a primary difference in expectations between students and advisors was reflected in their attitudes regarding course selection and guidance, and this difference in expectations was particularly pronounced with new and first year students as well as students entering new majors. Whereas many advisors, especially those advising undeclared students, tended to take a broader perspective in regards to degree planning and semester courses, most students expressed their preferences that advisors be more specific in regards to course information. Many of these students perceived an academic advisor's primary role to be that of "course consultant" and held the expectations that advisors should know more details about specific classes and instructors. Several students commented that they expected advisors to be able to "help them pick out specific classes" based on students' interests, "tell which courses and instructors were difficult, easy, or useful", and "get students into classes." These types of comments from this demographic of students suggest that some of them are largely unfamiliar with the multiple responsibilities and functions of academic advisors and unaware of the differences between the types of advisors (faculty, department, college advisor, etc.). Further complicating matters is the reality that advisors in different colleges may have different approaches that are based on the advising culture and characteristics of their specific colleges' academic degree plans. For example, advisors in Engineering, where practically all students have declared majors, might be more likely to prescribe courses due to the certainty of students' academic directions as well as the rigid structure and sequential nature (prerequisites) of courses in the colleges' academic degree plans. In contrast, advisors in Liberal Arts, especially those who advise undeclared students, would be more likely to encourage students to explore different courses and to make their own decisions regarding course selection due to the flexibility of the college's academic degree plans. Despite varying philosophies and advising approaches, advisors must identify and address students' expectations and responsibilities early in the advising process to reduce potential misunderstandings and to strengthen the advising relationship. Lowenstein (2006) declared that "an excellent advisor does for students' entire education what the excellent teacher does for a course: helps them order the pieces, put them together to make a coherent whole, so that the student experiences the curriculum not as a checklist of discrete, isolated pieces but instead as a unity, a composition of interrelated parts with multiple connections and relationships."

Focus 3: Implement Comprehensive Assessment Programs

Develop comprehensive assessment plans for advising and implement regular initiatives as part of an ongoing strategy for improvement in the advising units. A comprehensive assessment of academic advising programs should include a variety of qualitative and quantitative assessment tools and should incorporate several dimensions of the advising process. In stark contrast, the previous assessment efforts for most of the colleges at the University have relied heavily, sometimes solely, on student satisfaction surveys. “Satisfaction” is an imperfect measure of quality since some advising interactions, particularly at the College level, may be experienced by the student as punitive. For example, advisors issue or enforce decisions on denied appeals, place and refuse to release blocks/bars, inform students that they are on probation, inform them that they are denied admission to a major, and a wide range of other actions which the student may not be “satisfied” with. This is not to say that these interactions should not also be handled with the utmost tact and diplomacy and with respect for the student, but that the student experience of “satisfaction” may not be the best measure of either service quality or effective advising. Advising teams must continue to improve their assessment methods and instruments to gage the quality of student advising services and advisors’ impact on the student experience. To this end, I have provided some ideas through the creation of a student survey instrument, shown in *Appendix F*, for the purpose of assisting those individuals who are interested but new to the process.

The results of the document analysis chapter of this study reveal that there is room for more assessment of advising quality and outcomes at both the departmental and college levels. Advising units should aim to gauge both student satisfaction and learning outcomes as well as advisor and programmatic outcomes. Although the assessment of student satisfaction is more wide spread than other aspects of the advising process, we need to continue to assess this area because we operate in a student services capacity, and academic advising is still considered a value-added service that supports the institution’s core values and mission. However, assessment should not be limited to students; advisors' experiences are crucial for the successful advising process and need to be explored (Cuseo, 2003). Proper assessment of various aspects of an academic advising program is crucial to strengthening it in any institutional context. The assessment of academic advising should be focused on several dimensions of an advising system which include the following: nature of the advising relationship, frequency of different types of activities that take place during advising sessions, students’ satisfaction with academic advising, students’ outcomes (increases in knowledge of academic environment, understanding of academic goals, etc.), and advisors’ satisfaction. The sharing of information regarding assessment practices and exchanging of ideas among the various advising centers can help to establish a baseline of previously successful initiatives that have been considered to be of value. Each individual advising unit can then proceed to develop its own best practices and expand the assessment portfolio. A chronicling of previous and existing assessment instruments and initiatives has been provided in Chapter 4.

Perhaps the best place for the institution to start in the process of establishing a comprehensive assessment program is to have all of the college advising centers revisit their post-appointment advising surveys and examine instruments for clarity and purpose. Start with the college advising centers to implement best practices, and standardize the quality level of the post-appointment surveys across the institution. Establish primary categories for all colleges to use (standardization of categories but not questions). Incorporate questions for student learning outcomes. Consider adding a feature to the survey instrument that would prompt participants and allow them to leave open responses immediately below Likert responses that register at the extremes of the scoring scale. Train staff and personnel to be attentive to survey results, and take action towards improving programs when possible. Finally, expand the accessibility of the assessment instruments from the post-appointment advising system to departmental advising units (a few colleges are doing this already.), and coordinate training efforts on how to best utilize the systems' assessment features. It is necessary to bear in mind that each college, as well as department, is unique, and assessment often needs to be tailored to suit the specifics of the advising process.

Focus 4: Develop & Support an Effective Advising Culture

An ideal advising environment and effective advising culture is representative of an advising organization's mission, purpose, and core values. Most importantly, a quality advising culture facilitates the development and success of the student, the advisor, and the advising unit. It is important to keep in mind that factors affecting the advising culture do not function mutually exclusive of each other; rather, each factor reinforces another in a reciprocal process within the advising culture. The key to establishing a quality advising culture is to develop an effective strategy with a focus on improving rapport and strengthening relationships within one's own advising unit, as well as across the advising community. This approach can be accomplished through a focus on the following:

- Engaged and responsible leadership;

- inclusiveness and excelling together;
- effective communication: inter- and intra-office;
- support, learning, accountability and acknowledgement.

Engaged &responsible leadership. I have had the opportunity to work and interact with a variety of leaders from different fields throughout my academic and professional careers. Critical reflection of these experiences has reinforced my belief that the characteristics of effective leadership (principles and practices) are not limited to any specific field. Leadership is at its best when its vision is strategic, the voice persuasive and the results tangible. Leadership is not an end in itself, but a means to bring out the best in people, to inspire and motivate them to commit their energies, skills and talents to delivering a shared vision of the organization.

During my time formerly as an academic advisor in a large advising center, I witnessed various changes to my own college's administration (Deans, Associate and Assistant Deans, Academic Advising Coordinators), and observed various leadership styles. I have experienced leadership manifested in different ways and in a variety of settings across the institution. Some leadership practices/approaches have been exemplary while others have been ineffective. Some leadership decisions have been successful at improving the advising culture while others have inadvertently weakened it. The following are some insights into leadership derived from the study's field observations, administrator interviews, and my time spent in the field of academic advising:

- An effective leader implements a strategic vision and determines goals, innovates and generates novel ideas, makes informed decisions, builds rapport with various constituents, inspires and elevates the performance of staff, communicates effectively, invites open discourse and exchanges of ideas, establishes a commanding presence, and garners the trust and respect of peers and subordinates.

- Perceptions do matter and so does one's demeanor. For example, if you are a leader who is a hard worker with good ideas but you consistently come across as arrogant and self-serving to others, your staff will tend to focus on these negative characteristics and deemphasize the good work that you have done.
- Trust, respect, and believe in your advising team. Be cognizant of the pitfall extremes such as micro-managing and over-delegating. Actively listen, evaluate, and consider the advice of others. No matter how bright you think you are, there is always someone out there that has excellent ideas. Your advising team can offer useful feedback before plans are set into motion.
- During budget shortfalls, hiring freezes and institutional layoffs to various staff, the college leadership (Dean, Associate Deans, Assistant Deans, etc.) needs to be sensitive to practices that can further reduce team morale and the advising environment. At a public institution, salaries are of public record. If you tell your staff that no one is receiving merit increases for the year and possibly the next several years, but you and your fellow administrators continue to be awarded year-after-year with huge increases and accept these increases that are not in line with the financial times, the advising climate and team morale suffers, and you

lose a considerable amount of trust, respect, and legitimacy from your staff. Be innovative and willing to explore options including non-financial incentives and flex times.

- An effective leader lessens tensions in the office, refrains from gossip, and reduces drama in the advising environment.
- An effective leader is dedicated and committed to enhancing the advising culture, and internalizes the institution's core values.
- An effective leader recognizes, mentors, and attempts to retain advising talent. Personnel are organized into areas that give them the best opportunities to succeed and feel fulfilled.

Inclusiveness & excelling together. Ultimately, inclusiveness is about building relationships with people and collaborating effectively. It is both a concept and practice that impacts advising culture through its catalyzing effects on synergy and innovation. We excel when we are able to share ideas and learn from each other, and within that context of respect and being able to excel together, we are able to generate novel ideas and create novel solutions to problems. Inclusiveness should be a philosophy inherent in how we think, what we say, and what we do. For this to happen, I believe that it's absolutely necessary that people take each other into account, are respectful of each other, and trust each other. This means that no matter how stressful it gets, we are attentive to what people do; we acknowledge and credit people for what they do, and we thank people for what they do. It also requires that we are all individually accountable to each other and are responsible for prioritizing the needs of the team before the individual.

To change or improve the advising culture, advising teams must be able to take the idea of inclusiveness and transform it to actual practice. I believe this process can be achieved through an advising community's sincere and steady commitment to the following:

- Promoting open and honest discourse;
- Maintaining a high-level of transparency and clear channels for communication;
- Appreciating and recognizing teamwork.
- Encouraging participation and providing mechanisms for input in decision-making.

Diversity is a conceptual partner to Inclusiveness. Advising leaders and administrators should examine the extent of efforts in advising units to attract and build diverse advising teams that consist of student-focused staff with a wide-range of academic and life experiences and backgrounds. Appreciating diversity leads us to become more understanding of others, to think more deeply about our own beliefs, and to consider different possibilities through critical reflection. Good faith efforts must be made to understand how the day-to-day operations of advising centers relate to institutional priorities such as diversity in regards to advising practices, HR practices, student services programming, special populations, and the advising culture. Although there has been much attention given to the discussion of diversity practices and initiatives among the faculty circuit and at the institutional level, very little consideration has taken place within the advising realm. In regards to the employment and staffing of advising professionals, academic advising continues to be dominated in gender by females. Nowhere is this more evident than in the School of Engineering - it has about two dozen professional advising staff members in the central and department offices; however, only two are male. This proportion has remained fairly consistent throughout the years, and it is peculiar in light of the fact that approximately 77% of undergraduate enrollment is male in the School. The discrepancy in numbers between female and male academic advisors, however, could be due to targeted strategies to attract more female students to the Engineering majors and the existence of a primarily male faculty base. More investigation is needed into the reasons for gender imbalances within the field of advising in general. On another note, there are over a hundred advisors at the University but only two are Asian American (none in positions of advising supervision/administration), which is another glaring peculiarity since the University student population consists of 16% Asian American. Inclusiveness and excelling together requires that a diverse representation of the population is accounted for and voices are heard.

Effective communication: inter- and intra- office. Information exchange is a daily function of the advising system that is vital to an organization's success. The advising system consists of advising centers and units that serve as important information hubs for the academic and campus community. These information hubs receive input from a multitude of campus offices and circulate the information throughout the institution's components to students, faculty, and staff. Members of the advising community in this study have alluded consistently to the importance of effective communication and several expressed the desire to see improvement in this area. Advisors reported that communication among advisors is excellent, and that they felt very comfortable picking up the phone and calling advisors in other offices, whether they know those advisors by name or by position. However, several advisors, mostly from departments, were concerned about the flow of information down from their supervisors and Dean's Offices. Some center advisors also expressed frustration with a top-down approach to information flow in their colleges and the instituting of changes, insofar as their input is not always solicited on issues that will affect them. In regards to communication with other campus offices, advisors mentioned the need for better communication with the Registrar's Office and Study Abroad. Specifically, advisors expressed their concerns about not having opportunities for meaningful input on decisions being made for changes or new designs to technology systems that they utilize on a daily basis. They noted that this problem has emerged in the past with respect to the course catalogue and the course scheduling programs controlled by the Registrar. Advisors also mentioned the need for better and more frequent communication with Study Abroad personnel to clarify and align various policies and processes for their students.

Conflicting Information, message clarity, and message delivery. Students' communication-related concerns seemed to focus mainly on perceptions of their interactions with advisors from advising sessions and alluded to themes such as conflicting information, message clarity, and message delivery. These communication issues were often buried and manifested within students' descriptions of their negative advising experiences. By uncovering and addressing the weaknesses and breakdowns in communication, advisors can begin to address the fundamental sources of student discontent and dissatisfaction with advising.

When students receive conflicting or confusing advice, the advising culture is adversely affected due to the erosion of students' trust in the advising process. Best practices were identified through informal discussions with students, advisors, and administrators to reduce the prevalence of conflicting advice in the advising setting; these practices are as follows:

- Engage in focused, spirited, and conscientious advising discussions with students; organize and bring order to advising interactions, reinforce important messages, and ask students questions to gage their understanding.
- Exercise due diligence to ensure the accuracy of information that is given and follow up with the student later if facing time constraints.
- Make attempts to assist students in contacting other departments (time permitting) when information overlaps with other offices: limit the number of offices a student must go to.
- When faced with uncertainty, consult primary or direct sources for information at the institution instead of making assumptions for the student or relying on secondhand information, especially when potential inaccuracies exist due to outdated information that could have a significant impact on a student's situation.
- Clarify and resolve any potential issues as soon as possible.
- Identify and expand channels of communication across the institution and coordinate the consistent interpretation of policies that may involve other offices or overlap with them.
- Formalize and document advising processes and internal college policies in

writing for each college advising center so that policies are clearly specified and made available to all members of an advising unit to reference and to share with other student affairs personnel as necessary.

Attitudinal barriers. Another identifiable threat to effective communication in the advising environment is an attitudinal barrier. Within an advising team, attitudinal barriers can stem from low staff motivation, work disposition, problems with the advising leadership, or resistance to change. In regards to students, this type of barrier is manifested in students' expectations of advising and can stem from students' dissatisfaction with previous advising experiences. By understanding some of these potential causes for student dissatisfaction and maintaining awareness during advising interactions, advisors can prepare themselves to communicate more effectively through their communication approaches and message delivery. Major factors that were identified in this study include the following:

- Transference of students' feelings of uncertainty, stress: The higher the level of uncertainty (majors/academic path), the higher the level of stress;
- perceived inconsistencies in information/advice given from advisor(s);
- perceived lack of knowledge (expertise) or indecisiveness from an advisor;
- perceived lack of helpfulness;
- unfavorable decisions (denial of appeals/petitions, etc.) and not being provided with options/clear plan to move forward; and

- an advisor’s approach and demeanor during the advising session: how a message is delivered, the timing and reinforcement of that message, the clarity and focus of advice.

Physical and system design barriers. The communication issues that I have described thus far have focused on interpersonal communication. Other barriers to effective communication that I have observed over the course of this study include the following: physical barriers that are due to the nature of the advising environment such as space, location, and capacity issues; and system design barriers that arise from organizational/advising structures and operational systems such as too many informal reporting lines in an organizational structure, inconsistent practices involving the chain of command, a lack of clarity in advisor roles and responsibilities, and degree audit system errors.

Advising teams looking to lessen any of these barriers should start with the most easily identifiable and relevant issues of the group. In general, physical barriers are easy to recognize. The cubicle structure (walls and arrangement of the advising spaces) in the advising center of the College of Liberal Arts is an example of a type of physical (environmental) barrier that can affect the quality of communication during advising interactions. For many reasons, cubicle structures are not ideal for one-to-one advising sessions because they are physically exposed and do not offer students much privacy to discuss personal or sensitive academic information that the advisor may need to offer counsel or advice. It may be possible to arrange or modify cubicle structures to minimize privacy concerns and utilize sound-masking technology to accommodate confidential communication exchanges, but a cost-benefit and comparative analysis would need to be conducted. As it stands currently, most of the institution's advising centers and advising units have enclosed advising offices. Several advising suites that used to consist of cubicles have transitioned to physical offices over the decades, the most recent example being College of Communication moving to the newly constructed BELO center last year. The Liberal Arts advising center remains among the last to address the situation and continues to leave itself open to potential FERPA violations. Unfortunately, the completion of a multi-million dollar Liberal Arts flagship building did not bring about anticipated changes as no space was allocated for the advising center, and the decision was made to keep the Student Division advisors in the same building as the various college Deans.

Support and learning. These features of an ideal advising culture, though universally recognized as important by the advising community, are often underemphasized in practice within the advising system. The aspects of support and learning that I am referring have as much to do with the student-advisor relationship as to do with the advisor-team and advisor-administrator relationships. These concepts have been identified earlier as reoccurring themes scattered throughout the various findings in the chapters of this study on effective advising, and remain widespread in relevant academic advising and Student Affairs research literature. The terms - "support" and "learning" - have appeared within the mission statements and core values of many institutions and organizations of higher education. In regards to academic advising, these components can profoundly affect the quality of the advising culture.

Support. Since the concept of support and guidance in regards to students and the student-advisor relationship has already been covered in varying degrees of detail in other sections of this study, I would like to focus now on the concept in relation to services and programs to our students, and thereafter, in relation to advisors and the advising culture. Front desk and appointment services, peer advising, online correspondence, and advising technology are examples of student support services that have been identified as areas for on-going improvement. More information into these areas is needed to determine the causes of service irregularities. It is unclear, for example, why several students have reported lower levels of satisfaction with peer advising and higher levels of satisfaction with college center advising (and departmental advising) and if this is related to either the faith in or integrity of the information students receive from these sources. Also, additional information is needed to understand the presence and role of faculty advising in the colleges, as well as the relationship between faculty and staff advising in the advising process. Of particular significance are the ways in which consistency between these critical advising functions and interactions can be achieved and maintained over time to better support students. Faculty advising appears to be underutilized by students at the institution, perhaps because some colleges' advising structures have not effectively integrated faculty and staff advising so that the two functional areas support and enhance one another.

There is inconsistency in the quality and extent of support services across the advising system due to varying priorities and funding in the colleges. The areas of significance that are most frequently identified by the advising community across the institution include major and career exploration, and academic success/persistence. Students have expressed the desire to have major and career advising integrated more closely together and to have more internship opportunities made available to them. The classic argument of colleges as places of learning and self-development vs. workforce preparation and training is still present and alive in students' discussions across campus today, and remains a source of growing concern particularly for students and their families. Students seek assurances that their degree will mean something in the "real" or working world, and they inquire about applicability and the "practical" value of a degree. Although these concerns are particularly prevalent among first-generation college students, many who come from poor or working class families that must deal with more immediate financial pressures, the rising cost of obtaining a college degree and burden associated with increased student loan borrowing have affected the general student population in large. Since timely graduation is in the interest of the student and the institution, advising administrators need to review their strategies for assisting academically at-risk students and work towards developing comprehensive and intrusive support programs. Almost all colleges utilize grade contracts for students facing academic jeopardy, but to varying degrees of success that depend on the design and efforts behind the supporting programs. In programs such as the College of Liberal Arts' UTurn, advisors actively reach out to these students and require bi-weekly advising sessions. They also work with students to draw up a contract outlining required visits to campus resources, such as tutoring or time management consulting, and a minimum GPA to aspire to in the next semester. From a small sample size of 165 students, results appear promising as two-thirds of students in UTurn avoid academic dismissal, compared to about half of students who decline the program's invitation.

The support (level, amount, type) that advisors receive from the advising organization and leadership in the workplace is another factor that impacts the advising culture. A thriving culture consists of advising teams that support students and the institution, and advising administrators who support their advisors, develop new advising leaders and advance academic advising within the field. Support resides in many forms within the advising institution. Based on observations of the advising environment at the University, three areas - advisor training, leadership development, and professional development – warrant more attention.

Advisor training in the advising centers tends to be focused on policy and procedural issues, as well as proficiency with advising resources and technological tools. What is surprising, however, is the lack of attention given to the actual practice of advising which includes advising theory, counseling students, developing rapport and building student-advisor relationships, diversity training, and communicating effectively in a variety of settings with various constituents. Currently, a lot of training in these areas for the newly hired occurs through the "trial by fire" process based on the mentality of "throwing you in and letting you sink or swim." This practice has its own merits, but should be supported with an organized training program with formalized procedures and structured training activities. Many advisors can describe how they advise, but are unable to articulate their particular advising style in reference to theoretical concepts. Advisors, especially those with very little advising experience, often resort to relying on personal experiences when advising students in the absence of theoretical frameworks for advising and advising knowledge to draw from. Since the direct leadership of personnel in the advising centers consists of non-faculty administrators who have risen to their status from years of steady and continued service in their offices (rather than their educational qualifications, knowledge of student development theory/training practices, or former supervisory experience), these centers tend to be heavily practitioner-oriented with very little appreciation for theoretical concepts and little to no emphasis on student learning theory. Advisors' ideas and self-reports of their own advising styles aren't always the advising styles that are actually employed during their advising sessions. Being able to state one's advising style and executing it effectively are two entirely different things. For example, if you tell everyone that you are a developmental advisor but your students and your peers identify you as a prescriptive advisor, then either you lack self- awareness about your own advising approach or you have not been successful in applying the developmental advising approach. Efforts should be made within a training program to address the responsibilities of advisors in relation to students as well as the institution, and to assist advisors with the process of understanding how advising might impact retention, graduation, and the overall quality of academic and student life. Some examples of methods that I believe would be helpful include training modules, case studies, critical reflection exercises, and research-discussion of current issues in advising.

Learning. At the heart of a successful and thriving advising organization is an advising culture that is deeply rooted in learning. Since learning is the pillar of every academic institution of higher education, any advising service must create an advising culture that integrates learning into the advising mission and goals of the advising organization. In this regard, the focus on learning applies to students and advisors alike. Much has already been presented in the current study and relevant literature regarding student learning within the context of advising services, but little has been explored in relation to staff development. The leadership in advising centers must do more to support an appreciation of lifelong learning, and to facilitate academic and professional learning opportunities for advising personnel. Specifically, more needs to be invested in staff development, training, and recognition. Fundamental strategies should, at the very least, include the following: implementing flex time for advisors, reserving a series of time blocks for professional development activities or classes, mentoring advisors, recognizing and developing emergent leaders, exploring new advising and institutional technologies, improving advising approaches/techniques, promoting research on advising and the exploration of literature in the field.

Implications

This research study was robust and comprehensive in its mixed-methods, case-study design that utilized methodological triangulation involving multiple sources of data. The study explored effective advising and assessment at a large, public Tier One Research University, the University of Texas at Austin. Overall, academic advising is highly-valued and highly-regarded by students at the University; however, several themes have emerged that provide insight into factors that limit the effectiveness of advisors and/or the advising system. On another note, the assessment of advising is severely lacking in most colleges, and the assessment of student learning outcomes is almost non-existent. Moreover, assessment methods and practices in most colleges are inadequate in design, number, or implementation. From a continual improvement perspective, several components of the academic advising system warrant further attention. These components, mentioned throughout this final Chapter, provide areas for future research. Some of these components would be well-suited for survey research, whereas a component such as advising culture might benefit from observational research methods. Finally, the quantitative analysis section of this study provided clues into additional areas of interest for study. For example, it was discovered that the award-winning advisors at the University had among the highest respective efficacy scores in their colleges. Also, it was discovered that there were correlations between courtesy and efficacy items, as well as trust and efficacy items. A similar study could be expanded to include a larger cohort or could be conducted at other institutions to examine additional variables and these phenomena. Alternatively, another study could focus on observations of the award-winning advisor cohort to discover common advising characteristics or effective advising approaches.

APPENDIX A: ADVISING – OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Advisor:

Date/Time of Observation:

Length of Advising Session (minutes)

Purpose for the advising session (student's presenting concern)

Year of Student: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Student Race: _______________ Gender: ________________

Content of Advising Session
A = Advisor initiated, S = Student initiated, N = N/A

Clarifying Institutional Policies/Procedures:
Providing Information/Resources:
Developing Personal Skills:

1. How does the advisor personalize the session? How does the advisor make the student feel comfortable?

2. How does the advisor help the student make decisions and share advising responsibility?

APPENDIX B: STAFF MEETINGS – OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date/Time of Meeting: ____

Location of Meeting: ____

Stated Purpose of Meeting: ____

____

Attending Meeting: Administration ____ Advisors (supervisor/non-supervisor) ____/_____

Peer Advisors ____Staff Support ____ Others _____

1. Describe the meeting: Who convened and adjourned the meeting? What was the agenda?

2. Was there any prolonged discussion? If yes, by whom? What were the prevalent themes? What questions were raised and how were they addressed? If conflict arose, how was it handled and by whom?

APPENDIX C: FRONT DESK – OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date/Time/Length of Observation:

Location of Observation:

Support Staff Present:

Number of telephone calls received:

Type of telephone calls received:

Number of in-person interactions (student/staff/administrator):

Type of in-person interactions (student/staff/administrator):

Overall description of office environment:

1. How did the front desk staff, in general, handle incoming calls and walk-ins?

APPENDIX D: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP(S) GUIDE

Version 1

1. Think back to the time when you first entered the university and learned about academic advisors.
    a) What did you know/think about advisors?
    b) What were some of your expectations of advisors at the time?
    c) What did you imagine your advisor's role would be in your education?

2. Describe your experiences with academic advising.
    a) How have you utilized academic advising, and how often do you go? If you don't go often, why do you think that is?
    b) What are your perceptions of advisors or advising? Have those changed over time?
    c) Has advising had an impact on your time at the university? If so, how or in what ways?
    d) What has been your most positive experience with advising? The most frustrating?

3. Discuss advising in the context of your degree progress and your academic/career goals.
    a) How has advising contributed to your progress towards finding a major and/or completion of a degree?
    b) How has advising assisted you in better understanding academic and career goals?

4. Discuss advising in the context of personal goals and student development.
    a) How has advising contributed to your identification of personal goals and development as a person (understanding yourself and working with others, improving communication, expanding relationships, acknowledging roles and responsibilities, motivations, etc.)?
    b) How has advising contributed to your perceptions of the overall university experience?

6. Discuss effective advising practices and effective advisors.
    a) What are the essential characteristics/key qualities that you expect a sound, professional advisor to demonstrate in your advising meetings? (These are the minimum criteria, but most important ones, that advisors should display during each and every advising session.)
    b) What are some of the things that your advisor does well? (Think of the best and most memorable advising experiences that you have encountered.)
    c) For the less than ideal advisors, what are some suggestions for change? (Think

of the worst advising experiences that you have encountered.)

d) What responsibility have you taken for your education? How can you, the student, make advising more useful to you and get the most out of advising?

7. Discuss your advising centers/departments: office environment, advising resources, online tools, advising programs, student progress, and the administration.

a) What are your insights into any of these areas?

b) In what ways do you see advising being improved (how can it be improved)?

Version 2

1. Your perceptions of academic advisors.

d) What were your first perceptions of academic advisors (or advising) when you entered the university?

e) What were some of your expectations of advisors at the time? What did you imagine your advisor's role would be in your education?

f) Have your perceptions and/or expectations changed over time?

2. Your experiences with academic advising:

e) How have you utilized academic advising, and how often do you go? If you don't go often, why do you think that is?

f) Describe your experiences with advisors and academic advising. What have your experiences with advisors and academic advising been like? For what reasons do you seek out advising, and in what ways have you benefited (or not) from advising (i.e. major planning, degree progress, understanding academic/personal/career goals, understanding self and working with others, improving communication, building/expanding relationships, acknowledging roles and responsibilities, discovering motivations, etc)?

g) What responsibility have you taken for your education? How can you, the student, make advising more useful to you and get the most out of advising?

3. Your ideas on effective advisors and advising practices

e) What are some of the things that your advisor/advising center does well (or not so well?)

f) What are the essential characteristics (key qualities) that you expect a sound, professional advisor to demonstrate in your advising meetings? What skills or traits would you want your ideal advisor to possess? What approaches work well for you?

g) What is your idea of effective advising practices or programs? What would you like to experience more of? What is one suggestion for change?

4. Your reflections on advising quality and impact

(Office environment, advising resources, online tools, student programs, academic progress, and the administration.)

a) What are your insights into any of these areas?
b) In what ways do you see advising being improved (how can it be improved)?
c) Ideally, what would you like to get out of advising?

APPENDIX E: ADMINISTRATOR(S) INTERVIEW GUIDE

Part 1

1. How are post-appointment surveys (waitlist surveys) used in the advising unit? Are there other surveys or forms of assessment that your office utilizes? How do you measure student learning outcomes?

2. What is the organizational structure of your office?

3. How have college and institutional budget cuts affected your advising unit within the last five years?

4. How are your staff meetings conducted?

5. How is advising administered in your advising unit? (Physical layouts? Caseloads? Assigned advisors? Walk-ins vs. appointments?)

6. How are advisor duties/responsibilities distributed in your advising unit? What type of committees do you have?

7. How do you address the issue of scholastic probation or at-risk students?

8. What is your process for handling student policy and procedure issues (petitions/appeals)? How would you describe the communication between advisors and administration? (What levels of input do advisors have on policy, procedures, and decision-making and how are ideas communicated?)

9. How do advisors get trained? What is the training process?

10. What is your level of interaction with students? What were some of your own experiences with advising either as an advisor or as a student?

11. How has assessment assisted your advising unit thus far? What are some of the relevant and important issues currently discussed in your advising unit?

Part 2 (Follow Up)

1. Tell me a bit about your role as an administrator in your advising unit.

2. How well do you feel the structure of the advising unit works for you and your students? Is there anything you would change if you could?

3. Let's move to the advising structure across campus. How well does this structure (i.e. central advising offices for pre-majors/undeclared, department advisors for majors, and other offices for specific purposes) serve your students? Why? What about when students transition from undeclared status to declared major status?

4. It appears that advising centers have quite a large presence at the University. Other departments and advisors often look to you all for information and advice. Could you take a moment to comment on this dynamic? Do you feel that you live up to this role and serve this purpose and function in the ways you should?

5. It's felt that some students primarily "self advise" rather than seek help from advising. Do you think this is true? Why or why not? Do you think this is good or bad? If you think it's a bad idea, what are some measures that could encourage these students to use advising services at UT?

6. Many have expressed concerns about the consistency of information students receive from advisors across units. Do you feel this is an issue with students you serve? If so, why? What are the reasons for the inconsistencies? What are some ways this could be improved?

7. Results of the student focus groups and open-response survey questions are indicating a high level of interest in having better communication and information flow, and having more collaboration and cooperation across advising units. Has your advising team experienced these sorts of problems or heard these types of concerns? If so, what are some things that might be done to improve these types of issues?

8. An advisors focus group study retrieved during the document review section of this study revealed that information on student satisfaction with advising is quite important to advisors but that there is very little of it. How do you feel about this? Why is evaluation important to you?

9. UT has not always been perceived as a welcoming place for students of color and other under-represented populations. The Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE) was created and launched by the University's President in 2007 to address these issues of staff/faculty hiring and development, climate, and collaboration. What's your sense of how advising is working with students of color and other under-represented populations (GLBT, first generation, disabled, etc)? Is there anything else to be done to improve the climate and experience?

10. Overall, how effective do you feel the university is at meeting the advising needs of the undergraduate population?

11. What, if anything, would assist students in planning their academic programs more effectively? What additional advising services?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX F: ORIGINAL SURVEY (CONTENT EXAMPLE)

1. During fall semester 2010, approximately how often did you use the following resources for academic planning? (Never; Once a semester; Once a month; Once a week; Two or three times a week; Daily)

   Course Schedule
   Degree Plan (Checklist)
   IDA (Interactive Degree Audit)
   Undergraduate Catalog
   Course Schedule
   UT Course Instructor Surveys
   College Website(s)
   Departmental Website(s)
   Other
   If Other, *please specify:*

2. How many times during fall semester 2010 did you talk with the following people when you needed academic advice? (Never; Once or twice; Three to five times; Six to ten times; More than ten times)

   An advisor in your department major
   An advisor in a department outside your major
   An advisor in the Liberal Arts Student Division
   An advisor in the School of Undergraduate Studies
   An advisor in the Business Undergraduate Programs Office
   An advisor in the Communications Student Affairs Office
   An advisor in the Natural Sciences Office of Advising & First Year Initiatives
   An advisor in the Engineering Student Affairs Office
   An advisor in the Education Dean's Office
   A faculty member
   A teaching assistant
   Your parent(s)
   Your sibling(s)
   Your friend(s)
   Other
   If *Other*, please specify:

3. Which of the following statements best describes your use of academic advising at UT?

   Currently working with one advisor
   Currently working with more than one advisor
   Not currently working with an advisor but I have met with one in the past
   Have never met with an advisor since I started at UT

Other
If *Other*, please specify:

4. What, if anything, hinders you the most from working with an academic advisor more often? (Check all that apply.)

I don't have time to contact or meet with an academic advisor.
I use other UT resources for academic advising (e.g., UT Website, Student Planner, etc.).
I don't know whom to contact for academic advising.
Academic advisors are not available when I can meet with them.
I had a bad advising experience and am not interested in going back.
I am not sure what an academic advisor can do for me.
The academic advisors' offices are inconveniently located.
The academic advisors' offices do not allow for private and confidential discussion.
Nothing hinders me, I work as often as I can with an academic advisor.
The advisor I am supposed to see was not helpful to me in the past.
I can figure out what I need to do on my own.
Other:

If you have <u>NEVER</u> met with an academic advisor at UT, please go to Question #16. If you <u>HAVE</u> ever met with a UT academic advisor, please continue with Question #5.

For the following question, please think about your current UT academic advisor, OR, if you are not presently working with one, please answer the questions about the last UT academic advisor from whom you sought advice.

5. Please indicate whether you will be referring to an academic advisor in …

Your department major
The Liberal Arts Student Division
The School of Undergraduate Studies
The Business Undergraduate Programs Office
The Communications Student Affairs Office
The Natural Sciences Office of Advising & First Year Initiatives
The Engineering Student Affairs Office
The Education Dean's Office
Other

6. How often did you communicate with your academic advisor during fall semester 2010?

In-person (one-on-one)?
In-person (group)?
By email?
By phone?
Via web chats?

Other?
If *Other*, please specify:

7. Do you feel the number of contacts you had with your academic advisor during fall semester 2010 was sufficient for your needs?

Yes
No
Not sure

8. If you met with your academic advisor one-on-one during fall semester 2010, how much time did you spend in each meeting?

I have not met
Under 5 minutes
Between 5 and 15 minutes
Between 15 and 30 minutes
Between 30 and 60 minutes
More than 60 minutes

9. Was the amount of time you met with your academic advisor one-on-one (in Question #8) normally enough time to adequately discuss your academic interests, issues, and concerns?

Always
Usually
Never

10. Please indicate whether or not you have discussed each of the following topics with your academic advisor. (Have not discussed and do not need to; Have not discussed but should have; Have discussed)

Your academic progress
Scheduling/registration procedures
Dropping/adding courses
Selecting/changing your major area of study
Meeting requirements for graduation
Improving your study skills and habits
Matching your learning style to particular courses, areas of study, or instructors
Obtaining remedial/tutorial assistance
Identifying career areas that fit your current skills, abilities, and interests
Coping with academic difficulties (e.g., low grades, academic probation, etc.)
Dealing with a problematic faculty member or teaching assistant
Obtaining, or problems with obtaining, financial aid
Continuing your education after graduation
Dealing with personal problems
UT services that support students with learning challenges and/or differences
Other

If *Other*, please specify:

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your most recent academic advisor? (Not Applicable; Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly agree)

    Expresses interest in me as a unique individual
    Provides me with consistent and accurate information about academic requirements, prerequisites, etc.
    Encourages me to assume an active role in my academic planning
    Helps me select courses/understand course options
    Is familiar with my educational background
    Encourages me to talk about myself and my college experience
    Shows concern for my personal growth and development
    Is a helpful, effective advisor whom I could recommend to other students
    Is comfortable working with students with ethnic backgrounds different from his/her own
    Responds directly and clearly to my questions
    Refers me to other sources from which I can obtain assistance and information
    Is readily available when I need assistance
    Is approachable and easy to talk with
    Is willing to discuss personal problems
    Helps me explore careers in my field of interest

12. If you met with multiple academic advisors during fall semester 2010, how consistent was the advice you received?

    Not at all consistent
    Somewhat consistent
    Consistent
    Very consistent
    No basis for judgment

13. If the information you received was not consistent, what were the consequences?

14. Regarding academic policies and procedures at UT (whether you agreed/disagreed), how accurate was the advice you received from advisors?

    Not at all accurate
    Somewhat accurate
    Accurate
    Very accurate
    No basis for judgment

15. If the information you received was not accurate, what were the consequences?

16. Did you declare a major before reaching 60+ credit hours?

Yes, an advisor assisted me with making an informed decision.
Yes, but I self-declared and did not need to seek an advisor.
No, I'm still searching for a major.
No, I have not reached 60+ credit hours yet.

17. What role, if any, did advising play in you getting all the necessary requirements for your degree plan?

    Helped tremendously
    Sufficiently helped
    No role at all
    Hindered
    Don't know

18. Which of the following statements are you most likely to hear from your advisor during a long semester?

    Take a light course load because you might not be ready to handle college level work.
    I would recommend that you take no more than 12 hours for the semester.
    Taking 15 hours during a long semester is a good, solid course load.
    In general, you should take a balanced, full course load which will depend on a variety of factors, but you should make sure that you have accumulated at least 30 credit hours each year to be able to graduate on time.

19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the academic advising services at the University? (Not applicable; Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly agree)

    In general, undeclared/transitional advisors (Dean's Office/Student Affairs) have met my advising needs.
    In general major specific/academic department advisors have met my advising needs.
    Advisors have helped me to make sound, informed decisions as a student.
    Advisors have helped me to understand my role and responsibilities as a student.
    Advisors have helped me to succeed at the University or at life in general.
    Advisors have helped me to stay on-track for graduation.
    Advisors have helped me to communicate more effectively with others.
    Advisors have helped me to assess and set academic, career and/or personal goals.
    Advisors have increased my comfort level within the University.
    Overall, academic advising has been beneficial to me (has helped me) as a student.

20. If you've ever been advised by an advisor(s) at a different institution than UT, how was that experience compared to UT?

    Significantly better than UT.
    Better than at UT
    About the same as UT.
    Worse than UT.
    Significantly worse than UT.

Not applicable

21. If your advising experience at another institution was significantly better/worse, please explain why.
22. If you could change one thing about the academic advising you have received at UT and/or add any additional UT advising services, what would it be?
23. Do you want your name to be included in the drawing for an iPOD mini or one of three $50 gift certificates for the UT bookstore?

Yes
No

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