Correlates of High School and College Academic Advising Experiences

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Abstract

The current study examined how outside factors like a student's relationship with their high school counselor play a role in their relationship with their college academic advisor. This study was administered online to undergraduate students and included questions regarding demographics, personality, high school counseling, advising preparation and history, student engagement within the department and career development. Primary findings were: a small positive correlation between satisfaction with high school advising experience and satisfaction with college level academic advising; similarity between first generation and non-first generation college students in terms of departmental involvement; a positive correlation between the amount a student worked and the student's departmental involvement; correlations between personality and preparing for advising meetings, and correlations among advising satisfaction, departmental satisfaction and familiarity with future employment opportunities. These findings and their implications are discussed.

Keywords: academic advising, high school counseling, personality, first generation

Correlates of High School and College Academic Advising Experiences

All collegiate institutions, whether they are private or public, large or small, have one thing in common; each student is assigned an academic advisor (DeLaRosby, 2017). Through this one-to-one interaction, students are able to meet with a staff or faculty member to discuss class selection, departmental requirements and student concerns, inside and out of the classroom. With the growing diversity within these institutions, academic advisors play a vital role in helping ensure every student has the opportunity to speak with a university staff member for support and guidance throughout their collegiate career. Throughout the years, academic advising has grown to accommodate the variety of student needs within universities, and it has had to evolve from the practices used originally at Harvard, which involved the President of the college advising the students. With the growing number of students, and the unique challenges each student faces, there has been a shift, from the President of the college to the Dean to faculty to the current practice of employing academic advisors, who are personnel designated by the university to help guide students throughout their collegiate career (Gordon, 1992). Oftentimes, academic advisors, especially faculty advisors, are tasked with teaching courses and are expected to produce research, as well as, provide guidance to students in areas like course selection, which has led to advisors having less time for their students (Milem, Berger & Dey, 2000).

As a result of this shift throughout history, the role of the academic advisor can oftentimes be unfamiliar to students. However, the goal of an academic advisor is to promote student success. Schreiner (2010) provided a breakdown of what defined student success into what they found to be the "Thriving Quotient," which consisted of three components regarding the students in the university: academic engagement, psychological well-being, and interpersonal relationships. These three components, assessed by a 32-item questionnaire, allowed advisors to

see they cannot simply focus on students' academic achievements as a predictor for success. Despite many perceiving academic advisors as only a gateway for class enrollment, they are a resource for students both inside and out of the classroom. With the responsibility of ensuring student success, they are often faced with the many outside challenges of a student's life that have an impact on their academic success. Kennedy and Ishler (2008) discovered that academic advisors are more likely to interact with nontraditional college students than traditional students, but only 25% of college students can be considered the "traditional student," who graduates in four years directly after high school. Factors found to characterize nontraditional students were enrollment delays part time attendance, financial independence, full-time employment, having dependents or having earned a GED. Whether a student is tradition or nontraditional, the transition into college can be challenging.

When students are making the transition from high school to college, the high school counselor can play a vital role in the preparedness of students for college. In a large survey of high school students, 84% of the individuals surveyed felt they did not receive enough help from their high school guidance counselor. Although they were provided information about college in some form, participants perceived high school counselors to be less helpful than both parents and teachers in the transition from high school to college (Smith & Zhang, 2009). When considering the role of a high school counselor, one of their largest roles is to help students with the college application process. However, depending on school funding and resources, many schools are not able to provide enough counselors to ensure every student in the school is seen. In Robinson and Roksa's (2016) study with 8,980 participants, students were asked about their interactions with a high school counselor regarding the college application process and resources available, in both the 10th and 12th grade. Results showed students who saw a high school counselor were more

likely to apply to two and four year college institutions. Students who saw a high school counselor in their 12th year, were 67% more likely to apply to four-year schools than their peers. Students who saw a counselor in both years were 135% more likely to apply to a four-year institution. The study emphasizes the importance of targeting students beyond their first year of high school, since students will begin to start making the decision of whether they will attend university or go into the work force. However, with some schools having limited access to school counselors, many students are not being prepared for college admissions. In contrast, some students choose not to use high school counselors as a resource for college preparation. Despite students being aware of the resources available through high school counselors like career planning and emotional support, high school counselors are often underutilized, and many students choose not to confide in them. Many high school counselors are not meeting the expectations placed on them to help with the success of the students, since many students do not seek help from their high school counselor (Gallant & Zhao, 2011).

Despite the growing research on both high school counselors and collegiate level advisors, there has been limited research regarding the link between the two. Research has often focused on improving academic advising practices on collegiate campuses through a student's perspective. A factor many fail to consider is the advisor's perspective on advising students and the preparation the student takes towards achieving academic success. Allen and Smith (2008) found academic advisors were satisfied overall with the advising they gave to students, whereas students were oftentimes dissatisfied. Faculty with advising responsibilities found advising was not emphasized in importance compared to their other responsibilities like research and teaching. Academic advising faculty have also been faced with a lack of reward for their efforts in academic advising. Less than one in three universities recognize faculty for their academic

advising achievements with students in areas like acceptance into graduate school or job placement success rate. Furthermore, less than three in ten universities choose to evaluate their academic advisor's performance with students, which has led to a lack of potential improvement plans being implemented (Habley, 2003).

Since there are not specific guidelines all academic advisors are expected to follow, many have found it difficult to relate to the large range of students, with different backgrounds and personality types, they are expected to advise. According to Powers, Carlstrom and Hughey (2014) the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) recommends academic advisors use Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) when advising their students. These SLO's can vary across universities, due to variance in their missions and goals as institutions. The current study identified 3 SLOs: cognitive (the student's knowledge), behavioral (the student's capabilities), and affective (what the student feels is important). These SLOs allow for the academic advisors to take a holistic approach in their advising appointments, rather than limiting the appointments to only class selection discussions. Yet, a large part of the success of the student and advisor relationship lies in the academic advisor's ability to relay knowledge, support, and availability to their students. If an academic advisor is unable to communicate these traits to students, then the relationship between the student and advisor will not be as successful (Sheldon, Garton, Orr, & Smith, 2015).

When seeking out advisors Mottarella, Fritzsche and Cerabino (2004) found both male and female students preferred an academic advisor who was supportive and open to discussion during their meetings. However, the personality type of the student can influence their ability to connect with the advisor. Students who are introverted, less agreeable, or score low on conscientiousness, are more likely to struggle with developing warm relationships with their

academic advisor. While their peer counterparts are more likely to develop positive relationships with their advisors sooner. Academic advisors also face the challenge of communicating with different personality types depending on their respective colleges and designated caseload. Students who are more social tend to choose majors related to areas like education and business, while majors like engineering and science disciplines tend to draw individuals who are less social and more mechanically based in their mindsets. However, not every student's major follows along these general personality trends (Larson et al., 2010). For students who are more introverted than their peers, academic advisors can be a valuable resource in finding instructional methods best suited towards each student and their learning preferences. For example, students who are more introverted may choose to take more online classes than their extroverted peers who prefer face-to-face instruction (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010).

An academic advisor often serves as a liaison between the college they represent and the students they advise. Leach and Wang (2015) found academic advisors are oftentimes viewed from a teaching perspective, which leads many to students to seek out "Out-of-class Communication" like they would with professors. Students were found to fall into six motive categories for why they sought help from their academic advisors. The six motives were: The Relational Motive (seeking an emotional connection to their advisor), The Functional Motive (seeking help in class scheduling), The Encouragement (seeking affirmation), The Participatory Motive (seeking communication outside of the designated classroom setting regarding their academics), The Sycophanting Motive (seeking time with their advisor for items like recommendation letters), and The Excuse-Making Motive (seeking a source to confide in the obstacles they are facing like low grades). Regardless of the student's motive, academic advisors can propose different approaches for students to take in the area they need help. Academic

advisors can serve as a contact in many capacities ranging from a support system for students, a contact within the department, or a resource for finding help available to students for things like mental health services (O'Donnell et al., 2018).

While students have varying motives as to why they seek out academic advisors, the advisors are tasked with helping students in their career pursuit. In addition, academic advisors are encouraged to promote student engagement within the department. Furthermore, academic advisors can also provide students with class suggestions, based on their interests and available time to devote to the courses, which can help them towards academic success. They provide advice on graduation timelines while helping to evaluate career options best suited for each student and their goals after college (Hurt, 2007). However, helping students find a balance between their schoolwork, a job when applicable, and active engagement in the department can be difficult for advisors (Tudor, 2018). When students are faced with the financial responsibility of paying for their college, they are forced to split their time between school and work. Butler termed this to be work-school conflict. In his study of 253 participants, who averaged working 21.25 hours, he found many students' attention was divided by this conflict. These students found they were unable to devote time solely to schoolwork success because of the financial worry of paying for tuition and books for the courses along with necessities outside of school (2007). Students who are financially responsible for their education face the challenge of balancing school and work. Students who work more hours are less likely to be involved in their studies and are less likely to attend class (Lau, 2003).

Another factor many academic advisors face is working with first-generation college (FGC) students. These students, in comparison to their peers who have parents with college degrees, are at a higher risk for needing to obtain a part or full time job to help finance their

education (Garriott & Nisle, 2018). Along with financial stress, first-generation college students encounter obstacles, both inside and outside of the classroom, their counterparts do not. These students often have parents who are unable to relate to the difficulty of pursuing a college degree and the many related challenges their children face (Olson, 2016). Many FGC students have difficultly opening up to their peer counterparts about their struggles because they find being an FGC student comes with challenges their classmates are unable to relate to. These students may also have more difficulty engaging in their department because they feel isolated from their peers. However, students who have been provided with resources like enrichment programs or interactions with other FGC students find they are able to relate more to their peers and staff within their department (Swanbrow Becker, Schelbe, Romano & Spinelli, 2017).

In conclusion, academic advising has drastically shifted from one individual advising the whole college to trained professionals having a select, though sometimes large, number of students. While the goals of academic advisors are to help students with course selection and career planning, there is still a need for research to better understand what factors relate to advising and promote student success. We know high school students who engage with their high school counselors are more likely to attend college, but there is little to no research on how the high school advising relationship is related to the college advising relationship. Based on existing literature, we hypothesize high school students who are satisfied with their high school counselors are more likely to have positive relationships with academic advisors at the collegiate level. We also know that first generation students face unique challenges. We predict first-generation psychology majors are less likely to be involved in departmental offerings like research, teaching assistant opportunities and clubs. In addition, students who work more hours are also predicted to be less likely to be engaged within the department. Furthermore, we expect

students who prepare more before advising meetings will score high on conscientiousness and be more likely to have positive relationships with their academic advisors. Last, our study's focus is to see how a student's relationship with their academic advisor, both positive and negative, can have an influence on their satisfaction with their department and knowledge of job availability after college.

Method

Participants

After eliminating incomplete surveys, 527 participants (352 females, M_{age} = 19.6 years, age range 18-33) participated in the study. Participants identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (2.6%), Black/African American (5.1%), Caucasian (69.2%), Hispanic/Latino (4.3%), Native American (3.8%), other (0.8%), did not indicate (0.4%), or multiethnic (13.2%). For additional information regarding participant demographics refer to Table 1. The participants in the study were students at Oklahoma State University enrolled in psychology classes that allowed research participation credit as part of the course. These individuals were compensated for their completion of the survey by receiving course credit.

Materials and Procedure

Demographics

The study was administered to participants online using Qualtrics software. Once the participants completed the consent questionnaire, they were asked to complete the 15-item demographic questionnaire about their year in school, age, race, gender, completed school hours, education level of parents, and work for pay.

Personality Component

After participants answered questions regarding demographics, they were asked to complete the Five Factor Model Rating Form (Samuel & Widiger, 2006) within the survey. This component measured how the participants rated themselves in the areas of: Neuroticism versus Emotional Stability, Extraversion versus Introversion, Openness versus Closedness to one's own Experience, Agreeableness versus Antagonism, and Conscientiousness versus Undependability. Each subsection contained six questions to help participants self-evaluate which personality to which they most related. Items were scored on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 5 (extremely high) to 1 (extremely low).

High School Counseling

Once participants completed the personality component, they were directed to answer questions regarding their experience with their high school counselors. Participants answered 12 questions on a Likert-type scale with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Questions contained items like "My School Counselor helped me with future educational planning, college selection, and placement" (Carey, 2005).

College Academic Advisors

Following questions regarding high school counselors, participants answered questions regarding their perceptions of their college academic advisor. In order to see how students felt about their experience with their academic advisor, they were asked the question "How satisfied are you with your experience with your academic advisor?" and responses were measured on a Likert-type scale with values ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Participants were also asked questions regarding their academic advisors on a Likert-type scale with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample question is "My

academic advisor is familiar with my program (degree plan) and its requirements" (Kansas State University, n.d.).

Advising Preparation and History

Participants were then asked how they prepared for advising appointments with a yes/no response. They were asked if they had done any of the following tasks prior to their advising appointment: "Prepared questions to ask my advisor," "Reviewed my graduation plan," "Identified courses and alternatives for the following semester" and "Reflected on my career plans" (Kansas State University, n.d.).

Student Engagement Within the Department

Then, participants were asked to complete questions regarding their engagement within the psychology department at Oklahoma State University. Sample questions included "Are you a current member of Psychology Club?," "Have you ever enrolled in PSYC 3990: Teaching Practicum?," and "Have you ever enrolled in PSYC 4990: Special Problems (research experience)?"

Career Development

To conclude, the participants answered questions regarding career development. Questions were scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Items included "I am familiar with the types of jobs that are available to people with bachelor's degrees in Psychology" and "I understand the difference between jobs available to someone with a bachelor's degree compared jobs available to someone with an advanced degree (MA or PhD)" (Dillinger and Landrum, 2002).

Results

The analytical approach was to conduct bivariate correlations using Pearson's r. For most analyses, we focused on Psychology majors because doing so allowed us to better understand and measure engagement and the student's relationship to the department.

With regard to the relationship between high school advising experience (as measured by a composite of items tapping to a into variety of aspects of high school advising) and satisfaction with college level academic advising in the psychology department, there was a small positive correlation, $r(258) = .156$, $p < .006$. There was also a small positive correlation between the extent to which psychology students thought their high school advisor helped them think about their future plans and their satisfaction with their college advising experience, $r(258) = .142$, $p < .011$.

When comparing first generation psychology students to non-first generation psychology students' involvement within the department, Table 2 shows there was little difference between first and non-first generation students. While the number of first-generation students, $n = 69$, was smaller than the sample of non-first generation students, $n = 185$, the percentage of the students involved in departmental activities was almost identical for both.

With regard to student development, Psychology majors who worked, both on and off campus, were found to be involved within the department. There was a small positive correlation between the amount a student said they worked, both on and off campus, and student involvement within the department $r(258) = .199$, $p < .001$. There was also a small positive correlation between the amount a student worked and their overall experience as a psychology major $r(256) = .120$, $p < .028$, as well as a small positive correlation between work and a student's satisfaction with the psychology department at Oklahoma State University $r(258) =$

.137, $p < .014$. The amount a student worked showed no correlation with feeling like being a psychology major was a part of their identity $r(258) = .062$, $p < .161$.

In terms of how personality relates to academic advising, there was no correlation in the whole sample between scoring high in conscientiousness and someone's satisfaction with their academic advisor $r(525) = .072$, $p < .100$. However, there was a small positive correlation between participants who scored high on conscientiousness and preparing for their advising appointments before the meeting took place $r(525) = .179$, $p < .000$. The study also found a small positive correlation between participants who scored high on extraversion and preparation for advising appointments $r(525) = .128$, $p < .003$. Other personality dimensions were not significantly related to our measure of academic advising.

Additionally, overall advising experience (as measured by a composite of items tapping into a variety of aspects of the college advising experience) and satisfaction with the psychology department revealed a small positive correlation $r(229) = .201$, $p < .002$. There was also a small positive correlation between familiarity with jobs available after college and overall satisfaction with an academic advisor $r(231) = .224$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The study was performed in order to find out more about a student's academic advising experience and how outside factors like high school advisors impact the experience. Primary findings were as follows. There were small positive correlations between high school advising experience and satisfaction with college level academic advising. There was little variance between first generation and non-first generation student involvement with the department. The amount a student worked showed positive correlations with student involvement within the department, overall experience as a psychology major, and a student's overall satisfaction with

the psychology department. While conscientious did not show a correlation with the satisfaction of their advisor, it did have a small correlation with preparing for meetings before they took place. Extraversion also showed a small positive correlation with preparing for academic advising meetings. In addition, there was a small positive correlation between overall advising satisfaction and departmental satisfaction, as well as familiarity with jobs and overall academic advisor satisfaction. These results are examined and reviewed in the sections that follow.

While there is a small positive correlation between high school advising and college level advising experiences, the relationship between the variables was weak. This allows us to assume the relationship a student has with their high school counselor has little effect on whether they will form a positive relationship with their college advisor. If a student's relationship's with their high school counselor was negative, this negative relationship should not influence a student's relationship with their academic advisor, which is good news. Some high schools do not have enough high school counselors, (Robinson & Roksa, 2016) and students do not always use them (Gallant & Zhoa, 2011). Our findings suggest that a negative or non-existent relationship with one's high school counselor will not have consequences that carry into college academic advising. Additional research would help to bridge the gap between high school counselors and college academic advisors since there is little research examining how the two are related.

Our initial assumption that first generation college students were less likely to be involved in departmental offerings was not supported. Prior studies found first generation students were more likely to be tasked with paying for their college by themselves than students who were non-first generation (Garriott & Nisle, 2018). While we originally though factors like work could influence the amount of time a non-first generation spent in the department, we found both first generation and non-first generation students were almost equal in their

involvement within the department. Our study showed a large percentage of students had zero involvement within the department, but this could be a result of many of the participants being college freshman. Future research could focus on if the results would change if the study were given to upperclassmen like college seniors. Many younger individuals may have not yet had the opportunity to be a teaching assistant for a course, since they have just began their first semester, or they may have not had the opportunity to join a research lab. If upperclassmen psychology seniors were given survey, we could test to see what their awareness level was for these activities and the Psychology Club.

Surprisingly, first generation psychology students who worked were not less involved in the department. The percentages of both first generation and non-first generation students were almost identical. While our initial hypothesis was incorrect, the study allows us to assume that work does not play a vital role in a psychology student's involvement within the department. It appears that students who choose to be involved in the department will find a way, regardless of outside factors like work. Future research could replicate the study to be in both a participant's freshman and senior year. Since a large number of participants within the study were freshman, there could be a small positive correlation within the study that was missed due to not as many older students participating. If the study were to be in both years, potential researchers could examine how work and involvement changed throughout a student's college career.

In addition, there was a small positive correlation found between work and psychology major's overall experience as a psychology major and work and their satisfaction with the psychology department at Oklahoma State University. Lau (2003) found students who were financially responsible for paying their way through college to be less involved in their studies. Our study showed work did not negatively influence first generation college student's experience

within the department and their experience as a psychology major. However, many participants within our study worked less than 20 hours a week. Future research could examine how working 20 plus hours a week could influence overall experience as a psychology major and satisfaction with the psychology department.

In terms of personality and the academic advising experience, there was a small positive correlation between participants who scored high on conscientiousness and advising preparation. The conscientious personality trait describes someone who prefers order in their life and they are disciplined when trying to achieve success. Students who score low in consciousness are more likely to struggle with developing warm relationships with their academic advisors (Mottarella, Fritzsche & Cerabino, 2014). It is important to note the personality measure relied on self-report and participants may have become aware of the purpose of the study and not answered completely truthfully. While you cannot change a person's personality, you can cater advising appointments to best fit each student's personality type. For example, student's who score high on conscientiousness may prefer advising appointments that are geared more towards future planning. In contrast, someone who scores low in conscientiousness may prefer advising appointments that only deal with class scheduling. Understanding a student's personality may aid in improving overall academic advising experiences.

Importantly, we found that students who were satisfied with their academic advisor were more likely to be satisfied with the psychology department. Satisfaction with their academic advisor also showed a small positive correlation with knowledge of psychology jobs available to students with a bachelor's degree. We assume students who have positive relationships with their academic advisors are more likely to hear about opportunities for involvement within the department, and they may also seek out their advisor as a resource for becoming involved. The

level of trust between a student and their advisor could be developed through factors like feeling aware of the job opportunities available to students after college. Future research could focus on how the dynamic between a student and academic advisor shifts overtime beginning with freshman year and ending senior year. Researchers could examine if freshman are closer to their advisors, since there are an assigned resource starting the first day of college, or if college seniors are closer to their advisors, since they have had the opportunity to build a relationship with their advisor. This could be helpful in seeing if students are closer when they come into college, since every student is assigned an academic advisor (DeLaRosby, 2017), or if they are closer to their academic advisor in later years like senior year, after a relationship and factor of trust have been developed.

In conclusion, the current findings focus on students and their experience with their college academic advisor. Outside factors like the relationship with their high school counselor, work, engagement and satisfaction with the department, and personality were examined to see how they related to academic advising. However, further research will need to be conducted to bridge the gap between high school counseling and college academic advising experience.

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Table 1 Sample Characteristics

Demographic Variable	n	%
Psychology vs. Non-Psychology Majors		
Psychology major	260	49.4%
Non-Psychology major	266	50.6%
School Classification		
Freshman	224	42.3%
Sophomore	132	24.9%
Junior	101	19.1%
Senior	70	13.2%
Mom's Level of Education		
Less than a high school diploma	16	3.0%
High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)	65	12.3%
Some college, no degree	83	15.7%
Associates degree (e.g. AA, AS)	46	8.7%
Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)	205	38.7%
Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)	78	14.7%
Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM)	8	1.5%
Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)	9	1.7%
Vocational training	11	2.1%
Dad's Level of Education		
Less than a high school diploma	16	3.0%
High school degree or equivelant (e.g. GED)	92	17.4%
Some college, no degree	84	15.8%
Associates degree (e.g. AA, AS)	35	6.6%

Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)	177	33.4%
Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)	60	11.3%
Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM)	15	2.8%
Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)	21	4.0%
Average Hours Worked (per week)		
.0	294	55.5%
1.0 – 10.0	68	13.0%
11.0 – 20.0	105	19.9%
21.0 – 30.0	40	7.6%
31.0 – 40.0	14	2.7%
41.0 – 50.0	6	1.2%

Total number of survey respondents, *n* = 527

Table 2 Involvement in the Department

Type of Student	n	%
First Generation College Students		
No Involvement	58	84.1%
Involved in 1 activity	7	10.1%
Involved in 2 activities	4	5.8%
Involved in 3 activities	0	0%
Non-First Generation College Students		
No Involvement	154	83.2%
Involved in 1 activity	19	10.3%
Involved in 2 activities	10	5.4%
Involved in 3 activities	2	1.1%

Total number of Psychology Major survey respondents, *n* = 254

Note: Activities were determined as club involvement, research experience, or teaching assistant experience.