A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT SMALL, CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FACULTY

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I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. – 2 Timothy 4:7

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Abstract:
As student retention, persistence, and degree completion became “hot topics” in higher education, research on the influence from academic advising models and practices emerged. However, there is little research on faculty advisor perceptions of models, specifically at small, Christian universities. Such information improves academic advising and, in turn, retention, persistence, and degree completion at these institutions. Consequently, the purpose of the study was to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities.

This case study was conducted at three Christian universities and resulted in numerous findings for the individual institutions and as a collective case study. The four findings from the first institution were that faculty advisors knew their institution, industries, and students very well, but were busy with several responsibilities, saw the function and process of academic advising as different from that of enrollment, and were not engaged in general education courses. The first two findings from the second institution were that faculty accessibility and good customer service were vital aspects of effective academic advising and that personal relationships among faculty advisors and advisees contributed to student success. The second two findings were that FERPA slowed down the advising and customer service processes for students and that faculty advisors were busy and had little time or ability to advise students. The three findings at the third institution were that faculty advisors enjoyed interacting with their student advisees and wanted to know them well and help them succeed. They also felt limited by the technological systems that they used to enroll students and had many responsibilities that left little time for academic advising.

Thus, the two findings for the collective case study consisted of one perceived strength and one perceived challenge. The perceived strength was that faculty advisors knew their students and enjoyed interacting with them, while the perceived challenge was that they were busy with multiple responsibilities and did not have the amount of time they wanted or needed to advise their students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, small, private colleges and universities in the United States boasted better retention (students staying at the first institution of their choice), persistence (students continuing enrollment from semester to semester), and degree completion rates than large, public colleges and universities (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Such success was partially due to selective admission standards, the probability of traditional student bodies that resided on campus and did not have to work to support their families, and smaller environments that promoted campus connections and involvement (Freeman, Hall, & Bresciani, 2007; Gordan, Habley, & Associates, 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001). However, as the health of the economy decreased, enrollments at some small, private institutions declined. The decrease in attendance at private colleges and universities was possibly the result of student financial struggles, which contributed to increased enrollment in public two-year and four-year institutions since they were often more affordable than private universities (Callan, 2002). Private institutions affected included religiously-affiliated ones – colleges and universities with a mission that required them to remain accessible and affordable for students who wanted to receive a religious education. Therefore, such challenges were likely enhanced for religious universities located in proximity to public two-year and four-year institutions.

In the past 20 years, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Astin (1993), Tinto (1993), and Gordon, et al. (2000) published foundational works indicating that students must feel like they belong to or are integrated in a campus culture in order to want to stay in it. Remaining a student at the first institution an individual attends is the main idea of retention; however, continuing to take courses from one semester to the next is known as persistence (Tinto, 1993). Both retention and persistence contribute to degree completion, although the average amount of time in which a college student completes his or her undergraduate degree evolved from four years to sometimes more than six years (Capaldi, Lombardi, & Yellen, 2006).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Astin (1993), Tinto (1993), and Gordon, et al. (2000), among other scholars in higher education, maintained that the best way for students to engage at an institution is through relationships formed with faculty members. Their research showed that such relationships are easily fostered at small colleges as there are more opportunities for students to interact with their professors both inside and outside of the classroom (Kuh & Hu, 2001). In addition, most colleges and universities with enrollments below 2,000 students utilize a faculty advisor model, in which faculty members in academic departments advise students within their major on classes to take and different career and internship options (Leymaster, 1989). Thus, using faculty advisors is likely to enhance student experiences at small, private institutions, which increases the likelihood of student retention, persistence, and four- to six-year degree completion (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Freeman, et al., 2007; Gordon, et al., 2000; Habley, 1993; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Research reveals that academic advising models and practices have positive influences on student retention, persistence, and degree completion throughout higher education (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, et al., 2000; Habley, 1993; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, et al., 2005). At most small, private universities in the United States, including Christian ones, full-time faculty members play the role of academic advisor (Gordon, et al., 2000). Unfortunately, as faculty job descriptions at small colleges and universities grow to include administrative obligations and research responsibilities in addition to teaching duties, faculty do not often treat academic advising as a priority (Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Habley, 2004; Lowe & Toney, 2001; McGillin, 2003; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tien & Blackburn, 1996; Vowell & Farren, 2003). Since the model of using faculty as academic advisors is not likely to change at small institutions (Gordon, et al., 2000), and there is a need for good academic advising to improve student retention, persistence, and degree completion (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, et al., 2000), it may be helpful to faculty advisor effectiveness at small, Christian universities if faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of their current systems of faculty-provided academic advising are explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my dissertation study was to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities. A case study (Merriam, 2001) research strategy was appropriate as my research focused on a specific population (faculty advisors who taught full-time) at a certain type of institution (small, Christian universities) in a designated located (a Midwestern urban area). The research itself was bound by time; it examined perceptions related to these specific characteristics as they were exercised and expressed in the summer and fall semesters of 2014.

Research Question

Because of the qualitative nature of my investigation, I had one research question for my dissertation study. The research question asked: “What are faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities?”

Epistemology

The design of my dissertation was based upon the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of constructivism, which state that realities and truths are built by those who experience a specific occurrence or phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). These foundations are well-linked to case study research strategies, which strive to understand a certain situation and the meanings that are made of it by the individuals who experience it. As Merrian (2001) said, "The interest is in the process rather than the outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19).

Methods and Procedures

The methods and procedures for my qualitative study included interviews, document collection, and observations. I began the data collection process by identifying three small, Christian institutions that were similar in mission and size and located in the same Midwestern city. Then I selected three full-time faculty members at each institution and conducted one-on-one interviews with them. This resulted in a total of nine interviews, which I conducted in accordance with a set interview guide (Appendix A) that addressed current university academic advising models and processes, their advantages and limitations, what the faculty members wanted to change about the models and processes at their institutions, and the resources that they believed would be most effective in their responsibilities as academic advisors. I also asked each participant about the way in which their Christian faith influenced their academic advising. I audio recorded the interviews. Later, I asked these participants to provide copies of documents that were mentioned in their interviews. Such documents included academic advising manuals and four-year degree plans. I conducted observations of advising sessions with each subject as well. My collection of the data through interviews, documents, and observations occurred during the summer and fall semesters of 2014.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

I identified the participants for my dissertation study through professional contacts at each of the selected universities. I then emailed about five full-time faculty advisors at each institution, described the purpose of my study, and asked if they were willing to participate in my research. After several face-to-face conversations and email exchanges, I practiced purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) by selecting a total of nine participants based on their gender, academic field, and years of teaching and advising college students.

Data Analysis

While collecting data, I uploaded interview transcripts, documents, and observation field notes into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis program. I organized the data from each university in the order in which they were collected and separated them by institution so that I could review and present the data according to a case study framework. I then reviewed all of my data with first cycle, inductive coding (Patton, 2002), which allowed me to identify patterns and themes as they emerged from the data. As I continued coding, I interpreted my findings based on reinforcements from the data. I reported the findings in a case study format, based on individual institution, and then shared them as an overall collective case study (Creswell, 2007).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study contribute to the areas of research, theory, and practice.

Research

First, the findings of my dissertation fill a void in the literature on academic advising by specifically focusing on small, Christian universities. Second, the findings fill a void in current knowledge about faculty perceptions (as opposed to student perceptions) of academic advising practices and structures. By revealing such faculty perceptions, other academic and student affairs researchers may gain an increased holistic understanding of the issues related to faculty advising, which further define remaining issues in this area that need to be studied.

Theory

In addition, this qualitative study provides data that impact theories of leadership and organizational development, especially as they relate to faculty and student development. The data display information about faculty advisors at small, Christian institutions, specifically that they knew and enjoyed their students, but were incredibly busy with other job responsibilities that prevented prioritizing academic advising. Thus, the findings from my research contribute to the foundations of future theories on faculty and student opinions toward academic advising, as well as other studies in this area.

Practice

The findings of my dissertation also contribute to the practice of academic advising in higher education administration. With little research and few theories available on faculty perceptions of advising structures at small, Christian universities, it is difficult for practitioners to rely on research in determining what resources or tools faculty believe they need to be better advisors. This study sought to address this need by exploring faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges within their current systems of academic advising. Findings from this study offer improved guidance for faculty advisors, as well as practitioners who seek to put effective tools in the hands of faculty and/or design organizational systems that support academic advising.

Definitions

Key terms for this study are defined as follow:

- Academic advising: A series of intentional interactions and a relationships between a student and his or her advisors, either a faculty and/or staff member, that address curriculums, pedagogies, and desired outcomes related to the student's chosen major(s) and career and life aspirations.

- Degree completion: The timeframe in which a student starts an academic program at an institution and completes the degree in his or her chosen area of study.
- Full-time faculty advisor: A faculty member whose contract, job description, or for whom an unwritten university expectation requires teaching a full load of classes each team, while also advising major and/or undeclared undergraduate students.
- Persistence/persisters: Students who are continually enrolled or re-enrolled in a four-year institution after *stopping out* from their original entry into the higher education system (Tinto, 1993).
- Retention: The rate at which first-time college students remain enrolled at their initially attended university without leaving it, whether to *stopout* for a period of time, transfer to another institution, or leave the higher education system entirely (Tinto, 1993).

Summary

This chapter introduced the problems surrounding academic advising at small, Christian universities, specifically as they contribute to retention, persistence, and degree completion at such institutions. Chapter I then provided a formal statement of the problem and purpose of the study before focusing on the research question of my dissertation study: "What are faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities?" The significance of this study to the areas of research, theory, and practice were also discussed after describing the epistemology, methods, and procedures used to guide the collection and analysis of data. The next chapter further explores the problems related to retention, persistence, degree completion, and academic advising in a comprehensive review of the literature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of my dissertation was to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian institutions in the United States. Obtaining such information assisted me in filling two voids in the literature on academic advising; first, it focused on small, Christian universities, and second, it provided insight to faculty perceptions (as opposed to student perceptions) of advising practices and structures. The research also enabled me to gain a greater understanding of issues surrounding faculty advising, as well as related areas that need further study. Therefore, the chapter begins with a review of the process I used to collect literature on the topics of retention, persistence, degree completion, and academic advising. The review of the literature then examines the benefits of higher education for individual students and global economies, industries, and societies. Once such benefits are established, Chapter II addresses the ways in which retention, persistence, and degree completion are determined, as well as the history of advising, how its models and structures changed over time, and student satisfaction with academic advising. The final topic of the chapter explores the role faculty play as academic advisors and their attitudes toward academic advising at small, Christian institutions.

Literature Review Search Procedures

The procedures I used to collect literature for this chapter began with the identification of three significant issues in my research problem: retention, persistence, and degree completion;

academic advising; and expectations of and rewards for faculty advisors. I first searched these topics on the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and ProQuest databases on the Oklahoma State University (OSU) library website. As articles and texts surfaced as appropriate results, I reviewed their abstracts for a quick assessment of their relevance to my dissertation. I then printed any texts of interest if online versions were available and uncovered other tangible documents at the University of Central Oklahoma library. A few of the documents were not originally accessible on the OSU library website, but I found them elsewhere on the Internet, using tools such as Google Scholar. I then categorized the literature into topics and ordered them into a format that might appear in this chapter. As I read each document, I made notations to record key connections and concepts. I noted additional references that seemed promising and searched for them in ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. I continued these procedures as the literature came together, took shape, and through ongoing review revealed any "gaps" or "holes" that I needed to address.

Benefits of Higher Education

My research indicated that completing college degrees has positive impacts on the people who earn them, as well as on the economies, individuals, industries, and societies that surround them. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), for example, explained that university graduates are able to exercise greater critical and cognitive thinking skills than those who do not attend or finish a degree at a higher education institution. They are qualified for more desirable careers, which usually led to greater monetary incomes. They are also able and more likely to donate funds to the universities they attended (Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009). Such citizenship extends to the surrounding society in the form of enhanced civic engagement (Cantor, 2004) and participation (Bradburn, Nevill, & Cataldi, 2006; Day & Newburger, 2002), allowing college-educated individuals to improve economies and industries within the national marketplace. As a result, low retention rates at colleges and universities leads to negative outcomes for individual students, their families, and local economies, industries, and societies.

Individual Students

I believe there is a great deal of debate about the cost of and students' returns on their investment in higher education. According to Day and Newburger (2002), the average cost for in-state tuition, room, and board for full-time students at public four-year institutions was $8,655 per year and the average cost for in-state tuition at public two-year institutions was $1,359 per year. At this time, approximately 90% of United States students graduated from high school and 60% of those graduates attended a college or university. Although these people had different reasons for pursuing undergraduate degrees, most of them did it because they expected greater financial earnings as a result of their educational attainment. Despite the rising cost of a bachelor degree, my research reinforced this idea; higher education graduates make more money than only high school graduates throughout their lifetimes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The trend is seen in starting salaries and throughout the course of an individual's career, meaning that as technology changes in the workforce, there is an increase in hiring employees who have the education and training only gained at higher education institutions. Therefore, college graduates are in better positions to pursue and secure higher level jobs and incomes. For example, the lifetime earning difference between a high school graduate and university graduate is $1 million. Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) reported that individuals with bachelor degrees earn about $2.1 million in their work-life, which is one-third more than college dropouts and almost double that of only high school graduates.

Furthermore, my research showed that holding an undergraduate degree decreases an individual's chances of facing unemployment. Lotkowski, et al. (2004) reinforced this fact when they explained that 20-24 year olds who held bachelor degrees had an unemployment rate of 6%. However, the rate was more than double for 20-24 year olds who had only a high school diploma or less; their unemployment rate was 14%. Thus, higher education not only results in higher income levels, but also allows college graduates to benefit from a better quality of life, which includes better financial health, increased career opportunities and security, and more leisure time and activities (Porter, 2002). Similarly, college graduates exercise greater critical and cognitive thinking skills and have more appreciation for cultural opportunities (Rowley & Hurtado, 2002). Such benefits result in an increased understanding of global affairs and issues and greater social statuses, enabling children of college and university graduates to have better finances, health, and social awareness as well.

Global Economies, Industries, and Societies

As I expected, the personal benefits of higher education are also positive for state, national, and global economies, industries, and societies, partly because university graduates pay more taxes, stimulate the economy, and are less dependent on government financial support than those who do not have college degrees. However, individuals with bachelor degrees also make beneficial contributions to the changing economies and industries of the United States. In Hecker's (2004) review, analysis, and discussion of 10 year employment projections, he stated that 21 of the 30 fastest growing jobs in the United States would require a post-secondary degree or training. He explained that 21.3 million of the jobs would result from economic development, but another 35 million positions would open because of retiring members of the Baby Boomer generation. Six out of every 10 of those positions would have to be filled by individuals who had a college education (Lotkowski, et al., 2004). Consequently, the occupational group that would expand most quickly was that of professional and related industries, and of the 30 job areas that were declining, none would be classified as occupations that require a degree (Hecker, 2004). Although college graduates still fill these positions, there is a dire national emphasis on higher education degree attainment.

Thus, I believe that there are two significant problems related to this issue. The first, and the one addressed most extensively, is the need to attract students to higher education and find ways to make their paths to colleges and universities more accessible. The second, which still needs more attention and effort from college administrators, is the need to retain students so that they can complete their undergraduate degrees and take their skills and experiences into the workforce (Lotkowski, et al., 2004). As Tinto (2002) stated, it does not matter that a student is able to start college if he or she is unable to finish it. Such thinking separates retention from persistence and persistence from degree completion, all of which are essential in ensuring that college graduates are prepared to enhance their state, national, and global economies, industries, and societies (Lotkowski, et al., 2004).

Retention, Persistence, and Degree Completion

Throughout the course of the past 40 years, retention, persistence, and degree completion were prominent issues within higher education. Tinto (1993) introduced these issues in his text, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, when he explained that more than half of students leave college before obtaining their degrees. Some of these students were *stopouts*, meaning that they take one or more breaks between enrollment semesters, while others transfer to another or multiple institutions or dropped out of higher education altogether (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Not surprising, then, is that only 51% of students graduate from the college where they start their degrees, whereas only 7% of students complete their degrees when transferring to another institution (Tinto, 2002). The students who finish their degrees do so in about six years, which indicates that a “four-year degree” may be an achievement of the past (Capaldi, et al., 2006; Kramer, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, et al., 2005). As a result, administrators continue to monitor the retention, persistence, and degree completion of their undergraduate students (Upcraft, et al., 2005).

Retention

My studies revealed that retention is most often used to describe whether or not students leave their initially-attended institution before completing their degrees. If students withdraw from their original university, either because they quit or transfer to another college, they are characterized as not being retained. By the same standard, if students transfer to another institution and graduate, they were not counted in the receiving university's retention numbers because they did not stay at the institution where they started their degree program (Tinto, 1993). Since these rules were confusing, and arguably inaccurate, Hagedorn (2005) defined four categories of retention: *institutional retention*, *system retention*, *academic discipline retention*, and *course retention*. Understanding different types of retention is important for administrators, faculty, and staff advisors who are responsible for counseling students who may struggle with varied academic experiences and issues.

When higher education administrators discuss retention, they often mean *institutional retention* (Hagedorn, 2005; Tinto, 1993). *Institutional retention* refers to students who start their post-secondary career at one university and complete their degrees from the same university. If the degree completion includes a break from coursework, but an eventual return to the same university, these students are characterized as *institutional stopouts* (Tinto, 1993). *Institutional retention* differs from *system retention*, which focuses on undergraduate students instead of colleges and universities. Rather than counting who stays at what university, *system retention* tracks where students go after they left an institution. If they transfer to another university, begin classes the next semester, and graduate, they are identified as *immediate transfers* (Tinto, 1993). However, if they *stop out* and transferred to another institution at a later time, they are known as *delayed transfers* (Tinto, 1993). Either way, these students are considered to be retained by the higher education system, though these rates are expensive and difficult to track and are not helpful to colleges wanting to improve their *institutional retention*.

Another type of retention is known as *academic discipline retention* (Hagedorn, 2005). *Academic discipline retention* is more specific than *institutional retention* and *system retention* as it considers whether or not students keep their initial major throughout their time at an institution. This type of retention can be specific to major, department, or college, depending on how a university classifies it. For example, if a student changes his or her major from communication to nursing, he or she is seen as not being retained in that academic discipline, even if he or she remains at the same institution. Because these numbers are not reported nationally, they are only tracked if specific departments, disciplines, or universities wish to record them. The benefit of tracking *academic discipline retention* is that the information can be helpful in determining how changes of majors affect students' academic performances and degree completions. I also see this data as beneficial to faculty advisors who gain and lose advisees among academic departments and must counsel these students through academic transitions and evolving career and life aspirations.

Similar benefits come from looking at *course retention* as well (Hagedorn, 2005). *Course retention* numbers are obtained when university administrators examine class retention levels. Unfortunately, this is a complex and flawed process as it often fails to consider students who are still enrolled in other classes at the college. It also often fails to consider the number of courses that should be tracked in order to determine appropriate retention in an academic area.

I found a great deal of research on factors that contribute to *student departures* from higher education institutions as well (Tinto, 1993). Among these studies is a meta-analysis conducted by Lotkowski, et al. (2004), who examined 109 studies of academic and non-academic factors for the retention of full-time students at four-year institutions. The meta-analysis found two academic and nine non-academic factors with salient relationships in regards to retention. The academic factors were students' American College Testing (ACT) scores and high school grade point averages (GPA), which are set before attending college; however, the non-academic factors were more abstract because they could surface or be established during a student's time in college. Lotkowski, et al. referred to these non-academic factors as academic goals, academic-related skills, academic self-confidence, achievement motivation, contextual influences, general self-concept, institutional commitment, social involvement, and social support. Their analysis discovered that several non-academic factors are positively linked to retention, with academic goals, academic-related skills, and academic self-confidence having the strongest relationships. Upcraft, et al. (2005) reinforced the findings, saying that retainable students have clearer goals for their education and career, develop and exercise effective study habits, and attend class on a regular basis. While such qualities are desirable in undergraduate students, I believe that faculty and staff advisors should also be aware of the challenges and limitations that their advisees face in their pursuits of academic success.

Unfortunately, some first-year students are unaware of their academic or career goals and underprepared for college work, meaning that they are not confident in their ability to attend or graduate from an institution of higher education. Such realities contribute to low retention rates, which "waste human talent and resources, jeopardize our nation's economic future, and threaten the economic viability of our post-secondary institutions and our country's democratic traditions" (Lotkowski, et al., 2004, p. 2). Thus, Lotkowski, et al. reinforced the idea that faculty contact and counsel may be necessary to promote academic self-confidence, thus guiding students to careers and industries that maximize their professional potentials.

To better understand why students think, talk to someone about, and take steps to leave their institutions, Freeman, et al. (2007) conducted a study in the residence halls at a large, public four-year university. Their results showed that 43.8% of the 160 respondents considered leaving the institution. Of the participants, 39.4% admitted to talking to someone about withdrawing from the university, while 11.3% of the respondents indicated that they took steps to leave the institution altogether. In each area, over 80% of the students who thought, talked about, and took steps to leave the university were women, though this research did not acknowledge if women leave higher education more often than men. Rather, these findings could indicate that some female students need academic advisement, counsel, and encouragement more than their male counterparts do.

The results of Freeman, et al.'s (2007) survey instrument highlight a number of other variables that possibly lead to student attrition. The respondents reported the top five variables as lack of diversity, lack of social engagement, lack of emotional preparation for college, lack of academic preparation for college, and low satisfaction with general college experiences. Variables differed for students who entertained the idea of and talked to others about leaving the institution, but did not take steps to do so. The variables included class being a waste of time, not connecting with the university, and feeling like no one would help them succeed. Therefore, I wonder if such findings demonstrate a need for improved academic connections and engagements with faculty and advisors, both inside and outside of the classroom. Such conclusions are apparent in the positive variables that kept the students enrolled in college: being satisfied with the residence halls, developing relationships at the institution, and becoming integrated into college life. Although some factors are related to social opportunities, a great deal of research indicates that faculty also play an important role in student retention (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 1998; Upcraft, et al., 2005).

ACT's *What Works in Student Retention* report (2010) showed that private institutions have a 75% retention rate from students' first year at a university to their second year at the same university. The average first-year retention rate of both private and public institutions is 73%. When specifically asked which retention practices and programs were most effective, students at the universities that participated in the study reported the academic advising center, advising interventions with selected student populations, and an increased number of academic advisors as the top three. At the same time, private college and university administrator respondents were asked to report the efforts they believed most contributed to retention at their institutions. They listed early warning systems, the offering of a freshman seminar/university 101 course for credit, and advising interventions with selected student populations as the top three. Thus, I believe such findings indicate that academic advising, as a process that connects students to their institutions, could be a valuable tool in the retention, persistence, and degree completion of undergraduate students.

Persistence

I found that the literature on retention addresses its relationship with persistence as well. In one study, Tinto (1993) defined *persisters* as students who are "either still enrolled in a four-year college via continuous attendance or… enrolled again after having stopped out sometime after first entry into college" (p. 29). This description differs from that of retention, but shows how persistence impacts educational attainment, meaning that it is a greater contributor to degree completion than just retention alone (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Two of the most well-known models of persistence are Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure and Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcomes model. Here, Tinto hypothesized that students transitioning to college are most successful if they integrate into academic and social communities. Although some of this incorporation must be done by the student, Tinto explained that institutions of higher education also have a responsibility to foster such opportunities. Doing so enables students to form a connection with their institutions, which makes them feel as though they belong to the educational community.

Astin's (1993) model is similar as it examines students' characteristics (input) before attending college (the environment), the combination of which forms the results (outcomes). He identified 146 inputs that affect students' perceptions of and experiences with college, such as their age, gender, high school grades, income, parent's educational attainment, race, reasons for pursuing higher education, and standardized test scores. Astin then explained that each of the 146 inputs has some influence on students' abilities and likelihood to persist. He also highlighted 192 environmental factors that relate to undergraduate student success. Astin divided these 192 factors into the following areas: curriculum, faculty characteristics, financial aid, institutional characteristics, major field of choice, place of residence, student involvement, and students' peer group characteristics. The combination of inputs, which are explained in the next paragraph, and the environmental factors result in 82 total outcomes that measure achievement, persistence, retention, satisfaction, and success.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) also addressed a number of factors that contributed to the persistence of college students. They referred to these factors as *between college effects* and *within college effects*. Here, they saw the difference in the factors that relate to the type of institution students attend (*between college effects*) and his or her accomplishments and experiences that are independent of the institution they attend (*within college effects*). Two *between college effects* are applicable to my dissertation as they are two-year versus four-year institutions and institutional control: private versus public. In their discussion of two-year and four-year institutions, Pascarella and Terenzini stated that students who attend four-year institutions have better retention rates and are more likely to earn bachelor degrees and attend graduate school than those who attend two-year institutions (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1998; Upcraft, et al., 2005). Thus, for many students, the direct path to graduation is the best one (Tinto, 2002).

Likewise, the literature further showed that attending a private institution instead of a public one has a positive influence on persistence, degree completion, and attendance at graduate schools (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1998). Kuh and Hu (2001) supported these findings by stating that students at private universities have more contact with their professors than students at public institutions. Such contact is likely the result of more frequent and better quality relationships, which are probably easier to achieve at smaller colleges and universities (Freeman, et al., 2007;

Gordon, et al., 2000; Upcraft, et al., 2005). I believe that the difference may also be due to higher tuition rates, which result in a sense of commitment to and investment in the institution, and distinct or religious missions that attract students of similar perspectives and contribute to a more significant sense of institutional fit and satisfaction (Gordon, et al., 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001).

After a student decides where to attend college, his or her persistence is also impacted by *within college effects* (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Several of the effects are related to my dissertation study, including academic achievement, peer relationships and extracurricular involvement, relationships with faculty, residence, and orientation and advising. The first effect is specific to students' high school and post-secondary grades, which reflect their intellectual abilities, motivation, and study habits (Astin, 1993; Upcraft, et al., 2005). In fact, a recent study reviewed information from 36 "test optional" institutions and found little difference in the GPAs and graduation rates of students who submit standardized test scores for admission and those who do not (Westervelt, 2014). Thus, the conclusion of the study was that high school grades are often "the best predictors of a student's success in college. And kids who have low or modest test scores, but good high school grades, did better in college than those with good scores but modest grades" (p. 2). It is not surprising, then, that academic achievement has a strong tie to retention and persistence, especially at private universities where admission standards are often higher than those at public institutions. Furthermore, high school graduates who are prepared for college are four times more likely to attend a four-year institution and seven times more likely to graduate (Tinto, 2002). Therefore, it is evident to me that academic ability and preparation play vital roles in student persistence.

Additionally, students who socially integrated into college life through friendships or campus activities are more likely to commit to their institutions and less likely to leave them. Such connections are not limited to extracurricular involvement and peer relationships, though; they also extend to relationships with faculty (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 1998; Upcraft, et al., 2005). Consequently, the more students integrated with the academic and social environments on campus, the more likely they persist at that institution (Lotkowski, et al., 2004). If students are able to meet with and talk to their professors outside of the classroom, they have greater chances of persisting from one semester to the next (Astin, 1993; Upcraft, et al., 2005). Thus, I believe it is possible that students may be more successful at establishing social and academic bonds at small, private institutions than at large, public ones.

Another *within college effect* of persistence is residence. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Astin (1993), Upcraft, et al. (2005), and Freeman, et al. (2007) explained that students who lived on campus are more likely to create relationships with faculty and peers and utilize institutional resources than students who live at home or commuted to class. As a result, residential students have more opportunities for social integration, institutional fit and satisfaction, and degree completion. Still, only 18% of all students live on their university campuses (Tinto, 2002). Unlike most public universities, private institutions often require freshmen to live on-campus for at least their first year of college, again possibly leading to greater persistence at private colleges and universities.

Similarly, quality orientation and advising programs assist students in integrating to new environments, connecting with faculty, and focusing on their academic major and career goals (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Freeman, et al., 2007; Gordon, et al., 2000; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Upcraft, et al., 2005). Such programs allow students' conversations with faculty to focus on intellectual and substantive ideas, such as career plans, which allow for better integration than strictly social encounters (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Student-faculty relationships are also achieved when faculty make intentional efforts to direct out-of-class discussions with students to deepen ideas that connect their learning in the classroom to life outside of and beyond their college experiences (Gordon, et al., 2000; Upcraft, et al., 2005).

Tinto (2002) suggested five areas in which higher education institutions could promote student persistence. The areas were identified as *expectation*, *advice*, *support*, *involvement*, and *learning*. First, he stated that university administrators must expect their students to succeed. Upcraft, et al. (2005) claimed that many new college students are not challenged by their first semester of coursework, which makes them less engaged in their institutions. Unfortunately, this may be true as there are instances in which students are not expected to perform at a certain level in the classroom. Such low expectations do little to motivate students to try harder or do better in their quest for a degree. Second, Tinto said that university administrators, faculty, and staff must be better about advertising their academic requirements and support services so that students are aware of their options when thinking about majors, classes and schedules, and career plans. Third, he believed that students (especially freshmen) need academic, personal, and social support to integrate into the campus community and make connections to their institutions of higher education. This leads to Tinto's fourth point, which maintained that students must feel involved in and valued by their institutions of higher education. He also believed that administrators, faculty, and staff must make greater efforts to foster student learning. Tinto explained that if a student learns something in the classroom, he or she is more likely to stay at that institution. Therefore, Tinto's fifth point was that organizational policies that are created to promote persistence should emphasize institutional curriculum and faculty pedagogies and skills.

Thus, I believe that higher education administrators and staff should provide training for new faculty members on how to teach and then reward effective teaching properly. Likewise, such priorities should be rooted in the mission of the college or university, allowing persistence to be an organizational priority for which administrators, faculty, and staff all share responsibility (Lotkowski, et al., 2004).

Degree Completion

To understand the complex idea of student persistence, one must be aware of the meaning of degree completion. According to Tinto (1993), degree completion is "the rate at which individuals who begin their programs in a particular college or university complete their degrees within a given time frame in that college or university" (p. 18). Although there are a number of factors that affect degree completion, many of which are linked to student characteristics and responsibilities and were previously discussed in this chapter, some are related to institutional practices that assist students in making sense of academic requirements, career plans, classes and schedules, and major options. I believe that there may be deteriorations in both areas since degree completion rates have been on the decline for many years. In the early 1990s, for example, Kramer (1993) found that the number of students who graduated in more than four years doubled from the previous 30 years. At that time, the 1993-1994 academic year, the four-year graduation rate was 36%. The five year graduation rate, not including students who graduated in four years, was 28%. This meant that 64% of college graduates in 1993-1994 finished their degrees within five years of starting college. Approximately 37% of these students were delayed in completing their degrees because they transferred institutions at least once and took breaks between university enrollments (Upcraft, et al., 2005). There are many causes of *delayed completions*, including major area of study, credit hours lost when transferring from one institution to another, part-time enrollment in coursework, and part-time or full-time employment while enrolled in classes (Freeman, et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Such student practices continued to increase; thus, the need for academic counseling and support is now necessary to address student retention, persistence, and degree completion.

Although an undergraduate degree was once seen as a "four-year degree," it may now be an idea of the past. Recently, only 42% of university students finished their bachelor degrees in this "traditional" amount of time (Capaldi, et al., 2006). As a result, it is more common for students to complete their degrees in six years; the national statistics for six-year graduation rates at public and private institutions has increased to 71%. Among public colleges and universities alone, such averages are even lower; only 20% of students graduate in four years and 45% of students graduate in six years (Capaldi, et al., 2006).

However, there are limitations in the ways in which these statistics are configured and reported. For example, an institution's final degree completion rate for an academic year does not count all of the students who persist through coursework and semesters at their institutions. Its degree completion rate does not even consider all of the students who walk across the stage in their spring commencement ceremony. Rather, it reviews the full-time enrollment of first-year students who start taking classes at an institution in the fall and considers the percentage of those students who graduate from the same institution four or five or six years later. Thus, degree completion, as tracked by federal and state governments, does not include part-time students, students who start attending college in the spring or summer semesters, or students who transfer to other colleges or universities. Therefore, it seems that four-year and six-year graduation rates may not accurately represent the speed at which most college students complete their bachelor degrees.

My research demonstrated that student and organizational characteristics have a profound impact on the retention, persistence, and degree completion of college students. Although much of the literature showed that private institutions boast better retention rates than public colleges and universities, further studies that focus on specific institutional types, like small, private or Christian institutions, provide further insights to the circumstances that lead to *student departure* (Tinto, 1993). Most recently, the great recession of the early 2000s led to a time of enrollment crises at these colleges and universities, especially the ones that are not considered academically competitive or prestigious. Consequently, there is a push for these institutions to enhance and utilize student support services, like academic advising programs, to retain their undergraduate students and help them persist to their graduation dates (Campell & Nutt, 2008; Freeman, et al., 2007; Gordon, et al., 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Upcraft, et al., 2005).

Academic Advising

In my opinion, higher education institutions measure student satisfaction and success with retention, persistence, and degree completion numbers too often; in reality, they should be concerned with student learning. Although the literature stated that student learning happens in the classroom, many researchers claim that student satisfaction and success are fostered through the learning that takes place in academic advising, counseling, and mentoring relationships formed with faculty (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Freeman, et al., 2007; Gordon, et al., 2000; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Because there are different factors that relate to retention, persistence, and degree completion, the influence of academic advising on these topics is also important. Thus, I believe that if academic advising programs are designed and implemented well, they can be pivotal in supporting student learning and success (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, et al., 2000).

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) defines academic advising as "a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes" that "synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the framework of their aspirations, abilities, and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes" (Drake, 2011, p. 10). This definition of academic advising emphasizes three major components – curriculum, pedagogy, and student learning outcomes – which Campbell and Nutt (2008) described as the issue or topic that advising addresses, how this counseling leads to academic and/or career accomplishments, and the results of the advising process and advising relationships. Thus, Campbell and Nutt explained that "an excellent advisor does the same for the student's entire curriculum that an excellent teacher does for one course" (p. 5). As a result, there is more to effective academic advising than just telling students to take the "right" courses; there is a responsibility for *developmental advising* to help students clarify their educational and career objectives (Gordon, et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). Although the definition of advising varies from one institution to another, the main purpose is "to assist students in developing meaningful educational plans within the context of students' life goals" (Hester, 2008, p. 36).

Historically, at both large and small, public and private, institutions, academic advising was commonly considered a minor activity by administrators, faculty, and staff (Lowe & Toney, 2001). Thus, the responsibility of academic advising is often passed to faculty and staff with little support and inconsistent training. Because such processes and structures are treated as low priorities, they lead to decreased satisfaction for students who desire accurate information and appropriate holistic support. Overall, the literature on retention showed that such frustrations cause some students to even withdraw from their institutions (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Freeman, et al., 2007; Gordon, et al., 2000; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, et al., 2005). It is even more important, then, for institutions that are surrounded by a great deal of competition to develop quality academic advising programs to recruit and retain students (Gordon, et al., 2000; Lowe & Toney, 2001). I think this is especially crucial for private institutions where enrollments declined as a result of the recent recession.

Despite a great deal of debate concerning the most appropriate and effective way to foster retention, Tinto (1993) identified three specific problems of which all college and university administrators, faculty, and staff should be mindful when developing long-term retention efforts. Such efforts are important for faculty and staff advisors as they highlight key issues with which their advisees predominately struggle. The first is academic difficulties, especially for students who are not adequately prepared for college work. The second is the struggle of students to determine what they want to study and do with their lives after they finish college. Finally, the third is the difficulty of students to be integrated into the academic and social communities at their institutions. Although these issues are often addressed by institutional academic advising programs, Habley (2004) reported that many colleges and universities do not administer or utilize such services to the best of their abilities. In fact, some institutions do not even have formal advising programs. According to Habley, many colleges do not make the most of their advising services and are not very effective in retaining their students. This is unfortunate as Upcraft, et al. (2005) stated that "the quality of academic advising is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment" (p. 92).

The History of Academic Advising

Gordon, et al. (2000) divided the history of academic advising in higher education in the United States into three different time periods. The first time period was academic advising before it was identified as academic advising, which started with the establishment of Harvard University and lasted through the growth of public universities in the late 1800s. The second time period was academic advising after it was identified as academic advising, but before the activity itself was reviewed. This time period began at the end of the 1800s and lasted until the 1970s when academic advising theories and practices developed. Finally, the third time period was academic advising as an activity that was reviewed, which started in the 1970s and continues through present day.

In the first time period, academic advisors took the shape of faculty and tutors who lived on campus and sometimes in the residence halls with their students. These people oversaw many aspects of their students' lives, including where they lived and attended church and what and how they studied. Most of the students' academic guidance came from these tutors, who provided assistance within the subject areas offered at the institution. Such practices changed, however, around the time of the American Civil War. As higher education became more accessible to different races and women, the gap between faculty and students widened. Gordon, et al. (2000)

wrote, “At best, historical ideals about the teacher guiding the learner had become obscured; at worst, they had been lost” (p. 7).

The separation of teacher and learner continued into the second time period of academic advising, until the year 1909, when A. Lawrence Lowell, the president of Harvard University, spoke out against it. His beliefs were rooted in the priorities of Charles Eliot Norton, former president of Harvard University, who stated that faculty should advise and assist students both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, Lowell declared that every new college student would be assigned to a faculty member who was responsible for counseling the student in both academic and personal matters. Similar practices took place at Columbia University and Johns Hopkins University approximately the same time; faculty advised their students on what courses they should take, though such systems mostly existed as impersonal conversations and interactions.

About 40 years later, the president of Alfred University created a program to introduce new students to the institution and to teach them proper collegiate behavior and study while enrolled at the university. This was the beginning of orientation programs, which acted as an extension of the faculty advisor relationship in order to prepare students to be successful in college. As more colleges and universities implemented similar programs, studies in freshman students began to change. Syracuse University studied 173 female freshmen to learn about the difficulties they faced in adjusting to college life. The researchers found that these students were used to having details of their lives dictated at home, so they asked for direction and guidance in college as well. Consequently, the researchers concluded that all new college students could use help transitioning to higher education and that the university should take measures to provide both academic and social assistance.

One of the first studies on academic advising and retention was conducted nearly four decades ago by Glennen (1975). At the time, he worked at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he first trained faculty on academic advising services and strategies; he then required students to meet with their advisors on a regular basis. Today, this practice is known as *intrusive advising* or *outreach advising* and is characterized by academic advisors' intentional outreaches to students and students' requirements to participate in academic advising in order to avoid some sort of punishment. As a result of these efforts, Glennen found a 39% decrease in attrition for freshman students who participated in the first two years of the program.

Thus, in the third time period, academic advising as a practice finally presented itself as a profession. The NACADA was established in 1979, and within a year, it had over 500 members. It provided many opportunities for professional development, like conferences, journals, and other research, which generated interest and improvement in the field of academic advising. At the same time, John N. Gardner began his studies of the first year experience of college students, which highlighted the need for faculty and staff to orient and advise students, especially as they progressed through their first year in higher education.

Despite the development of NACADA and first year experience and orientation programs and research, academic advising continued to exist as a weak and somewhat ignored function of higher education. This reality led ACT to conduct regular national surveys of academic advising practices and structures at different types of institutions every four years, beginning in 1979 and continuing through present day. By the 1990s, most colleges and universities began assessing and changing their academic advising models to meet student needs and increase persistence and degree completion. Such models varied from one college to the next, but further study showed that almost every institutional practice involved faculty in one capacity or another.

Models and Practices of Academic Advising

Therefore, it is evident that both the look and function of academic advising evolved greatly over the years. What was once a simple routine between a faculty member and a student became a more complex discussion that focused on students' academic, career, and personal decisions and growth. As a result, a number of colleges and universities, especially large, public ones, moved to academic advising models and practices that utilize professional advising staff. Such models and practices vary across different institutions. For example, some professional advising staff are responsible for all students' academic and career counseling throughout the whole of their undergraduate careers. Others offer combined services that allow both faculty and professional academic advising staff to assist students in their educational and career goals (Gordon, et al., 2000; Kuhtmann, 2004; Tuttle, 2000). Still other institutions use professional academic advising staff to counsel specific populations, such as first-generation, first-year, and/or minority students, and faculty to advise sophomores and upperclassmen (Gordon, et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). The different models are important as they dictate the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors, especially faculty members who balance such expectations with their already overloaded schedules of administrating, conducting research, grading, and teaching.

Perhaps the basis for comparison and understanding of these different academic advising models relates to their level of centralization. Gordon, et al. (2000) wrote that "in a *decentralized* organizational structure, advising services are provided by faculty or staff in their academic departments," whereas "a *centralized* organizational structure consists of an administrative unit, usually an advising center, with a director and an advising staff housed in one location" (p. 193). Within these categories, Tuttle (2000) and Kuhtmann (2004) reported seven different structures of academic advising that developed in the last several decades. The first is a faculty-only model, which has full-time faculty who advise students throughout the course of their college career. This is possibly the oldest model and is one that is still utilized by many colleges and universities, especially small, private ones (Gordon, et al., 2000). The second structure is the satellite model, which utilizes different academic advising offices and staff in different academic departments. The advisors themselves are faculty, staff, or a combination thereof. The third model is the selfcontained model, where a central academic advising office is run by a dean or director and employs professional staff rather than faculty. The fourth structure, the shared-supplementary model, uses faculty to advise students, but provides professional advising staff in another office to assist with this process. In many cases, the professional staff members offer academic advising development and training to faculty advisors, while also evaluating transcripts and verifying students to graduate from the college or university.

The last three academic advising models are the shared-split model, the shared-dual model, and the total intake model. The shared-split model is close to the shared-supplementary model, though the difference is that students are usually categorized based on their academic status. Perhaps the most common split is first- and second-year students who report to the professional academic advising staff for assistance with their general education requirements and then visited with faculty advisors for help with courses and questions specific to their majors. In some ways, the shared-split structure is also similar to the shared-dual structure. Here, students report to both faculty and professional advising staff, but the faculty advisors focus on major courses and sequences, while the professional advising staff help with general academic issues and registration processes. Finally, the last model is the total intake model. In this structure, all students utilize a central academic advising office with professional advising staff until they reach a specific milestone in their academic career. At some institutions, it is the completion of the first year of college or a certain number of credit hours. When this milestone is reached, students are then assigned to an appropriate faculty advisor (Kuhtmann, 2004; Tuttle, 2000).

Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising

Although the designs, processes, and structures of advising vary from one institution to another, most colleges and universities measured effective and successful academic advising through higher GPAs, satisfaction with faculty and staff advisors and academic advising services, and student awareness of campus resources (Hester, 2008). Thus, a great deal of research was conducted on student satisfaction with academic advising programs, advisors, and advising styles. Crookston (1972) stated that academic advising should be treated as an extension of teaching, which is often accomplished through two different styles: *developmental advising* and *prescriptive advising*. The difference between styles is that *developmental advising* is "based on a personal relationship between the student and advisor and integrated academic, career, and personal goals in advisement, rather than having a sole focus on academic goals" (Hale, et al., 2009, p. 4), whereas *prescriptive advising* is "impersonal and authority-based, answering only specific questions and not taking individual development into consideration" (p. 5). Research on *developmental advising* and *prescriptive advising* styles revealed that most students prefer advisors who use *developmental advising* as *prescriptive advising* limits students' opportunities to integrate into their campus communities (Hale, et al., 2009; Myers & Dyer, 2005). However, many advisors are not aware of students' preferences and believe that they just want assistance with course selections and degree requirements (Jordan, 2000). Thus, it seems that if faculty and staff advisors are informed of students' preferences and encouraged to alter their advising styles, student satisfaction with advising may increase.

Low (2000) stated that institutions of higher education should "focus on the needs of their students… continually improve the quality of the educational experience, and… use student satisfaction data to shape their future directions" (p. 2). To address such recommendations, Lowe and Toney (2001) conducted a study to specifically explore how student satisfaction relates to types of advisors, students' academic levels, and the frequency of their contact with academic advisors. Participants included 200 randomly selected undergraduate and graduate students who were enrolled in teacher education programs and six faculty advisors and six staff advisors who volunteered to be part of the study.

At the beginning of the survey instrument, the student respondents were asked to report their academic level, major, and if they were assigned to a faculty advisor or staff advisor. They were then asked to rank the importance of certain advising responsibilities, as evident in the literature on the subject, on a scale of one to four, with one being "not very important" and four being "very important." These students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with their academic advisors' abilities to perform each responsibility on a scale of one to four, with one being "not satisfied" and four being "very satisfied." Finally, the student respondents were asked to report how frequently they met with their academic advisor throughout the course of the last year. Similarly, both faculty and staff advisors were asked to share their positions at the college or university, how many students they advised in a typical year, and how much experience they had with academic advising and teaching.

Through this study, Lowe and Toney (2001) found that both undergraduate and graduate students reported increased satisfaction with their academic advisors the more frequently they met with them. Students' academic levels did not appear to affect their satisfaction with academic advising, regardless of the type of academic advisor (faculty or staff) to whom they were assigned. The study also revealed that undergraduate and graduate students ranked six out of 12 advising tasks as most important. These responsibilities included understanding certificate and degree requirements, sharing graduation requirements, engaging in caring relationships with their students, assisting their students with career goals, orienting new students to campus life, and communicating internship and scholarship opportunities to their advisees. Such duties were rated as most important by student respondents on all academic levels, though seniors preferred academic advisors who were available for meetings and willing to listen to their problems. The study also explored the academic advising tasks that faculty and staff advisors believed to be most important. Unlike the students, the faculty and staff advisors rated knowledge of university resources, caring relationships with their students, understanding student needs, and orienting students to campus as the most critical aspects of their advising jobs.

Kuh and Hu (2001) indicated that it is important for colleges and universities to create and maintain environments that are affirming, supportive, and welcoming. Doing so is not just vital for retention, persistence, and degree completion, but also for student satisfaction, especially as it relates to academic advising and counseling. Thus, it is necessary for students to feel comfortable when thinking about and dealing with their academic and intellectual abilities and futures. Upcraft, et al. (2005) described such competence as "the successful completion of courses with an acceptable GPA, continued enrollment in the second year, and development of the higher-order intellectual skills necessary to become an educated person, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and reflective judgment" (pp. 27-28). I believe, then, that each of these areas can be enhanced through the roles and responsibilities of faculty advisors.

Faculty as Academic Advisors

The various models and structures of academic advising that currently exist indicate that nearly all college and university faculty members are expected to advise students in some capacity or another. Gordon, et al. (2000) explained that faculty advisors have an average of 26 advisees and spend about 11% of their time meeting with students about academic issues. These faculty advisors are seen as effective if they accomplish the following goals: assist students in self-understanding and acceptance, especially as they relate to career goals and life decisions; assist students in developing an appropriate educational plan and aid their decision-making abilities; and provide specifics about policies and support programs and resources (Gordon, et al., 2000). Yet, it is vital to recognize that the abilities and skills associated with academic advising do not always come naturally to faculty (Gordon, et al., 2000; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Such limitations of faculty roles as academic advisors and attitudes toward academic advising are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Faculty Roles as Academic Advisors

Gordon, et al. (2000) listed several abilities and skills as most important for academic advisors. These responsibilities include listening, counseling, referring, challenging, and supporting. They recommended that the extent of such expectations begin with the mission of the institution, which strongly influences the goals and mission of specific academic advising programs and faculty advisors. There is a great deal of research that shows that effective academic advising is not often rewarded at colleges and universities (Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Habley, 2004; Lowe & Toney, 2001; McGillin, 2003; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tien & Blackburn, 1996; Vowell & Farren, 2003). Rather, research is the most rewarded activity in rank and tenure considerations and processes at large, public four-year institutions (Tien & Blackburn, 1996). Although rank and tenure rewards possibly motivate faculty to be active in scholarly research and publications, Tien and Blackburn wondered if intrinsic motivations (enjoyment and interest in research in general) could result in greater research productivity than extrinsic motivation (faculty promotion) alone. Thus, the same possibilities were stated about academic advising over decades of research. Even if an institution does not reward faculty for fulfilling their academic advising expectations, the faculty members who enjoy advising students are more likely to do it and do it well.

Although faculty are experts in their academic fields, many of them start the teaching profession without any skills or training in academic advising (Gordon, et al., 2000; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, the colleges and universities where they are employed do little to meet their professional development needs in this area (Gordon, et al., 2000; Swanson, 2006). This means that faculty advisors must make their own efforts to improve their academic advising abilities. Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, and Prosser (2004) stated that doing so requires faculty to first understand their strengths and off-set their weaknesses, while acquiring a positive attitude toward their academic advising processes and responsibilities. As I expected, faculty attitudes were a difficult part of this equation.

Faculty Attitudes toward Academic Advising

While researching faculty attitudes toward academic advising, Petress (1996) found four factors that influence faculty self-perceptions of the academic advising abilities. The first is how they interpret or what they understand their advising responsibilities to be. The second is the professional development or training that is provided to academic advisors. The third is administrative and colleague expectations of faculty advisor structures. Finally, the fourth is reward structure (promotion, rank, recognition, and/or tenure) for effective academic advising. The last point is an important one since Tien and Blackburn (1996) and Dillon and Fisher (2000) wrote that academic advising is not often considered in rank and tenure promotions or rewards.

Stull (1997, as cited in Myers & Dyer, 2005) reported three areas in which faculty need help in developing their academic advising skills. Such areas include career advising, curriculum and/or academic program advising, and developmental training. Unfortunately, there is not much research that studied faculty attitudes toward academic advising, how they prepare for such responsibilities and roles, and how they execute these tasks when advising students. One of the only studies that covered these points was conducted by Myers and Dyer, who tried "to determine the attitudes, needs, and self-perceived level of competence in advising by faculty and administrators of college of agriculture at land grant institutions" (p. 38). Their research revealed that faculty advise mostly undergraduate students and that their sessions with undergraduate students are longer than their sessions with graduate students. Ninety-one percent of faculty in the study also said that they believed that academic advising should be part of rank and tenure decisions and count toward their teaching loads. When asked if such practices already existed at their institutions, 36.4% of faculty reported that academic advising was part of rank and tenure considerations and 41.3% said that their teaching loads allowed enough time to advise students.

Overall, the faculty attitudes were positive in this study. Ninety-five percent of the respondents believed that academic advising was a good use of their time. Almost all of the faculty respondents (99.1%) said that academic advising was effective in building rapport with their students, while 98.6% said it was effective in retaining students and 90.8% said it was effective in recruiting students. As a result, 71.5% of respondents stated that academic advising should be required of all full-time faculty, regardless of compensation levels. In addition, 67.1% believed that the responsibility of academic advising should continue to fall to full-time faculty members.

The last part of this study explored faculty preparations for academic advising roles and responsibilities. For the most part, faculty reported that they were comfortable with certain parts of this job. Ninety-nine percent felt competent in building their students' schedules and 93.5% said they were able to share information about institutional policies. Even 86.6% said they were able to assist their advisees with academic hardships and 94% felt like they were able to help students with their career decisions. However, only a little more than half of the respondents were comfortable helping students with personal issues. Regardless, 83.3% believed that their academic advising abilities and expertise were inadequate. This is probably because only 57.9% of respondents reported having any training in academic advising and only 18% received training on helping students with personal concerns.

Therefore, effective academic advising models and programs likely increase student retention, persistence, and degree completion at higher education institutions throughout the United States, including small, Christian colleges and universities. The increase in retention, persistence, and degree completion also result in an increase in higher education graduates, which not only benefits the individuals who earn their undergraduate degrees, but also their families and state, national, and global economies, industries, and societies. Unfortunately, many small, private colleges and universities do not reward their faculty advisors for their academic advising, which is an issue because these individuals are often responsible for advising at small institutions with limited personnel. Such concerns establish and reinforce the need for specific research that explores faculty perceptions of current faculty-provided academic advising structures at small, Christian institutions of higher education as findings could lead to scholarly improvements and opportunities in these areas.

Summary

This chapter addressed the procedures that were used to review literature on the benefits of higher education; retention, persistence, and degree completion; and academic advising. The findings from the search process provided literature that explored the impact of such topics on higher education institutions, students, and the many facets of faculty as academic advisors. The following chapter addresses the methodology and methods for this dissertation case study, which explored faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The first and second chapters of this dissertation identified the problems surrounding retention, persistence, degree completion, and academic advising at small, Christian universities in the United States. They also established and reinforced the need and purpose of the study, which was to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian institutions. Consequently, this chapter includes a discussion of the methods and procedures for the study, including the research sites, research participants, data collection, data analysis, and additional comments on qualitative research, as well as the trustworthiness of the qualitative study.

Statement of the Problem

The literature review indicated that academic advising models and practices positively impact retention, persistence, and degree completion throughout higher education (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, et al., 2000; Habley, 1993; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, et al., 2005). At small, private institutions in the United States, including those that are affiliated with the Christian churches, full-time faculty members often assumed the role of academic advisor (Gordon, et al., 2000). However, as faculty job descriptions at small colleges and universities include administrative obligations and research duties in addition to teaching responsibilities, academic advising is not treated as a priority by faculty (Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Habley, 2004; Lowe & Toney, 2001; McGillin, 2003; Myers &

Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tien & Blackburn, 1996; Vowell & Farren, 2003). Because the practice of utilizing faculty advisors is unlikely to change at small colleges (Gordon, et al., 2000), and good advising is necessary to improve student retention, persistence, and degree completion (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, et al., 2000), it may be helpful to faculty advisor effectiveness at small, Christian institutions if faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of faculty-provided academic advising are explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities.

Research Question

Due to the qualitative nature of my investigation, I had one research question for my dissertation. The research question asked: "What are faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities?"

Overview of the Design of the Study

Because "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem," such as academic advising at small, Christian universities in the United States, a qualitative design and methodology was effective in answering this research question (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). This design was ideal as the inductive style focused on faculty advisors as individuals, which gave light to their unique interpretations of the complex situation that is academic advising at their respective institutions. As the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, I used practices of ongoing research reflexivity to balance and consider existing ideas that I had about my research. This approach best positioned me to be neutral and open to the themes and findings that emerged throughout the process of collecting and analyzing my data (Patton, 2002).

Researcher's Statement

For many students at small, private institutions, their assigned temporary advisor is the first faculty member with whom they interact. As an 18 year old freshman at a private college in Florida, this experience was true for me. Although I do not remember every moment of my first day of orientation, I do remember looking at my itinerary and seeing that I was scheduled to meet with Andrea McCook, my academic advisor. I was assigned to Andrea, as she allowed students to call her, because she was one of three full-time faculty members for theatre arts, which was one of my selected majors. My other major was communication, and since Andrea was married to a communication professor at the same institution, it made sense that she could advise me in both areas. Still, I remember being nervous prior to our meeting, mostly because I did not know any college professors and was therefore intimidated by them. However, once I arrived at her office and started talking to her, I felt comfortable and relieved, like I was in the place where I was supposed to be.

Like most students, my college experience had its peaks and valleys. I did not change my major – theatre arts and communication were my declared double-majors from beginning to end – but I eventually switched my communication track from broadcasting to public relations. While I kept Andrea as my academic advisor, I later adopted a public relations professor, Rosemary Tutt, as a secondary, unofficial advisor. Undoubtedly, the help of Andrea and Ms. Tuff contributed to my degree completion from Flagler College. Without their guidance, and the connections I made with them as a result of their approachability and knowledge, I may not have earned a double-major within four years of beginning my degree.

Later, as a new registrar at a small, Christian university, I had many responsibilities that ranged from enrollment management to institutional reporting. However, I believe that the functions of my office have one main objective: to matriculate students. This means that my staff and I focus on academic policies and procedures; degree audits, curriculums, and requirements; and faculty assessments, practices, and requests. Therefore, my experience in these areas made me aware of the declining retention, persistence, and degree completion rates of undergraduate students at institutions like the one where I work. Discussions with my vice president for academic affairs confirmed what I already believed to be true; fewer than 50% of our students finish their bachelor degrees within four years.

The problem was already identified by our president, who created the goal of a 60% six-year graduation rate by the fall semester of 2018. As with any institutional objective, though, fixing the problem first required identifying the causes or contributing factors of the problem. Unfortunately, many of the causes were ones over which the university had little control, such as backlash from the economic recession and increased transfer credits both in and out of our institution. But my university did what it could to address both of these issues. First, it changed the tuition structure to a fee-free model and increased the number of credits that undergraduate students were allowed to take as part of their standard full-time course load. These changes lowered the overall cost of tuition, making my institution more financially competitive with similar private and even public colleges and universities. This affordability increased even more when the institution held these reduced tuition rates for two years in a row, which was especially impressive at a time when surrounding public and private institutions were increasing their tuition rates from one year to the next. Another strategy that improved these areas was an audit of the frequency and times of class offerings to ensure that students took as many courses as possible at our institution without feeling the need to earn additional credits at a nearby public two-year or four-year college or university.

Although these seemingly small changes did wonders for my institution’s retention and persistence rates, the four-year and six-year graduation rates are still below the national average for small, Christian universities. Further investigation into this problem at my institution revealed that many undergraduate students and their faculty advisors were unaware of core curriculum and major degree requirements, including practices and policies that affected students' abilities to graduate, such as GPA requirements and the maximum number of "D" credits that they could have on their degree audits. Thus, I turned to higher education literature on this topic to see how research, theory, and practice findings and recommendations could address the issue. To my surprise, I found few details specifically related to small, Christian universities and/or faculty advisor perceptions of their academic advising responsibilities. This information led me to the selection of my dissertation topic: faculty perceptions of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities. My hope was to discover the resources and tools that faculty advisors needed to increase their effectiveness in advising, specifically in relation to my university. Most importantly, though, I expect this dissertation to contribute to research in the area of advising as it relates to retention, persistence, and degree completion by filling a void in the literature and highlighting important areas for future study.

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

This dissertation study was rooted in the epistemology of constructionism, in which, "as the word suggests, meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Thus, there was no one objective truth to my research question; rather, the individuals who experienced a phenomenon created their own meaning or reality about that phenomenon. Such different truths could only be explored through qualitative research, which uses data collection and analysis methods to highlight individual experiences and perspectives, not to produce generalizations. This type of research is derived from the theoretical perspective of constructivism, which focuses "exclusively on the 'meaning making activity of the individual mind'" (p. 58). In this case, the theoretical perspective of constructivism enabled me to identify a culture-sharing group, such as faculty advisors at small, Christian universities in the United States, and study their perceptions about their academic advising expectations and responsibilities.

Research Strategy

The research strategy for this study was a case study. The defining characteristics of a case study are that it "explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, and one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13), is bound by a set period of time, and strives to result in a well-rounded understanding of the case being studied (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002). I felt no limitations of data collection for my case study, though I collected data from multiple sources to strengthen the description and understanding of their arguments. By employing this research strategy to collect and analyze interviews, documents, and observations, I successfully explored faculty perceptions of academic advising structures at small, Christian institutions. Thus, the case study could also be described as particularistic, meaning that it focused "on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon" (Merriam, 2001, p. 29). My study used a collective case study, in which multiple cases were researched to understand one culture and issue (Creswell, 2007).

Methods and Procedures

Multiple details related to the methods and procedures for my dissertation study, which were approved through the Institutional Review Board application (Appendix B) process at OSU. Such information included the research site, research participants, data collection, data analysis, additional comments on qualitative research, and the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Research Sites

The data collection for this study took place at three small, Christian universities located in the same large, metropolitan area in the United States. The institutions were Camden Christian University (CCU), Gaffney University (GU), and Metropolitan Christian University (MCU), which are pseudonyms, and were selected because of important characteristics that they share: commonalities of location, a Christian mission, and student enrollment size. In order to provide a point of ongoing reference, a summary of descriptors of my study sites is available in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptors of Study Sites

Institution (Research Site)	Location (Suburb Population)	Mission (Christian Affiliation)	Size (Student Enrollment)
CCU	~81,000	Protestant	~2,500
GU	~55,000	Protestant	~1,500
MCU	~19,000	Protestant	~2,000

Note: Information derived from www.censusgov/2010census/popmap and institutional websites

These three universities are positioned near or within the same city and face fierce competition with other private, public, and two-year institutions in their locale. While established through various Christian congregations and denominations, such missions appear to influence the way that faculty advise and interacte with students since more emphasis is placed on "shepherding" the whole person than at public or non-religious private institutions. Finally, it was vital to the focus of the case study that the institutions were similar in size; CCU, GU, and MCU range in enrollment from 1,500 to 2,500 combined undergraduate and graduate students. All of the institutions expect their full-time faculty to serve as academic advisors to students.

Camden Christian University. CCU is located in a suburb just north of a large city. According to the 2010 Census, this suburb is home to over 81,000 people. In the fall of 2014, the institution enrolled about 2,500 combined undergraduate and graduate students; most of the students were undergraduate students who lived on campus for approximately four years in either the residence halls or campus apartments. Attendance at daily chapel sessions and completion of Bible classes is mandatory for full-time, undergraduate students.

Gaffney University. GU is located on the south side of the city near a suburb of about

55,000 people (2010 Census). Of the three universities where I collected data, GU has the smallest campus and student body. In the fall of 2014, about 1,500 combined undergraduate and graduate students were enrolled. This number included both online and degree completion students. Although the institution is small, it has a residential campus and houses several athletic teams. Traditional undergraduate students are required to take Bible classes and attend regular chapel sessions as well.

Metropolitan Christian University. Like CCU and GU, MCU is located in another suburb of the same large city. This suburb was founded west of the metropolis by members of a specific Christian group, which is the denominational affiliation of MCU as well. The 2010 Census revealed that over 19,000 people live in this suburb, which is a 6.2% decrease from the 2000 Census. In the fall of 2014, MCU enrolled almost 2,000 combined undergraduate and graduate students. Approximately half of these students are undergraduate students who are part of a traditional, residential campus. They are also required to take Bible classes and attend regular chapel sessions. However, the institution offers degree completion, graduate, and online academic programs for adult and graduate students as well.

Research Participants

At each of the institutions, I selected three full-time faculty members to participate in interviews, observations, and document collection for the study, which resulted in a total of nine faculty members. Selecting research participants included discussions with professional contacts at each university to determine who was eligible for my dissertation study, how long they worked at their institution, what subject(s) they taught, their faculty rank, and the number of students they advised. Therefore, I made efforts to select professors who taught in different departments and represented a variety of expertise, years of service, and faculty rank. I selected some faculty advisors who were relatively new to teaching, as well as those who were tenured and/or employed at their institutions for a minimum of five years. I also selected faculty advisors who worked in different academic departments, such as accounting, Biblical studies, communication, education, engineering, mathematics, music, nursing, and psychology. Since these disciplines require various career and course counseling details, I believe that selecting subjects from these areas offered a broader look at faculty-provided advising at their universities and a greater insight to answering my research question.

After I identified potential participants at each university, I sent emails (Appendix C) to them about participating in the study. Therefore, the process used for my subject selection was purposeful sampling, where participants were chosen because they could provide rich information about a phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling was appropriate for my case study as faculty advisors gave insight to the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian colleges and universities.

Data Collection

Since my study explored faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian institutions in the United States, I interviewed, collected documents from, and observed faculty advisors at three small, Christian universities. Thus, I extracted the data for this dissertation from the interview transcripts, documents, and observation field notes. I also made the interview transcripts available to the interviewees as member checks contributed to the trustworthiness of my qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Interviews. I held interviews with each participant. I conducted these interviews and audio recorded them in different locations, based on where the participant wanted to meet. Four of the interviewees preferred to meet in their offices on campus, while the other five participants asked to meet off-campus at restaurants, coffee shops, or libraries. Interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2014 and varied from 20 minutes to 70 minutes in length. After each of the meetings, I transcribed the interviews and contacted the participants via email if I needed answers to follow-up questions. I also provided the transcript to each participant to assist with member checking and requested the documents that he or she brought up during his or her interview. The interviews were valuable data as they offered insight to participants' behaviors, feelings, intentions, and thoughts. Patton (2002) explained, "We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attached to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things" (p. 341). Thus, I believe that the interviews with my faculty advisor participants resulted in such data.

Documents. Following the one-on-one interview, I asked each participant to submit the documents that he or she mentioned in our meeting. I decided to see what documents the faculty members mentioned without being prompted and then requested them via email at a later time. I believe that allowing the documents to emerge in the interviews on their own best revealed the ones that were produced and/or utilized by faculty advisors at their institutions. The documents that I collected included an academic advising manual, several four-year course and sequencing plans, and a written proposal about faculty advising that was shared with an academic governance board. All of these documents are described at length in Chapter IV and provided insight to the expectations and priorities of each institution.

Observations. Following the interview and document collections, I made observations of participants conducting academic advising sessions with their students in the fall of 2014. To conduct the observations, I asked the faculty members to let me know when advising meetings were scheduled with their students. They let their students know that I wanted to observe the session and asked for verbal consent before I attended the meeting. Upon arrival, I introduced myself and briefly described the purpose of my study. I confirmed that each student was at least 18 years old and asked them to sign a consent form prior to conducting the observation. I observed one session with each faculty advisor, but I did not audio record them. Instead, I took field notes of my observations. The observations were important as they revealed the advising styles of the faculty members and the relationships they had with their advisees. Observing these academic advising sessions enhanced the data as observations "permit the evaluation researcher to understand a program or treatment to an extent not entirely possible using only insights of others through interviews" (Patton, 2002, pp. 22-23). Once I gathered the information from the interviews, document collection, and observations, I moved on to the analysis of my data.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis includes many processes. The ones used for my study involved organizing, coding, and interpreting data and displaying and discussing findings (Creswell, 2007).

Organizing Data. From the moment I started collecting my data, I started organizing, coding, and analyzing it. These processes began with the audio recordings of my interviews with faculty advisors. After I conducted an interview, I listened to the recording that night. I started the transcribing process only after listening to each full interview. I transcribed all nine of my interviews, which took several hours per interview and often required me to stop, rewind, and replay the recording to make sure that I heard and transcribed the comments correctly. Once I transcribed all nine of the interviews, I read them again while listening to the corresponding recording. Such efforts ensured that my transcripts were accurate and I was able to immerse myself in the data. I performed member checks at this point and made adjustments as requested to reinforce the content of my interviews.

After transcribing, I removed all identifying information, assigned pseudonyms to each of my faculty advisor participants, and deleted the audio recordings of the interviews. I continued such organizational and initial analysis processes as I collected documents and conducted observations. During all nine of my observations, I made thorough field notes of the interactions between the participants and students, as well as the details of their discussions. I typed the field notes within 24 hours of conducting the observations to ensure the data were clear and timely. Once I typed the field notes from my observations, I read them again. I also reread the field notes a third time before summarizing them in Chapter IV.

As I collected data for my study, I saved them on a password protected computer. In October of 2014, when I was about halfway through the data collection process, I uploaded my data into MAXQDA, a software program that assists in the organization of qualitative data, and labeled them accordingly. As I completed my data collection, I uploaded the rest of my files into MAXQDA and then organized them by institution. I also sorted the data chronologically to reflect the date that I interviewed each participant.

Coding and Interpreting Data. Qualitative data analysis is rarely linear, which was undoubtedly the case for me. I uploaded, organized, and even coded my data as I continued collecting them. As I reviewed my transcripts, documents, and field notes, I marked details and ideas in the data. This is an aspect of inductive coding, which occurred in several different cycles, beginning with first cycle coding, where I tried to remain open to whatever concepts were revealed in the data. I continued first cycle, inductive coding until I applied it to every piece of my data. First cycle, inductive coding was very important to my data analysis process as I did not apply a theoretical framework to my data; rather, I wanted to see what themes and categories emerged from the data on their own. While doing first cycle, inductive coding, I reread each piece of datum and wrote memos to define each code. I linked initial codes with the information outlined in my review of the literature. By the end of my first cycle coding, I had 62 codes that ranged from “athletics” to “graduating on time” to “unofficial advisor.”

I then conducted second cycle coding, where I paid specific attention to codes that were most prevalent in the data, as well as those that frequently overlapped with one another. At this point, I condensed and categorized several codes as subcodes of other codes and wrote analytical memos of occurrences in the data that I found to be interesting. I utilized these analytic memos "to document and reflect on… coding processes and code choices, how the process of inquiries is taking shape, and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in… data" (Saldana, 2013, p. 41). I also practiced analytical memo writing throughout the coding process as a way to communicate with myself about my data and the possible theories, themes, and findings that I drew from them. Toward the end of the organizing, coding, and analysis processes, I had 11 primary codes ranging from "busy" (later renamed "faculty responsibilities") to "Christian environment" to "training." To continue my understanding of how the codes were related to one another, I moved to code mapping. Doing so allowed me to think critically about what I saw in my data. It helped me identify and challenge my pre-existing assumptions as well, which forced me to back up any conclusions with strong evidence from my data. This process also allowed me to condense codes into the themes that are discussed at the end of Chapter IV.

Displaying and Discussing Findings. My study utilized a case study research strategy; therefore, the themes and findings from the data are presented in the format of a case study. I discuss the themes from the three Christian institutions as a collective study of cases (Creswell, 2007), whereas I share the findings from the faculty advisors at their individual universities. After discussing the findings from CCU, GU, and MCU individually, I cross-examine and discuss the findings of the mini-case studies as a collective case study with associated conclusions.

Additional Comments on Qualitative Research

Although the methodology presented a detailed and organized research design for data collection and adhered to the outlining characteristics of a case study strategy, qualitative studies often demand further flexibility for emergent data. Such details are mentioned to highlight the emerging and evolving nature of qualitative research that alters even the most established and organized research designs, strategies, and analysis techniques (Patton, 2002). Had such changes occurred, the specifics of my research design would have altered as necessary and only after receiving advice and recommendations from my doctoral committee.

Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Data

Collecting data from multiple sources supports triangulation, a practice that contributed to the trustworthiness of the emerging findings from my qualitative study. The specific criteria of concern were confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Therefore, Table 2 addresses the efforts of my research methods and procedures to ensure its trustworthiness.

Table 2

Trustworthiness Table

	Technique	Results	Examples
Confirmability	Reflexivity Triangulation	Establish Objectivity Verify Data	Reflexive Interview Questions Multiple Research Sources
Credibility	Prolonged Engagement Persistent Observation Triangulation	Build Trust/Rapport In-Depth/Accurate Data Verify Data	Faculty Advisors Multiple Observations Multiple Research Sources
Dependability	External Assessments	Promote Consistency	Member Checks
Transferability	Purposeful Sampling Thick Description	Generate Data Judge Generalizability	Variety of Sampling Descriptive, Relevant Data

Note: Information derived from Lincoln and Guba (1986)

Summary

This study utilized qualitative research and a case study methodology to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities. The data were collected at three institutions that were similar in location, mission, and size. All three universities were located near or within the same metropolitan area, employed Christian missions, and enrolled between 1,500 and 2,500 combined undergraduate and graduate students. Using purposeful sampling, I identified full-time faculty advisors at each institution and contacted them about participating in the study. I selected three faculty advisors from each institution and asked about their perceptions with academic advising. Following the initial meeting, I asked the participants to send me documents that they mentioned in their interviews. I also conducted one observation of a faculty and student advising session with each of the nine faculty members. Once I collected the interview and observation data, they were uploaded with the documents into MAXQDA for organization and coding. My analysis of collected data gave light to the themes and findings that I present and discuss in the upcoming chapters of this dissertation.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND THEMES

The purpose of my study was to explore faculty advisors' perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities. To assure the trustworthiness of my study, I used many techniques to address the confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability of my data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I promoted confirmability through triangulation by conducting research at three small, Christian institutions located in the same metropolitan area. Likewise, I increased the transferability of my study through purposeful sampling; I selected three full-time faculty advisors at each of the institutions, for a total of nine participants, to ensure a variety of sampling. Next, I reinforced the confirmability, credibility, and dependability of my study through reflexivity, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and external assessments. I designed reflexive interview questions, collected documents, conducted observations, and performed member checks to ensure that my data had accuracy and depth. This chapter solidifies the transferability of the study and relevance of the data by first presenting thick description of my participants, documents, and observations. The descriptions are followed by a presentation of the qualitative themes that resulted from my data analysis.

Overview of Participants, Documents, and Observations

I chose faculty advisor participants who were diversity in gender, academic field, and years of teaching and advising college students. I provide descriptors of my study participants, collected documents, and advising sessions in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3

Descriptors of Study Participants

Participant/Position	Institution	Gender	Academic Field	Teaching Experience	Advising Experience
Dr. Douglas Stamper (Department Chair)	CCU	Male	Communication	29 years	29 years
Mr. Edward Meechum	CCU	Male	Engineering	3 years	3 months
Ms. Jacqueline Sharp	CCU	Female	Nursing	9 years	9 years
Dr. Claire Underwood	GU	Female	Education	6 years	5 years
Ms. Zoe Barnes (Department Chair)	GU	Female	Mathematics	17 years	8 years
Dr. Remy Danton (Department Chair)	GU	Male	Psychology	3 years	3 years
Ms. Christina Gallagher	MCU	Female	Accounting	29 years	29 years
Dr. Janine Skorsky (Department Chair)	MCU	Female	Music	16 years	7 years
Dr. Daniel Lanagin	MCU	Male	Biblical Studies	16 years	16 years

Note: Information derived from interviews with study participants

As shown in Table 3, four male and five female faculty advisors participated in my study. Five of these individuals held doctoral degrees, while two of the other individuals were in the dissertation phase of completing their doctoral degrees. Four of these individuals were also chairs of their academic departments, which resulted in at least one department chair at each institution reviewed in my study. The academic fields varied broadly and without duplication among my participants and included accounting, Biblical studies, communication, education, engineering, mathematics, music, nursing, and psychology.

The teaching experience of these faculty advisor participants ranged from three years to 29 years, for an average of more than 14 years of teaching experience. Likewise, the academic advising experience of my faculty advisor participants ranged from less than one year to 29 years, for an average of approximately 12 years of academic advising experience. The names shown for my faculty advisor participants are pseudonyms. They are used throughout this and the next chapter of my dissertation.

Table 4

Descriptors of Collected Documents

Participant	Institution	Document Name/Description
Dr. Douglas Stamper	CCU	Academic Advising Sub-Committee Report Minutes of Academic Advising Report Presentation Academic Core Requirements (Communication & Liberal Arts) Advising Guide (Communication)
Mr. Edward Meechum	CCU	Four-Year Degree Plan
Ms. Jacqueline Sharp	CCU	Curriculum Requirements (Suggested Sequence)
Dr. Claire Underwood	GU	Academic Advising Manual Program Admission Checkpoints Student Teaching Checkpoints Program Graduation Checkpoints Course Projections (Education Program – Multiple Tracks)
Ms. Zoe Barnes	GU	Course Projections (Mathematics & Double Majors) Course Rotation Spreadsheet
Dr. Remy Danton	GU	
Ms. Christina Gallagher	MCU	Tentative Rotation Class Schedule (Business Department) Faculty Staffing Spreadsheet (Business Department)
Dr. Janine Skorsky	MCU	Degree Checklist (Music Program – Multiple Tracks)
Dr. Daniel Lanagin	MCU	Curriculum Sequence/Quadrant Form

Note: Information derived from interviews with study participants

Table 4 displays and describes the 17 different documents that I collected from each of my faculty advisor participants, with the exception of Dr. Danton, who did not mention or provide any academic advising documents during our interview. The types of documents that I collected varied from an academic advising report to several four-year degree and sequencing plans and spreadsheets to an academic advising manual. Many of the four-year degree and sequencing plans were developed for more than one academic major or track in a specific area of study. These documents were brought up by each of my faculty advisor participants during their interviews before I asked for copies of them.

Table 5

Descriptors of Advising Sessions

Participant	Institution	Student/Academic Level	Purpose
Dr. Douglas Stamper	CCU	Rachel Posner (Sophomore)	Create academic plan
Mr. Edward Meechum	CCU	Peter Russo (Freshman)	Discuss double-major
Ms. Jacqueline Sharp	CCU	Catherine Durant (Junior)	Discuss clinical trip
Dr. Claire Underwood	GU	Gillian Cole (Senior)	Enroll in courses
Ms. Zoe Barnes	GU	Linda Vasquez (Freshman) Garrett Walker (Freshman) Raymond Tusk (Freshman)	Meet new mathematics and physics students; gain advice about classes
Dr. Remy Danton	GU	Lucas Goodwin (Freshman)	Assist with technical issues
Ms. Christina Gallagher	MCU	Patricia Walker (Junior)	Enroll in courses; gain grad school/career advice
Dr. Janine Skorsky	MCU	Margaret Tilden (Freshman)	Discuss major change
Dr. Daniel Lanagin	MCU	Freddie Hayes (Junior)	Meet new student; discuss transfer hours/graduation

Note: Information derived from observations of study participants' advising sessions

Furthermore, the nature and content of each of my observed academic advising sessions varied. I observed meetings with six freshman students, one sophomore student, three junior students, and one senior student. Two of the junior students, Patricia Walker and Freddie Hayes, were fairly new transfer students at their universities. The purposes of the academic advising sessions included meet and greets, assistance with enrollment and technical issues, academic major and career exploration, and discussions of academic plans and experiences. The names shown for the students who participated in my observations are pseudonyms as well. They are used throughout this and the next chapter of my dissertation.

Camden Christian University

My research at CCU revealed that full-time faculty members are assigned advisees in their academic majors by the Registrar's Office. Every student is supposed to be advised by a full-time faculty member. The Registrar's Office has ownership of general education credits and processes, while faculty advisors and department chairs are responsible for those in their majors.

However, the advising models vary from one department to another. This was evident in the interviews and observations that I conducted with the faculty advisors at CCU who participated in my study: Dr. Douglas Stamper, Mr. Edward Meechum, and Ms. Jacqueline Sharp.

Dr. Stamper (Communication). In mid-July of 2014, I sat down with Dr. Stamper in his office for my first interview. Dr. Stamper is a professor of communication and chair of the department of communication at CCU. He said that he taught at the institution for 29 years and spent his entire profession “in schools like this one.” Our interview lasted about an hour, and during that time, he mentioned several documents related to academic advising at the institution. The first was a report on a study on academic advising at the university that was conducted in 2008 by a subcommittee of the academic governance group. He chaired the subcommittee and presented the report to the academic governance group in March of 2009. The second was an Excel spreadsheet that he used to advise his students in general education and communication and/or liberal studies. Following our interview, Dr. Stamper sent the Excel spreadsheet to me, along with an advising guide/spreadsheet that he uses to advise his communication students. A few weeks later, after Dr. Stamper was unable to find a copy of the academic advising report and minutes, I retrieved a copy of it from the office of the vice president for academic affairs.

A month later, I observed an advising session between Dr. Stamper and communication student Rachel Posner. Rachel was part of the university preparedness program at CCU and was also on the soccer team. She requested the meeting with Dr. Stamper, her academic advisor, to see if it was possible for her to graduate in December of 2018. Dr. Stamper commented that this was “a straightforward advising session.” He opened her Excel spreadsheet, discussed the courses she completed, and talked about the major courses that she still needed to take. He told her about each course, their prerequisites and sequencing, when they were offered, and when she should plan to take them. Dr. Stamper entered the information in her spreadsheet and addressed the general education classes that she still needed to take. He explained that a few of them had prerequisites, and most of them were offered every semester, so they could fit into almost any semester on her plan. They arranged the classes in her spreadsheet as well, making sure that the spring semesters were light so that she could focus on soccer. At one point, Rachel asked if she was "extremely behind." Dr. Stamper said that she was "right on pace," especially for a student-athlete in the college preparedness program. When they finished creating the academic plan, Dr. Stamper printed a copy for Rachel to reference throughout her time at CCU.

Mr. Meechum (Engineering). About a week after interviewing Dr. Stamper, I met Mr. Meechum, an assistant professor of engineering, in his office at CCU. Mr. Meechum earned his bachelor degree at CCU and then worked on his graduate degrees at an institution in another state. He returned to CCU as a faculty member less than a decade later. In his first three years of teaching, Mr. Meechum did not formally advise students; however, he became an official advisor for incoming students about three months before our meeting. The interview lasted about an hour in length and Mr. Meechum referenced one document during that time. The document was a four-year degree plan that he utilized to advise new (freshman and transfer) students in the engineering program. Mr. Meechum emailed this document to me after our meeting. When I reviewed it, I noticed that it provided a suggested schedule for every semester of a student's time at CCU and explained prerequisites and course sequencing requirements so that students would not "fall behind" in their engineering classes.

A few weeks later, in early September of 2014, I observed an advising session with Mr. Meechum and freshman student Peter Russo, who requested the meeting because he wanted Mr. Meechum's advice about adding a second major in the area of Biblical studies. At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Meechum admitted that he did not know much about the major in Biblical studies. He pulled up the university's catalog from their website and found the section on the major's course requirements. Mr. Meechum stated that it was difficult to study another subject while majoring in engineering because it was a rigorous major. However, he told Peter that it was not impossible, especially if Peter was fine with graduating a semester or two later than originally planned. Peter said that he was. Mr. Meechum took out the four-year degree plan for engineering majors and addressed a couple of courses that Peter had to take in the upcoming semester for his degree. Peter explained that he might have a job out-of-state that summer, so he and Mr. Meechum discussed some options, including taking Calculus I at another institution and trying to CLEP out of Physics I. They talked through a couple of academic plans before Peter said that he would try to figure out some scheduling details later. Mr. Meechum found the name of a professor to talk to about the Biblical studies double major and gave it to Peter.

Ms. Sharp (Nursing). A week after my meeting with Mr. Meechum, I interviewed Ms. Sharp, an instructor of nursing at CCU. As we sat in her office, she told me that she taught at the institution for nine years. Ms. Sharp explained that she advised students since starting her faculty position at CCU, but that she had a "buddy" who double-checked her work the first year. Our interview was one of the shortest in length; it lasted a little over 30 minutes and she referenced one document during that time. The document listed the curriculum requirements and a suggested sequence for nursing majors, which Ms. Sharp said that she uses to advise her students. She left her office in the middle of the interview to get a copy of the document and provide it to me. She said that she was especially proud of it since she worked with another nursing faculty member to create it and the rest of the nursing faculty adopted it in advising their students.

About six weeks later, I observed an academic advising session between Ms. Sharp and junior nursing student Catherine Durant. Ms. Sharp introduced Catherine to me as the president of the junior class and said that she asked Catherine to meet with her so that they could discuss the upcoming South America trip for nursing students. She explained that nursing students at CCU have certain requirements for their clinical hours and they can be completed by participating in a field experience in South America after finishing their junior year of college. Ms. Sharp then spoke to Catherine and asked when a good time to meet with the junior nursing students would be to give them information about the trip. Catherine looked at her planner and she and Ms. Sharp talked about a couple of different dates. While discussing the possibilities, Catherine asked Ms. Sharp a question about an exam in one of her courses. Ms. Sharp answered her question. After selecting a date for Ms. Sharp to talk to the junior nursing students about the South America trip, she asked Catherine if she knew how to log into the university website and apply online for the trip. Catherine did not, so Ms. Sharp showed her how to do it. At the end of their meeting, Ms. Sharp reminded Catherine that she and her classmates needed to submit recommendation letters.

Gaffney University

At GU, incoming first-year and transfer students declare majors and are then assigned to appropriate faculty advisors. They are added to their academic advisors' list of advisees, but are enrolled in their first semester courses by recruiters from the Admissions Office. A director of general education assists faculty and students with general education requirements, while faculty members are responsible for the course requirements for degrees in their disciplines. My three faculty advisor participants at GU included Dr. Claire Underwood, Ms. Zoe Barnes, and Dr. Remy Danton. Each of these individuals indicated that they try to meet with their advisees at least once every semester prior to the upcoming enrollment period. GU students are able to enroll themselves in courses through an online system, but some academic departments and faculty members prefer enrollment to take place through meetings with their faculty advisors.

Dr. Underwood (Education). In mid-July of 2014, I conducted an interview with Dr. Underwood at a restaurant in the middle of the nearby metropolis. Dr. Underwood, an associate professor of education, said that she taught at GU for six years, but only advised students for five years. Our meeting lasted approximately an hour in length, but almost immediately, she brought up a unique document: the institution's manual on academic advising. Dr. Underwood also discussed several other documents that she uses to advise her students, such as a checklist of admission requirements, student teaching requirements, and graduation requirements. She talked about academic plans for multiple tracks in the education major as well. Dr. Underwood referred to these items as "checkpoints" and "projections." I retrieved a copy of GU's academic advising manual about six weeks later and, a few weeks after that, Dr. Underwood emailed the rest of her checkpoint and projection documents to me.

I met Dr. Underwood in her office for an advising session with senior education student Gillian Cole in November of 2014. The session started with Dr. Underwood logging into the enrollment website and reviewing Gillian's checkpoint sheet to see which courses she completed and which ones she still needed to take. Dr. Underwood asked Gillian about her community service hours and Gillian confirmed they were completed. She went through her checkpoints and crossed off the items that Gillian finished. Dr. Underwood mentioned a few classes that Gillian needed to take the next semester and told her to read them to her aloud. Gillian did and Dr. Underwood enrolled her in the courses. Then Dr. Underwood flipped through Gillian's large binder, her teaching portfolio, that she brought to the meeting with her. Unfortunately, Gillian was missing several required sections, so Dr. Underwood told Gillian to take care of them as soon as possible. She said that she would not enroll Gillian in future classes until her portfolio was completed. Gillian said that she understood and left to pick up her schedule off the printer.

Ms. Barnes (Mathematics). I met with Ms. Barnes at a coffee shop in a suburb in early August of 2014; she is an associate professor of mathematics and chair of the mathematics and science department at GU. Ms. Barnes said that she taught at GU for 17 years, but only advised students for eight of those years. Our interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and during that time, she mentioned two documents that she uses to advise her students: course projections for mathematics and double-majors and a course rotation spreadsheet. She said that it was common for her mathematics majors to also show an interest in business, education, or physics; sometimes this resulted in the student becoming a double-major. Ms. Barnes emailed both documents to me in early September of 2014.

On the first day of the fall semester, I attended an advising session in the student center at GU. There, students and faculty gathered together to meet and discuss academic advising at the institution. I soon realized the session was for all new students. The faculty members took turns introducing themselves and sharing the subject areas in which they taught and advised. Then the students followed, introducing themselves and stating their majors. When these introductions ended, the lone mathematics major in the group, Linda Vasquez, approached Ms. Barnes. She acknowledged that she previously met Ms. Barnes on the soccer field, but figured it did not hurt to get to know her better. The three of us settled into a booth in the student center and Ms. Barnes asked Linda about her interest and experience in mathematics. She also talked to Linda about her schedule, future academic plans, and career goals. At the end of the session, Ms. Barnes encouraged Linda to find her if she ever had academic or personal issues to discuss.

As Ms. Barnes and I walked back to the middle of the student center, she recognized two physics majors from the group of new students. Ms. Barnes approached them and introduced herself, saying that they would likely have several mathematics courses with her. The students introduced themselves as Garrett Walker and Raymond Tusk. Ms. Barnes asked Garrett and Raymond some questions about their major and then stated that many physics students at MCU become double-majors, declaring mathematics as their second discipline. She provided a brief description of the coursework required for students who study both physics and mathematics. Garrett and Raymond seemed interested, so Ms. Barnes told them to come by her office any time.

Dr. Danton (Psychology). Dr. Danton suggested that I visit with him during his office hours in September of 2014 since it was the first day of the fall semester and I was likely to catch an academic advising session as well. When I arrived at Dr. Danton’s office, he did not have anyone else visiting with him, so we started the interview almost immediately. He told me that he taught and advised students at GU for three years, but did both at state institutions before teaching and advising at his current institution. Throughout the interview, he described the difference between teaching and advising students at Christian colleges and universities and public colleges and universities. My meeting with Dr. Danton was the shortest of my interviews; it lasted about 20 minutes in length, not counting the 15 minutes that the recorder was paused for him to help a new student with a technical issue. Furthermore, Dr. Danton did not talk about any documents that he used to advise students, so I did not retrieve any documents from him.

While I was interviewing Dr. Danton, he noticed a student standing in the hallway outside his office door. He encouraged him to enter the room. The student was Lucas Goodwin, a first-time freshman who was majoring in psychology and therefore one of Dr. Danton's advisees. Lucas explained that he was not on the roster for one of the classes in which he was enrolled. He said that he was also unable to log into the website where he could see the information for all of his classes. Dr. Danton asked him to spell his name and provide his student ID number. Lucas did, but even with that information, Dr. Danton could not log into his account. Dr. Danton asked when Lucas enrolled in his classes and Lucas responded, "Friday." Dr. Danton said that the system may need 24 business hours to update and allow him access to the website. To be sure, Dr. Danton called Information Technology and explained the situation. Dr. Danton was on the phone for at least five minutes while Information Technology attempted to fix Lucas' issue. After resetting Lucas' information, they told Dr. Danton to ask Lucas to try logging into the website again. He did and it worked. However, none of his courses were there. Information technology said that the system needed to update and that Lucas should check a few hours later.

Metropolitan Christian University

At MCU, students are assigned to faculty advisors at the beginning of their time at the institution. They are unable to enroll themselves in classes, which means they have to meet with their advisors every semester to enroll in courses. Like GU, the institution has a director of general education who oversees the university's general education requirements. Similarly, the faculty own the courses and degrees in their disciplines. The three faculty advisors at MCU who participated in my dissertation study were Ms. Christine Gallagher, Dr. Janine Skorsky, and Dr. Daniel Lanagin. They stated that their academic advising sessions were typically one-on-one with advisees and included discussions about academic majors and careers. Enrollment dates enabled different groups of students to enroll in a class in a specific order and at certain times. Faculty advisors enrolled students in courses through an electronic system, which also allowed "unofficial advisors" to enroll students in classes as well. At the time of my study, MCU was transitioning from one technological enrollment system to another, which is important to mention as the transition undoubtedly impacted the findings from MCU as they related to my research question.

Ms. Gallagher (Accounting). I met Ms. Gallagher, associate professor of accounting and finance at MCU, at a coffee shop on a Sunday evening in late August of 2014. She told me that she has taught and advised students at the institution for 29 years. Ms. Gallagher described several of her academic advising processes and shared her perspectives of this task. The only documents that she brought up were a tentative rotation class schedule and a faculty staffing spreadsheet, both of which were for the business department as a whole. Ms. Gallagher stated that she uses these documents when advising her accounting and finance students. Our interview lasted about 45 minutes in length, and about a month later, I went by her office to pick up copies of her documents.

Then in late October of 2014, I observed an advising session between Ms. Gallagher and junior accounting student Patricia Walker. Patricia was a transfer student who planned to take the CPA exam in the state, but was not sure what she wanted to do to earn the credit hours required to sit for the exam. She was also unsure when she would graduate with her bachelor degree. Ms.

Gallagher described a couple of options for Patricia. She said that she could finish her bachelor degree and take the rest of her classes after graduation on her own or she could go to graduate school and earn the remainder of her accounting hours while working on a master degree. Patricia said that she was confused and Ms. Gallagher assured her that she had time to decide. Ms. Gallagher focused on getting Patricia enrolled in the general education and major courses that she needed in the upcoming semester. When the schedule was made, Ms. Gallagher printed it so that Patricia would have a record of her courses after leaving the meeting.

Dr. Skorsky (Music). I interviewed Dr. Skorsky, professor of music and chair of the music department at MCU, at a restaurant in a suburb of the city in September of 2014. Although Dr. Skorsky taught at the institution for 16 years, she admitted that she was new to academic advising since she only advised students and acted as the department chair for four years. She explained that the previous chair did not want to burden his faculty with academic advising, so he advised all of the majors in their department. When he retired and Dr. Skorsky was asked to take his position, she agreed, but only if she could spread advising responsibilities among her faculty. (Dr. Skorsky had a total of seven years of academic advising experience since she did some advising before becoming the chair of the department.) She now advises first-year students and the rest of the full-time faculty in her department advise sophomore, junior, and senior students. My meeting with Dr. Skorsky was the longest in length as she talked for an hour and 10 minutes. At the end of the interview, she mentioned a music degree checklist for multiple tracks that she uses to advise students. When I visited her again at the end of the month, she gave me hard copies of these documents.

Two days later, I observed an advising session between Dr. Skorsky and freshman honors student Margaret Tilden. Margaret was not a current music student, but asked to meet with Dr. Skorsky because she was thinking about changing her major from biochemistry to music. She was also very organized in that she came to the meeting with a pad of paper, pen, and a list of prepared questions for Dr. Skorsky about her different options in the music major. Dr. Skorsky showed her the music degree checklist and talked about a couple of courses that Margaret had missed, but could take when they were offered again in one calendar year. She asked Margaret some questions about the instruments she played and made some suggestions regarding her required ensemble hours. She also attempted to answer some financial aid questions, saying that Margaret could audition for a music scholarship and would have to contact the bursar with other questions. Then Dr. Skorsky stood up and walked Margaret to the back of the building to show her their studio spaces. She introduced Margaret to the professor who coordinated the use of the recording studio spaces. He took us on a quick tour and answered a couple of questions before telling her that they would be in touch in the spring. Dr. Skorsky ended the conversation by letting Margaret know what she needed to do to officially change her major to music.

Dr. Lanagin (Biblical Studies). I conducted the last interview for my dissertation with Dr. Lanagin, a professor of Biblical studies at MCU in mid-September of 2014. Dr. Lanagin suggested meeting at a local library off-campus, saying that he did not want to meet in his office because he had a difficult time getting work done there. He said that he taught and advised students at MCU for 16 years, but felt like his idea of academic advising was very different than that of the institution. Right away, he mentioned a curriculum sequence/"quadrant" form that he uses to help his students enroll in classes. He later emailed a copy of this document to me. Our interview was the second longest in length, lasting a little over an hour.

About two weeks later, I observed Dr. Lanagin work with transfer student Freddie Hayes, who was a Biblical studies major. Freddie met with Dr. Lanagin because Dr. Lanagin wanted to get to know him better and discuss his transfer credits with him. Dr. Lanagin started the session by moving to a classroom across the hall from his office and asking Freddie some questions about himself. Freddie described where he was from and his previously attended college. He explained his reason for transferring (to be closer to his fiancé's family) and recent change of major. He talked about his hopeful graduation date and career goals. Dr. Lanagin stated that he would help Freddie however he needed it, although Freddie was not his official advisee, and encouraged him to "own" his educational processes. He looked at Freddie's transfer credits on the computer and advised him to discuss some equivalency options with the registrar. At the end of the session, Freddie thanked Dr. Lanagin and joked that Dr. Lanagin was now "stuck" with him as an advisee.

Themes Resulting From Analysis

During the organizing and coding processes, I practiced convergence (Patton, 2002) to put similar ideas together as primary codes and subcodes. I also employed divergence (Patton, 2002) to connect codes and ideas that did not initially seem to go together, but for which data supported the concepts as a theme. At the end of these processes, I had five themes with several subcodes, which are shared in Table 6, a presentation of themes and subcodes.

Table 6

Presentation of Themes and Subcodes

Faculty Responsibilities	Enrollment	Career Counseling	Christian Environment	Training
Direct	Academic Plans	Career Calling	Bible Classes	Degree Details
Adjunct	General Education	Free Will	Chapel	FERPA
Assessments	Major Courses		"Good Students"	Models
Coursework	Prerequisites	Faculty Connections	Non-Christian	Personal Issues
Grades	Graduating	Work Experience	Students	Policies
	Transferring	Internships/Jobs	Community	Processes
Implied			Service	Resources
Advising	Course Schedules	Major Exploration	Mentoring	Technology
Athletes	Alt. Year Classes	Double-Majoring	Personal	
Communication	Conflicting Classes		Relationships	
New Students			Prayer	
& Parents	Retention		Respect	
			Shepherding	
	Technology			

Note: Information derived from themes and subcodes sorted in MAXQDA

I present and support the five themes of faculty responsibilities, enrollment, career counseling, Christian environment, and training in the following paragraphs. I also provide a narrative portrait of each theme and include an overall definition of the theme and related and representative pieces of data. I edited direct quotes from my interviews to remove words like "um" and "you know" so that it is easier to understand the content of such comments.

Faculty Responsibilities

My interviews with the faculty advisor participants revealed that the faculty members were busy with a number of responsibilities, both those that were direct and others that were implied. Direct responsibilities are those that faculty members said were outlined in their contracts or job descriptions, whereas implied responsibilities are ones that were not clearly documented, but the faculty advisors felt obligated to do as a result of institutional expectations. Some of the direct responsibilities included hiring and managing adjunct professors (especially for department chairs); assessing their classes, programs, and students; assisting students with issues and questions related to their coursework; and grading class assignments. None of the faculty advisors made comments about their teaching responsibilities; however, it is important to note that my interview questions did not address their actions or duties in the classroom.

The implied responsibilities are more difficult to categorize and describe, which is likely a result of them being abstract and sometimes unclear. One example that I found in my subcodes was that of academic advising, specifically how it should be modeled, what it should entail, how many students for which it should be done, and what compensation or rewards should be provided for doing it. Dr. Stamper was specifically frustrated with advising loads and rank and tenure rewards when he explained,

> We have to address the issue of how to make it fair to people who spend a lot of time advising and remove the requirement for everybody, or rework it and give it a choice, because that minimizes advising by requiring everybody to do it and then looking the

> other way when they don't. So you have some people feeling overworked, overwhelmed. They don't have time to do some of the other things that are counted in promotion and so then it doesn't – it's not a fair situation (D. Stamper, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Several faculty advisors also mentioned advising students who were limited on when they could take courses because they were student-athletes. Such issues emerged in the interviews, like when Dr. Lanagin described frustrations with putting together course schedules for student-athletes. He said,

> And then I'll put them in class and they'll be like, "Oh!" You know, I'm 20 minutes into this advising process and they'll go, "Oh! I forgot! Track is going to be every Tuesday. And so I can't take any classes on Tues…" And I'm like, "Okay. So let's start all over again" (D. Lanagin, personal communication, September 12, 2014).

Such issues were also observed in advising sessions between Dr. Stamper and Rachel, a soccer player at CCU who had to work her classes around practices and games, and Ms. Barnes and Linda, a freshman soccer player at GU.

Likewise, in both the interviews and observations, communication was a significant part of academic advising for these faculty advisors. Almost all nine of the participants mentioned communication with the other faculty members in their department or on campus, as well as communication with the Admissions Office or Registrar's Office about incoming students and academic advising issues at their institutions. Furthermore, they brought up the many topics that students expected them to explain, like general education and major course requirements; when they should be able to graduate; the definition of a prerequisite and when they should take them; how their transfer hours counted toward their degrees; when alternate year classes and conflicting courses were offered, both in their and other academic departments; how to use technological resources to look up the catalog, degree audits, transfer forms, and other enrollment tools; if they would succeed in their chosen academic majors or careers; how to find jobs or get into graduate school after college; and details about financial aid and scholarships. Ms. Barnes addressed both aspects of the subcode by saying, “But in math, we’ve got this spreadsheet. ‘Here’s what you’re taking.’ And business, they’re not as [organized]. So I’m usually advising them on business, which I’m not familiar with business” (Z. Barnes, personal communication, August 2, 2014).

Finally, there was an implied expectation for faculty advisors to meet with new, incoming students, and often their parents, to promote the institution and major as well as to recruit students to the university and/or academic programs. Several participants described summer enrollment programs or meetings where they met with incoming students to offer academic advising before students even started taking college classes. Dr. Skorsky described a series of such sessions at MCU. She said,

> This last year, we did four. So one’s in April, a May, a June, and a July where everybody advises the freshmen. Or someone from every department is there. I think their sessions start at 8:30, 8:45, somewhere in there. And one of the stations that they go to is to see their advisor. And that’s where we have, like, 20 minutes per student because they want one music person in each group and we have five, you know? So we’re advising two in a 20 minute session? Hmm. You can hardly get them in classes because they don’t know anything (J. Skorsky, personal communication, September 6, 2014).

Such implied expectations or responsibilities were not usually outlined in any documents. Many of the faculty advisors’ contracts were only for 10 months, August through May. Regardless, nearly all of my participants were expected to talk to prospective and incoming students during those times and found that parents wanted to be included in the student’s academic conversations and decisions as well.

Enrollment

The second theme that emerged during the analysis of my data was that of enrollment. The theme of enrollment was probably the largest and broadest, which made it the most difficult to define and organize. Consequently, enrollment included any ideas related to physically enrolling students in classes. The first subcode under this theme was academic plans. In all of my data, but especially the collected documents and observed advising sessions, I found that faculty advisors used academic plans to assist students in enrolling in their classes. The data included written academic plans, which made up the majority of the documents that I collected, as well as discussions with students about their academic plans. When I asked Ms. Gallagher to describe an academic advising session, she brought up the idea of academic planning. She said,

> Some of them, especially those last two years, they know – and I'll try to, by the second semester of junior year – to plan out, "Okay, we're doing that this semester and this semester." And they'll have the next three semesters informally planned out, especially if they're tight (C. Gallagher, personal communication, August 24, 2014).

The details of these documents and conversations included general education class requirements, major class requirements, and prerequisite requirements. Prerequisite requirements were mostly communicated to students through discussions, but they were visually represented on academic plans through suggested course sequencing. Finally, in determining the details of academic plans, students asked when they would graduate or if they would graduate "on time." In describing effective advising, the academic advising manual from GU stated that a good advisor "is well organized" and "projects program requirements and manages minimal time to graduation." At MCU, Dr. Lanagin expressed the same institutional philosophy. He often tells students, "My job is to help you take the shortest path to pay the least money in the shortest amount of time to graduate from here" (D. Lanagin, personal communication, September 12, 2014). Sometimes transfer courses were part of the plan; students either transferred to the institution and had no idea when they were going to graduate or they decided to earn a few extra credits somewhere else and transfer them back to their institution. Dr. Danton believed that this practice was in direct conflict with the idea of graduating "on time." He stated,

> I've seen students transfer in who have 90 to 100 hours, of which only 45 or 50 of them are hours that even work with the degree program that they want to do. And to me, that's poor advising and just bad practice (R. Danton, personal communication, September 2, 2014).

Also under the theme of enrollment, I placed the subcode of course schedules. This subcode emerged as part of the enrollment theme when faculty advisors and students addressed course schedules, either the overall ones prepared and presented by the institution for all students or individual ones that students scheduled and followed during a semester. In my observations of advising sessions, specific concerns often included students not wanting to take a class at eight o'clock in the morning or wondering what their schedules would consist of in future semesters. But the specific topics that came up the most were alternate year classes and conflicting classes. Nearly every one of my faculty advisor participants talked about courses that were offered every other year in their departments and what that meant for junior students who missed one that would not be offered on the rotation for another two years. Ms. Barnes said,

> I've got a lot of classes, especially as juniors and seniors, that are every other year classes. So if they don't take them their junior year, they're kind of screwed. And so, I really keep track of that. I tell my students, "You've got to be in this class." If they are a sophomore that second semester, I don't care what else, "You've got to be in this one" (Z. Barnes, personal communication, August 2, 2014).

The faculty advisor participants seemed comfortable knowing this information about their major classes, but seemed stressed about knowing such details outside their academic departments. Ms. Gallagher said that she wished her institution's enrollment system flagged all alternate year classes so she would not worry about students missing something that they needed to take. At the same time, the faculty advisors and their students often faced the issue of conflicting courses: two or more classes that students must take, but are offered on the same days at the same time. I observed this issue in the advising session between Ms. Gallagher and Patricia. Dr. Stamper insinuated that both problems were due to the fact that many Christian universities are small and cannot offer every course every semester.

Another aspect of enrollment that emerged from the data was that of retention. When I asked my participants about academic advising, I noticed that most of their responses had to do with enrollment. Thus, it seemed that many of the faculty advisors, or at least their institutions, saw academic advising as synonymous with enrollment in classes. Dr. Stamper addressed this phenomenon when he said, "One misconception we have is that academic advising is enrollment. And it's not enrollment. And so, when faculty complain about it, they're complaining about the enrollment process, which is not what academic advising is all about" (D. Stamper, personal communication, July 15, 2014). Other faculty advisors made similar statements in their interviews, implying that retention (enrollment in next semester's courses) was the result of effective academic advising. A number of my participants did not agree with this philosophy, but admitted that it existed at their institutions. Dr. Lanagin said,

> It a lot of ways, I think the model at the university where I'm at too often feels like my role is to get students enrolled in the next set of classes so they don't drop out so we can get their money. And that's very frustrating to me (D. Lanagin, personal communication, September 12, 2014).

Unfortunately, it seemed that none of the institutions where I conducted research did much to reward their faculty for academic advising. Rather, when I asked my participants about rewards or compensation for academic advising, most of them said that seeing their students walk across the stage at graduation was the biggest reward they received for their academic advising efforts.

Finally, the technology that faculty advisors used to advise and enroll students was a dominant subcode that also seemed synonymous with advising and enrolling. When asked to describe the academic advising process, nearly every one of my faculty participants brought up the software program or website that they used to enroll students in classes. In fact, CCU was the only university that allowed students to enroll themselves in classes as early as the summer before starting college. Both GU and MCU required or expected students of all academic levels to enroll through meetings with their admissions counselor or academic advisor. Consequently, the faculty advisors voiced several pros and cons, though mostly cons, with the technology they used for these tasks. When I asked about changes in the resources or tools that were available to help faculty in their academic advising, almost all of them referenced issues with their technological systems. The entire observation I conducted of Dr. Danton and Lucas at GU was Dr. Danton assisting Lucas with a technical issue. Therefore, I believe it is apparent that my faculty advisor participants see technology advantages and limitations as related to academic advising and enrollment.

Career Counseling

The third theme that emerged from my data was that of career counseling. This theme encompassed all references to or examples of faculty advisors giving academic major or career advice to students. Several faculty advisor participants specifically addressed the issue of career calling, in which students claimed that the Lord called them to study and pursue a specific area of study. This seemed to be a specific issue at Christian universities since many of the students and faculty members were Christian. In some cases, faculty advisors used this concept to assure students that God had a plan for their life and would lead them to the career where they were meant to be. Ms. Barnes stated,

> They're struggling. They're like, "I don't know if I want to do this." And I'm like, "Do you like teaching? Do you?" And they say, "What if I don't find a job?" And so, you can bring in, "God will get you where He wants you. If you just follow what you like to do, He's going to open doors. He's going to shut them if He doesn't want you to do that." And I can bring in stuff like that. I can bring in, "God has a place for you and He's going to help you achieve that goal." I'm like that with my daughter right now. She's wanting to go to medical school and she keeps worrying, "What if I don't get accepted?" And I'm like, "God has provided you, first of all, with a gift for math. He's brought you here. He's going to use it! It may not be to get into med school, but you just keep following in that path, the doors He's opening, and He's going to guide you exactly where He wants you" (Z. Barnes, personal communication, August 2, 2014).

In other cases, faculty advisors talked about how difficult it was to advise students who thought they were called to a specific occupation, but who did not seem to have the ability or discipline for that career. Dr. Skorsky was one of these advisors. She explained,

> Faith reminds me, really, that it's about what God wants for the student, not what I think. So for the ones who are really convinced that God has called them to something, I mean, you can't argue with that, right? I'm not going to! I'm not going to. And in music, it's such an American Idol generation where people who are really not all that good go, "Whoa!" Anyone can be a star. YouTube – same thing. So we have a lot of students who come in with very skewed ideas about quality and what is excellent and the work that it takes. So for me, [it's about] trying to see them through the eyes of faith and knowing that God's not done with them any more than He's done with me (J. Skorsky,

personal communication, September 6, 2014).

Several faculty members described the challenge of whether or not to tell this to their students and how to advise and encourage them to a different academic major or career field. As a result, a subcode of this code was that of free will. A couple of the faculty advisors used this Biblical concept to explain that they can give advice to students or make recommendations for them, but ultimately, students have the autonomy to do whatever it is they want to do. Dr. Stamper stated,

> Advising is advising. I tell them all the time, "Advisor means advisor. I can give you the advice and you can go and do whatever you want. But the fact is you're still in charge. This is college. You're an adult. You're still in charge" (D. Stamper, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Another aspect of career counseling, which also could have been a subcode of faculty responsibilities, is that of faculty connections. This subcode describes the implied expectation for faculty members to either continue work experience in their chosen discipline or maintain connections in their industry to assist students in securing internships and/or jobs. Such examples were brought up in my interviews with Dr. Stamper and Ms. Sharp, who worked outside of their universities to keep connections with local industries, and observations of Ms. Gallagher and Dr. Skorsky, who were asked about internship opportunities during their advising sessions. While these were possibly implied expectations of faculty responsibilities, I categorized them under career counseling since career counseling emerged as an independent, yet vital aspect of faculty advisors' roles and responsibilities.

The themes of career counseling also included helping students with academic major exploration. A few of my faculty advisor participants referenced academic major exploration when describing students' career callings, though the majority of these discussions were started by students. In fact, three of the advising sessions that I observed involved academic major exploration. Mr. Meechum and Peter talked about the idea of Peter adding a double-major in Biblical studies, while Ms. Barnes spoke informally with three students, Linda, Garrett, and Raymond, about considering a double-major with mathematics. Similarly, Dr. Skorsky and Margaret met to discuss changing Margaret's major from biochemistry to music. As expected, all of these conversations were linked to career choice. Students expressed interest in certain areas and/or sought advice about the education that would prepare them for desirable careers. Thus, assisting students in exploring major options and/or deciding to major in multiple disciplines was a vital part of faculty advisors' advising and career counseling expectations and responsibilities.

Christian Environment

The fourth theme that emerged was Christian environment, which played an influential role in my study since my faculty advisor participants were all employed at Christian universities. Admittedly, this theme was anticipated, even intentional, as I chose to conduct my case study research at small, Christian institutions. Regardless, several factors of the Christian environment impacted advising for both my faculty participants and the students with whom they interacted. Consequently, the subcodes of this theme included Bible classes, chapel, "good students," non-Christian students, community service, mentoring, personal relationships, prayer, respect, and "shepherding" the whole person.

The universities I chose for my study all required Bible classes and chapel attendance, which was one of the factors in selecting these institutions for my research. I was not surprised, then, when they came up in my interviews with the faculty advisors. For the most part, Bible classes were mentioned as an aspect of general education course requirements, though both Bible classes and chapel were connected to the "good students" and non-Christian students at each university. The "good students" were addressed as those who were hired as part-time workers in the community because employers saw them as trustworthy since they attended a Christian university. More often, though, faculty advisors talked about the non-Christian students who tried to get out of Bible classes and chapel requirements.

Such situations put the faculty advisors in a place where they defended their institutions' missions, explaining that Bible classes and chapel were part of a holistic, Christian education. Ms. Sharp described one such situation when she said,

> We take a Bible class every semester, except the last two, and then it's just the one, if you work it correctly. So we get people transferring in that are not tied to the church at all. They just did not come to the school for the Christian aspect of it. And I'm like, "That's just how it is when you're here. You've just got to take a Bible." And honestly, that's a little frustrating to explain. Actually, what I would say, "It's just part of a well-rounded education" (J. Sharp, personal communication, July 30, 2014).

At GU, students are also required to complete a certain number of community service hours every semester. Since this is mandatory for all GU students, it was noted on several of the documents that I collected from the institution. Regular proof of the completion of community service hours was expected at each enrollment session, which I witnessed when I observed Dr. Underwood's meeting with Gillian.

Working in a Christian environment seemed to be a factor in the ways in which faculty advisors interacted with their students as well. Through my interviews and observations, it was apparent that the Christian faith of the faculty advisors influenced the ways in which they worked with students. Although I included an interview question about the role of the advisor's faith, it arose in every interview on its own, allowing me to use the planned faith question to encourage my faculty advisors to elaborate on their previous comments regarding their faith. Each participant provided some explanation about how their faith led them to mentor students, have personal relationships with them, pray with them, and in general, show them respect as people.

The academic advising manual from GU stated,

> It becomes our responsibility and privilege to guide our students to grow spiritually (*Heart*), intellectually (*Head*), and socially (*Hands*). In so doing, a part of us goes with them as they serve the Master all over the world in all kinds of ways. We become a part of their ministry as we pray, communicate, and give support or help when needed.

Such sentiments were reinforced by Dr. Lanagin, who said,

> So I think Christians should have a particularly deep commitment to the person they're investing their life in because Christians care about the whole person. So I don't care that someone is coming to the university to give dollars so I can have a paycheck so I can go home. I care about the student as a student, who they're becoming (D. Lanagin, personal communication, September 12, 2014).

All of these responses could be summarized by participants' desires (or maybe a felt expectation) to shepherd students so that not only their academic needs were addressed, but their emotional, personal, physical, and spiritual needs as well.

Training

The last theme that emerged from my data was training. As faculty advisors shared their perceptions with me, I realized that they had very little guidance on how to advise college students. This lack of knowledge included details related to degree requirements, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), models of academic advising, how to appropriately advise college students on personal issues, policies and processes related to the Financial Services and Registrar's Offices, academic and other institutional resources, and technology systems.

Most of the faculty advisor participants were aware of requirements for degrees in their academic areas, but were often confused about those for other areas, general education courses, and/or transfer hours or cumulative GPAs. Consequently, they were either unable to answer specific questions related to these areas, were forced to refer to the catalog, or send students to other contacts at the institution. An observed example was the academic advising session between Mr. Meechum and Peter, who was interested in adding a second major in Biblical studies. Mr. Meechum admitted that he was unfamiliar with the major and looked it up in the university catalog. He referred Peter to a faculty member more closely connected to that major.

Some of the faculty advisors were also unsure of what they could or could not say to parents, other students, or other faculty members about a student's academic performance. The faculty seemed to know that they were limited by FERPA regulations, but were not aware of the extent of such limitations. This was especially difficult for faculty advisors who assisted first-year students and had to address their parents in initial conversations as well. Mr. Meechum stated,

> Some of the privacy issues, I'm not necessarily sure of, especially when parents are in the room. And on [the CCU student information system], it tells me if I'm permitted to talk to parents. It has a little, "This student has not given permission." But then the parents are sitting right here. And so, those kind of, the FERPA stuff, whatever, I know that there are rules and I try not to cross boundaries, but I try to be open and honest as much as I can (E. Meechum, personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Likewise, the models of academic advising that each of the institutions used were very different from one another. Every institution assigned some level of ownership of general education courses to the Registrar's Office (though GU and MCU had directors of general education) and ownership of specific majors to their academic departments. Dr. Skorsky stated,

> The over-arching picture is that it's handled in the departments as opposed to an office

> dedicated for that. It used to be in the department and then we changed our gen ed program, and so, at that point, some of the advising went to… the Registrar's Office. And no offense, it was tragic. So now, it's handled with the departments, by department chairs, faculty members (J. Skorsky, personal communication, September 6, 2014).

The academic advising manual at GU also said,

> To assist students in their academic pursuits, the registrar assigns each student in the College of Arts and Sciences a faculty advisor based upon the student's major. The faculty academic advisor is available to assist the student with academic, social, and spiritual concerns, and is vital in mentoring and making sure students steadily progress toward degree completion and success in the program.

This meant that academic advising existed in each department, but the styles and techniques varied across every department at the institution. Some spread the advising loads equally among their faculty. Others assigned academic advisors to different academic levels of students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors). Still others assigned students to specific academic advisors, but also advised any students who wanted to meet with them for assistance. Such diversity in advising models told me that these small, Christian institutions expected faculty in academic departments to advise their students, but provided little to no further instructions on how to do so.

Several of my interviews also revealed that faculty advisors were often approached by students who wanted advice on or assistance with personal issues. While there were some faculty advisors who were comfortable with this, others were not. But almost all of them acknowledged that their Christian faith led them to assist these students. Dr. Underwood said,

> I've had students who've had difficult situations happen during the year. That's because we have an open door policy. Students will come in and we can pray with them if they

> are struggling with things. Like, I have a student whose friend passed away. He died of cancer. That's a really hard thing and she'll be in my office from time to time, just not knowing how to deal with that (C. Underwood, personal communication, July 19, 2014).

No one mentioned institutional expectations or training on how to approach such situations, so almost every faculty advisor handled personal problems differently. Several of my participants said they prayed with students in these situations. A few others referred them to counseling, the student success center, or another on-campus resource.

Some of my faculty advisor participants indicated that they were unaware of policies and procedures related to the Financial Services and Registrar's Offices and academic and other institutional resources. An example that came up in my interviews and observations several times was that of transfer students. Discussing the transfer process proved to be tricky for these faculty advisors as they did not know all of the policies and processes regarding transcripts, equivalency or substitution forms, or approval systems. Dr. Skorsky explained, "Transfers are always weird because it just takes forever to sort things out" (J. Skorsky, personal communication, September 6, 2014). At the same time, faculty advisors were often asked questions about financial aid and/or scholarship information. Frequently, faculty did not know how to answer such questions, and in some cases, they were unsure of the people or resources to whom to refer such questions. The students expected faculty advisors to assist them in several different topics, and when faculty advisors could not address such concerns, it resulted in poor customer service for the students.

Finally, faculty advisors expressed a lack of training on how to utilize the technological systems that their institutions employed to advise and enroll students. This subcode differs from the previous subcode about technology programs being synonymous with enrolling students in classes. Rather, it addresses the instruction or training that faculty and students received to use technology or other enrollment programs or electronic tools at their institution. At CCU, Dr.

Stamper said that students did not know how to use online tools or resources to track their own degree progress. Mr. Meechum said that he could not see lab times when scrolling through courses in the student information system. Ms. Sharp admitted to not knowing about certain resources on the central information website, which resulted in her calculating students' GPAs by hand until she learned that she could do it a different way. At GU, Dr. Underwood said it would be nice if students could enroll themselves and my entire observation with Dr. Danton was him helping a student with a technology issue related to his class schedule. At MCU, Dr. Lanagin complained about the institution's outgoing enrollment system, while Dr. Skorsky expressed anxiety about transitioning to the new one. Thus, it seemed that faculty were expected to know about and assist students with concerns in nearly every institutional area, but had little or no training on how to meet many of their or their students' needs.

Summary

Chapter IV provided detailed descriptions of the nine participants and observations, as well as the numerous documents that made up the data for my dissertation. This information is important as it assists readers in understanding the nature of the research conducted and collected for the individual and collective case studies. Following these descriptions, five themes resulting from my data analysis were presented. The themes included faculty responsibilities, enrollment, career counseling, Christian environment, and training. Chapter V discusses the findings at each institution and the three institutions collectively as they relate to my research question: "What are faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities?"

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Previous chapters of my dissertation introduced the purpose of my study, explored the literature surrounding my research, outlined the methods of my data collection and analysis, and presented my data and the themes that emerged from them. This chapter reports the findings from my study, both those for the individual institutions and for the collective case study. The chapter includes thorough discussions of such findings and how they relate to existing literature on academic advising. From there, the chapter addresses implications of my findings on research, theory, and practice, as well as the limitations of my study. The chapter ends with future research needs in the area of academic advising and concludes with a summary of the findings from my individual institutions and collective case study.

Individual Institutional Findings

While Saldana (2013) defined a theme as "an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection" (p. 14), he also more simply described findings as "buried treasure" within the themes that emerge from data in a study (p. 259). Consequently, determining the findings for the individual institutions and my collective case study required several revisits to, and reflections on, my themes. After re-reading and immersing myself in my themes, codes and subcodes, analytic memos, and code maps, I eventually saw the glimmer of buried treasure, the findings I set out to discover more than one year ago. These findings are the "gold nuggets" and precious stones that answer the research question for my dissertation: "What are faculty perceptions of the strength and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities?" Therefore, the findings at each individual institution are as follow.

Camden Christian University

1. Faculty knew their institutions, industries, and students.

My faculty advisor participants indicated that their awareness of, or at least connection to, institutional processes and resources allowed them to help students with academic issues. These individuals were experienced in their professional industries and maintained relationships with other professionals in their fields, which allowed them to identify whether or not students would succeed in their chosen academic and career field. Such connections also enabled them to assist students with career counseling and internship and job placements. Since the university was small, the faculty advisor participants knew the students in their majors and enjoyed helping them succeed in college and life. Thus, my participants understood the strengths of the faculty advisor model and structure at CCU.

2. Faculty were busy with a number of responsibilities.

While my participants believed that their positions as full-time faculty members gave them an advantage in advising students, they also said that their other job responsibilities kept them busy. Such additional responsibilities made it difficult for faculty advisors to meet with students on a regular basis and have meaningful conversations with them that were focused on academic and career goals.

3. Faculty saw academic advising as different from enrollment.

The faculty advisor participants at CCU described academic advising processes as similar or synonymous to enrollment processes. One of the faculty advisors identified the disconnection between academic advisement and enrollment, stating that they were not the same thing and that many faculty advisors at CCU were confused about the difference. Two of the faculty advisor participants suggested the use of a central advising office for enrollment purposes, which would allow faculty advisors to focus on offering career counseling and assistance with job placement.

4. Faculty were not engaged in general education courses.

Faculty advisors were very familiar with the courses and students in their academic majors, but their comments and my observations revealed that they were not especially engaged or interested in general education core requirements. One faculty advisor participant admitted this about CCU faculty in his interview, while the other two participants made no comments regarding general education courses. If a core course was not a prerequisite for a major course, it was not mentioned in the interviews, documents, or observations.

Gaffney University

1. Accessibility and customer service were vital to academic advising.

Every faculty advisor at GU used the words “open door policy” to describe academic advising at their institution. These words were also in the academic advising manual that I retrieved from Dr. Underwood. Thus, further data reinforced the meaning of such words, which was that faculty advisors should be accessible to the students and provide them with excellent customer service as part of their academic advising responsibilities.

2. Relationships between faculty and students led to success.

These faculty advisor participants also valued the one-on-one relationships that they had with students, both in the classroom and as their academic advisors. They believed that their efforts to be accessible, student-focused, and provide good customer service assisted the advisees in being successful, both at the undergraduate institution and in their chosen workforce after graduation.

3. FERPA slowed advising and customer service processes.

Unfortunately, my faculty advisors believed that they were sometimes limited in helping students due to FERPA regulations. Two of my participants described situations where they wanted to help students with academic advising or customer service processes, but were not able to do so because they did not have the academic information that they needed about the student. If this required sending students to another office to take care of such details, the faculty advisors were frustrated that the processes were not streamlined for them or their students.

4. Faculty were busy, resulting in little time or abilities for advising.

The faculty advisors at GU were very student-focused, but were also busy with teaching, grading, adjunct, and committee responsibilities. Thus, their job requirements demanded that they be in many different places at many different times, which made it difficult for them to be accessible or have time to advise their students.

Metropolitan Christian University

1. Faculty enjoyed interacting with students and helping them succeed.

Like the participants at CCU and GU, the faculty advisors at MCU said that they enjoy getting to know their students and helping them figure out their academic major and career goals. They believed that their efforts as professors and academic advisors were instrumental in helping their students be successful, both in higher education and after graduation. Thus, like the faculty at CCU, they saw such enjoyment and ability as strengths in the faculty advisor model.

2. Faculty were limited by technological systems used for enrollment.

Students at MCU were not permitted to enroll themselves in classes, so enrollment had to be done through visits with their faculty advisors. This meant that faculty advisors had to use multiple technological systems to enroll students in courses and answer additional questions related to students' academic progress at the institution. The faculty advisors at MCU were unfamiliar with such programs and felt anxious and limited about complications and changes that existed with their technological systems.

3. Faculty had many responsibilities and little time for advising.

However, the faculty advisor participants at MCU also felt stretched in their roles and responsibilities as full-time faculty members. Their numerous job demands made it difficult for them to find an adequate amount of time to have meaningful academic advising sessions with their students.

Discussion of Individual Institutional Findings

Camden Christian University

There were four findings at CCU that answered my research question about the small, Christian university. The first finding was that it made sense for faculty members to advise students because they knew their institution, industries, and students very well. This finding was the only perceived strength of faculty-provided academic advising at the university. The other three findings related to the challenges of faculty-provided academic advising at the institution. These three findings were that faculty advisors were busy with a number of responsibilities, which made it difficult to advise students. Faculty advisors also saw the function and process of academic advising as different from that of enrollment and faculty advisors were not engaged or interested in general education courses.

Faculty knew their institution, industries, and students. My data collection and analysis at CCU resulted in one perceived strength of faculty-provided academic advising at the university. The strength was that full-time faculty members were effective advisors because they knew their institution, industries, and students very well. Such knowledge allowed them to achieve common goals for faculty advisors, which Gordon, et al. (2000) defined as assisting students in self-understanding and acceptance, especially in terms of career goals and life decisions; assisting students in developing an appropriate educational plan and decision-making abilities; and providing specifics about policies and support programs and resources. Dr. Stamper and Mr. Meechum stated that full-time faculty members should advise students because they were most familiar with their academic disciplines at the university. Dr. Stamper said that the faculty advisors at CCU knew the requirements and schedules for classes in their academic areas. If they were unsure of the details for other disciplines, they could reference the catalog, which listed prerequisite and typical offerings of specific courses.

Mr. Meechum and Ms. Sharp believed that part of their success as faculty advisors came from easy communication with other faculty members in their areas and across campus. Both faculty advisor participants shared situations where they "hollered at" or visited another faculty member on their hall to ask a question about academic requirements and/or course offerings. However, Mr. Meechum acknowledged that he was a fairly new faculty member at CCU, so he needed time to learn the details and rules related to the engineering courses and major. Although he attended CCU as an undergraduate student and taught classes for three years before advising students, program requirements changed and he had to re-learn them. The literature supported the need for professional development or training in such areas. Tinto (1993), Gordon, et al. (2000), Myers and Dyer (2005), and Swanson (2006) indicated that the abilities and skills associated with academic advising and teaching were not often natural for faculty. Ms. Sharp stated that she had the resources she needed to advise students, though she would not mind if the model of advising changed so that she could spend more time assisting her junior and senior students.

Ms. Sharp's emphasis on upperclassmen came from a desire to shift academic advising from enrollment to career counseling. Without using exact terminology, she acknowledged that

CCU utilized a faculty-only model, in which full-time faculty members act as academic advisors for students throughout their time in college, but suggested using a shared-split model where professional academic advising staff helped freshman and sophomore students with their general education requirements and faculty advisors helped junior and senior students with their academic major and career questions (Kuhtmann, 2004; Tuttle, 2000). Dr. Stamper was very outspoken about the difference between the two, stating that the career center was not the best resource for students to explore major or career fields or be placed in internships and jobs. Rather, faculty advisors understood the relationships between specific majors and careers. They knew the requirements to be successful in certain industries, which assisted them in encouraging students to explore academic majors.

Likewise, faculty advisors held close connections to their related industries, making them a valuable source of career counseling for students. Such assistance was expected from students, who ranked help with career goals and communication about internship opportunities as two of the most important tasks of faculty advisors (Lowe & Toney, 2001). This was evident when Ms. Sharp told me that she worked one shift a week as a staff nurse at a nearby hospital in addition to her faculty job at CCU. She believed that this made her a better professor, since part of her job included educating students on what it was like to be a nurse, preparing them for the National Council Licensure Examination, writing recommendation letters, and helping them get placed in nursing jobs. Mr. Meechum brought up career counseling as well, though he said that he did it informally because his official advisees were freshman students. Regardless, junior and senior engineering students often stopped by his office to see if he would write recommendation letters for them or knew of any job openings in the area. Since Mr. Meechum was also completing his doctoral degree, he stated that most upperclassmen wanted his advice about going to graduate school or straight into a job.

Dr. Stamper, Mr. Meechum, and Ms. Sharp were able to assist their students with both academic and career counseling because the faculty advisor model allowed them to have personal relationships with their advisees. Lowe and Toney's (2001) study showed that students expected such relationships as well; they ranked "engaging in caring relationships with their students" as another of the most important tasks of faculty advisors. At the same time, the faculty advisors in the study ranked "engaging in caring relationships" and "understanding student needs" as two of the most important tasks of faculty advisors. Mr. Meechum reinforced such ideas at CCU, saying that engineering students seemed comfortable talking to any of the faculty in their area, not just their advisors. He attributed such relationships with students as an important part of the Christian environment at CCU. He believed that praying with students in class and seeing them in chapel and church contributed to the mission of the institution. The small and intimate university setting allowed him and Ms. Sharp to get to know their advisees well and relate to them on personal levels. Ms. Sharp explained that these personal relationships with her students made it easier for her to offer them advice and suggestions, though she said that she treated all of her students with courtesy and respect, regardless of her or the students' faith. Thus, faculty advisors should be rewarded for important work they do as academic advisors at their institutions.

Faculty were busy with a number of responsibilities. Almost immediately in our interview, Dr. Stamper stated that faculty advisors were busy with several responsibilities. As a department chair at CCU, he talked about managing course schedules and full-time adjunct faculty members in addition to teaching and grading. Dr. Stamper, Mr. Meechum, and Ms. Sharp indicated that they conducted research and/or maintained specialized accreditation for their academic areas as well. Unfortunately, advising added a greater workload to their already busy schedules as much of it required significant communication with students about nearly every aspect of the institution. According to Gordon, et al. (2000), faculty advisors are assigned an average of 26 advisees and spend approximately 11% of their time assisting students with academic issues. The majority of these meetings were related to academic plans and enrollment as my faculty advisor participants referenced questions about course offerings, working classes around intense athletic and work schedules, general education and major course requirements, and transfer policies and processes.

Such conversations often included students' parents, which, according to Mr. Meechum, changed the dynamic of the discussions considerably. He stated that large enrollment events were not the best place for this kind of academic information since the day was already overwhelming for new students and their families. Thus, Dr. Stamper suggested that academic departments go over such details with students to lighten the loads of faculty advisors. Ms. Sharp said that this information was shared with students in their orientation to the nursing program, but the students did not always retain the information. Consequently, Ms. Sharp stated that academic advising took up a great deal of her time, while Mr. Meechum explained that academic advising was especially difficult in his area because they were understaffed. Mr. Meechum advised 50 to 60 freshman students at any given time, and when they became sophomores and moved on to their new advisor, special situations surrounding their classes were lost in the transition. Such findings were in line with those shared by Myers and Dyer (2005), who reported that 36.4% of faculty said that academic advising was part of rank and tenure considerations and 41.3% of faculty said that their teaching loads allowed enough time to also advise students. Such variations in reward structures do little to relieve faculty of their academic advising responsibilities. Rather, they reinforce the message that academic advising is not an institutional priority.

Faculty saw academic advising as different from enrollment. Much of the frustration the faculty advisors had with the workload of advising was that their tasks were mostly related to enrollment. At CCU, a great deal of academic advising was related to enrollment, which frustrated my faculty advisor participants. Dr. Stamper declared that academic advising and enrollment were not the same things; thus, he believed that enrollment should be done by the student with the assistance of the Registrar's Office, if necessary. Such ideology was reinforced by much of the literature, which stated that there was more to academic advising than telling students to take the "right" classes. This ideology included *developmental advising*, in which faculty help students clarify their career and educational goals (Gordon, et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). As a result, Dr. Stamper said that faculty advisors should provide students and the Registrar's Office with semester plans and allow them to manage enrollment processes and systems from there. Mr. Meechum also wondered if there was an overlap in tasks completed among the Admissions Office, Registrar's Office, and faculty advisors. Dr. Stamper said that the Admissions Office and Registrar's Office should recruit and enroll students, while faculty advisors should counsel and mentor them. Ms. Sharp echoed many of these statements by admitting that she was unsure what the institution expected of her as an academic advisor. She agreed that academic advising was not enrollment, so students should enroll themselves in courses. Consequently, Dr. Stamper and Ms. Sharp believed that a different academic advising model should be implemented in order to address the differences between academic advising and enrollment. Doing so would separate enrollment tasks from advising responsibilities, which is necessary to maximize processes in both areas.

Faculty were not engaged in general education courses. A fourth finding was that faculty advisors were not very engaged or interested in general education courses at the university. Dr. Stamper explained that CCU revised their general education program a few years before our meeting, but unfortunately, it varied from one degree to the next, which complicated academic advising. One of the biggest issues was with undeclared freshman students, especially if they enrolled late in the summer. By that time, there were few seats available in general education courses, including the Bible ones. Many faculty advisors were also unsure about general education courses outside of their departments that students needed to take. In many cases, they did not even know when they were offered, which was apparent in my interview with Ms. Sharp. She brought up a general education course and said that she did not care when students enrolled in it. Mr. Meechum described a similar, but distinctly different problem, which was advising engineering students who were in the honors program as well. He explained that honors students followed a different general education program, so it was an additional academic area of which Mr. Meechum had to know. Dr. Stamper stated that the faculty advisors at CCU were great, but they cared more about their academic major courses than the general education ones. Such issues were also supported by a great deal of literature that said that faculty were hired because of their experience in their academic fields, not because of their teaching or advising abilities or their knowledge of other academic areas (Gordon, et al., 2000; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Thus, faculty advisors often needed help developing their teaching and academic advising skills and understanding general education and academic major curriculums (Stull, as cited in Myers & Dyer, 2005). Such achievements could be made if CCU hired a director of general education or established a general education committee to "own" core curriculum courses and design, schedule, and assess them in ways that better engage full-time faculty.

Gaffney University

Analysis of my data and themes from GU also revealed four findings that addressed my research question. Two findings were expressed as perceived strengths of faculty-provided academic advising at the university, while the other two findings were expressed as perceived challenges of faculty-provided academic advising at the university. The first two findings, the strengths, were that faculty accessibility and good customer service were vital aspects of academic advising and that personal relationships between the faculty advisors and their students contributed to student success. The last two findings, the challenges, were that FERPA slowed down the academic advising and customer service processes for students and that faculty advisors were busy, which resulted in limited time and ability for advising students.

Accessibility and customer service were vital to academic advising. In their study of student satisfaction with faculty advising, Lowe and Toney (2001) reported that students were more satisfied with academic advising the more frequently they met with their academic advisors. Such findings were not surprising since the study also indicated that "orienting new students to campus" was a priority for student advisees, while "knowledge of university resources" was a priority for faculty advisors. The exact words used by every faculty advisor participant at GU (and in the academic advising manual and at an observed academic advising session) to describe accessibility and customer service was that of an "open door policy." Dr. Underwood used this language to address the phenomenon of advising students who were not her official advisees. She said that students at GU knew they could walk into any advisors' office and they would help them. Ms. Barnes stated that she enjoyed advising and wanted admissions counselors to call her over the summer so that she could recommend the best classes for her new students. She also indicated that she was willing to talk to these students herself, saying that she would FaceTime or Skype with them during her summer vacation. Dr. Danton's comments were similar as he said he advised his students throughout every semester and academic year. He saw accessibility as an important part of customer service for his students, stating that they should get 100% of his attention outside of the classroom. Like Ms. Barnes, Dr. Danton also gave his cell phone number to students and told them to call or text him any time they had a question. Dr. Danton said that his students were paying for his services, so they deserved to receive them. Thus, it was apparent that accessibility and customer service were rich aspects of the faculty advisor culture at GU, so efforts needed to be made to support both academic and student services in these actions.

Relationships between faculty and students led to student success. Such accessibility and customer service were both furthered by my second finding, which was that personal relationships between faculty advisors and their students contributed to student success. These findings were reinforced throughout research on retention, persistence, and degree completion.

While student learning happens in the classroom, it is enhanced through academic advising, counseling, and mentoring relationships with faculty advisors (Astin, 1993; Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Freeman, et al., 2007; Gordon, et al., 2000; Lowe & Toney, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Dr. Underwood and her department found personal relationshipss to be so important and instrumental to their students' success that they only allowed them to enroll in courses by meeting with the academic advisors. At the meetings, Dr. Underwood not only enrolled her students in courses, but she also reviewed their teaching portfolios. She believed that this process improved the graduation rates of her education students and confessed that she would miss the personal relationships with her students if her department changed the system and allowed students to enroll themselves online.

Ms. Barnes echoed several of Dr. Underwood's comments, saying that the small institution and department enabled her to be student-oriented and treat students like they were part of her family. Ms. Barnes said the personal relationships were so valuable that she did not mind increasing her academic advising load without an increase in compensation for the work. Finally, Dr. Danton saw such relationships with students as part of his role as a "total advisor." He believed that he should assist students with their coursework, research, and career and graduate school questions. Perhaps most importantly, he explained that personal, one-on-one relationships with his students were part of GU's mission as a Christian university. Thus, well-designed and implemented academic advising programs may be incredibly influential to student learning and success (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, et al., 2000), which reinforces the idea that colleges and universities should encourage relationships between faculty and students both inside and outside of the classroom.

FERPA slowed down advising and customer service processes. Dr. Underwood mentioned FERPA as a limitation in advising students because it restricted her from seeing their grades. She found this especially frustrating because prerequisite requirements were often grade requirements, but she was unable to check to see if students earned a high enough grade in the first class in order to be placed in the second class. The education program also had a GPA requirement, but she could not find that information either. Dr. Danton reinforced such frustrations, saying that certain student information was only available to him on a need-to-know basis. Thus, he was annoyed when he tried to enroll students in classes, but was unable to do so because they had a "hold" or restriction of some kind. When he came across holds, he had no way of knowing the details of the restriction and had to send students away to take care of the holds. Then, they had to return later to Dr. Danton to continue the enrollment process. This element of FERPA irritated Dr. Danton since it resulted in a "run around" for students and decreased his customer service and efficiency as an academic advisor.

In essence, my faculty advisor participants worked under the expectations of being able to provide full service to students on numerous issues, but the access to data to do so was limited in ways that it frustrated these processes. Interestingly, a great deal of higher education literature and research explained that "FERPA is not a barrier to the flow of student information within an academic community or between communities" (Graham, Hall, & Gilmer, 2008, p. 311), though it is apparent that faculty advisors do not have the same understanding of FERPA restrictions. As a result, Gilley and Gilley (2006) recommended the use of early alert systems and a standing group made up of faculty and staff across campus to act as a support system for students as well as an advisory council for practitioners who need assistance navigating FERPA-related complications. Such resources could educate faculty on issues related to FERPA regulations and how to work with and around them.

Faculty were busy, resulting in little time or ability for advising. My last finding at GU was that faculty advisors were busy with multiple responsibilities, which resulted in little time and ability for advising students. Ms. Barnes addressed this issue when she told me a story about GU earning low academic advising scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement.

The primary feedback on the survey from students was that faculty advisors were never in their offices. When the provost in charge of academics read these results, she told her faculty members that they had to increase their office hours to 15 hours per week. Ms. Barnes said that the faculty were shocked and upset, and after creating a spreadsheet with all of her teaching, committee, and other responsibilities, she proved that it was "mathematically impossible" for faculty to do 15 hours of required office hours per week without staying at work until seven o'clock at night. After realizing this, the administration backed down on the requirement and that provost eventually left GU.

Similarly, Dr. Danton said an ongoing challenge of being a small institution was that it required faculty to "wear too many hats." He described teaching and advising responsibilities, but also indicated that he assisted students with numerous issues and managed several adjunct professors. Thus, the roles and responsibilities of these faculty advisors made it difficult for them to give quality time and effort to advising their students. Crookston (1972) stated that a lack of time for advising can cause *prescriptive advising*, which is impersonal and authority-based. In *prescriptive advising*, faculty advisors answer simple questions and do not consider students' individual development. This is very different from *developmental advising*, which is based on personal relationships that consider students' academic, career, and life goals. If institutional administrations can unload faculty advisors of some of their academic advising responsibilities, there will likely be more opportunities for *developmental advising* to occur.

Metropolitan Christian University

Interestingly, there were three findings at MCU for my research question. One of these findings was shared as a strength of faculty-provided academic advising at the university, while the other two findings were expressed as challenges of faculty-provided academic advising at the university. The first finding, a strength, was that faculty advisor participants enjoyed interacting with students and helping them succeed. The second and third findings, the challenges, were that faculty felt limited by technological systems used to enroll students and that faculty had many responsibilities, which left little time for meaningful academic advising.

Faculty enjoyed interacting with students and helping them succeed. According to a study by Myers and Dyer (2005), 95% of faculty advisors believed that academic advising was a good use of their time. They believed it was effective in building rapport with students, which, in turn, assisted in the recruitment and retention of students. Thus, 71.5% of faculty advisors said that academic advising should be required of all faculty and 67.1% said that academic advising should be done by all full-time faculty members. Such findings were supported at GU, where Ms. Gallagher made such comments about her advisees, and also the students in her department who were not her advisees. She indicated that most of the faculty in her department felt the same way since they were comfortable advising students who were not their official advisees.

Dr. Skorsky stated that she loved talking to her students about personal and academic topics. When asked about the limitations she faced as a faculty advisor, she indicated that she did not have enough time to do all of her job responsibilities and still talk to students as long or as often as she wanted to. The challenge of time was evident when she talked about a summer enrollment day that only gave her 20 minutes to meet with each new advisee. She explained that 20 minutes was barely enough time to discuss their schedules, much less get to know them. She also said that she wished she could have casual, relaxed advising sessions at a coffee shop on campus instead of rushed, back-to-back meetings in her office. Dr. Skorsky stated that meeting with students was the best part of her job, her “bliss.” Thus, when she passed her advisees on to other faculty members after their freshman years, she later tracked down the students and “pulled” them into her office to hear about their successes. Finally, Dr. Lanagin spoke at length about his desire to mentor students and genuinely assist them in their academic, professional, and spiritual success. Like many of the faculty advisors, both at MCU and the other institutions, he said that his Christian faith played a part in his care for students. He believed that he had a role and responsibility in their development as Christian individuals; thus, his desire to interact with and influence students was drawn from his personal faith. He also felt like it encouraged him to foster personal relationships with his students, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Faculty were limited by technology systems used for enrollment. My research at MCU was conducted as an interesting time since the university was in the process of moving from an internal enrollment website that they used for years to an external software package that was extremely new and unknown. Ms. Gallagher stated that the business department was a department that allowed students to be enrolled by any faculty member, even if he or she was not a student's official advisor. She explained that the new system did not allow faculty advisors to see or change information about students who were not assigned to them specifically. Similarly, Ms. Gallagher said that she hoped the new enrollment system would "flag" alternate year classes, but that the capability was not currently there. She admitted that the previous system was not without its faults either; she said that she often enrolled students in classes, hit the submit button, and "hoped that everything went through." Dr. Skorsky also described the issues associated with being between enrollment systems and hoped that problems with course audits and degree audits would soon be resolved. She explained that she would be on sabbatical the next semester and hoped that all of the glitches with the new system would be fixed while she was gone. Dr. Skorsky made this comment several times during our interview, which showed me that she was nervous about the transition from one technological program to the next.

Dr. Lanagin was not quite as concerned with the enrollment technology as Ms. Gallagher and Dr. Skorsky, though he demonstrated the current system for me during our interview. He echoed statements about enrollment not being the same process as academic advising and argued that higher education was only a few years away from using a Google algorithm to enroll students in classes. Such an algorithm would only need to know a student's major and the days and times that he or she wanted to take classes. Then it would populate a schedule for the student. Such limitations came back to the technological systems that my participants used to enroll students in classes, though literature and research on this topic indicated that face-to-face meetings also had their limitations. Phillips (2003) explained that such relationships were intended to be personal, mentoring relationships, but since they existed between people, they were prone to errors and dissatisfaction. She argued that faculty-provided advising models were enhanced "with modern technology and data analytics, thereby freeing advisors to spend more time on the things only people can do" (p. 48). Therefore, it was apparent that the faculty advisors at GU could benefit from comprehensive training with their new enrollment technology systems, as well as assistance with enrollment duties and processes from academic support programs across campus.

Faculty had many responsibilities and little time for advising. The second challenge of faculty-provided academic advising at MCU was that of time; Ms. Gallagher, Dr. Skorsky, and Dr. Lanagin explained that they had so many other jobs and responsibilities as faculty members that they were almost too busy to meet with students and make advising sessions meaningful. To foster personal advising sessions, faculty advisors had to listen, counsel, refer, challenge, and support their student advisees; yet, they had very little time to do so (Gordon, et al., 2000). Ms. Gallagher said that she loved interacting with students, but her schedule did not allow her to do it as much as she wanted to. Dr. Skorsky made similar comments, saying that she would love to have longer conversations with students. However, as a department chair, she also managed five full-time faculty members, two part-time employees, and several adjunct professors. She said that her students expected her to be available and give them her time, but she could not always do that. Sometimes, she had to use her administrative assistant as a gatekeeper for students, because otherwise, she would get nothing else done.

Dr. Lanagin's statements were the same; in fact, he asked me to meet him at a public library for our interview because it was too difficult for him to get work done in his office. He described a number of tasks his department had to do for their students every semester, such as academic advising, assigning scholarship funds, and placing students in internship opportunities. Such responsibilities required a great deal of time, so Dr. Lanagin suggested that his department cancel classes for one or two days to take care of these responsibilities at one time during one session. Dr. Lanagin's department chair did not think there was enough time for such an event, but Dr. Lanagin believed that it would save time in the long run. Overall, it was evident that my faculty advisor participants enjoyed advising students, but felt challenged by this responsibility because there was little training on when and how to do it, especially considering their many other roles and responsibilities as full-time faculty members (Gordon, et al., 2000; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Thus, there was an obvious need to unload faculty from some of their responsibilities in order to make academic advising more of a priority.

Collective Case Study Findings

The data, themes, and findings at my individual institutions resulted in two converging findings for my collective case study. One finding had to do with faculty advisors' perceptions of the strengths of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian institutions. The second finding had to do with faculty advisors' perceptions of the challenges of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian institutions. The two findings are shared and described as follows:

1. Faculty formed relationships with students and enjoyed advising them.

Across all three campuses, faculty advisors indicated that they enjoyed spending time with their students both in and out of the classroom. Working at small institutions that were teaching universities allowed them to know their students well and play an important part in their academic and career successes.

2. Faculty had demanding schedules and little time for advising functions.

However, the nature of the institutions also required my faculty advisor participants to do many tasks beyond teaching and advising. The combination of such tasks varied, but resulted in less time for meaningful, personal, or productive academic advising sessions with students.

Discussion of Collective Case Study Findings

Faculty Formed Relationships with Students and Enjoyed Advising Them

The collective finding that emerged as a strength was that faculty advisors were well acquainted and had established relationships with their students and enjoyed the academic advising component of their work. Such attitudes were needed for institutions to create and maintain environments that were affirming, supportive, and welcoming, which contributed to increased retention, persistence, and degree completion (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Several of my faculty advisor participants also attributed the encouraging and positive environments to the missions and small sizes of their universities. They implied that it was easy to get to know their students and for students to get to know them when they were focused on teaching instead of research and there were not hundreds of students or faculty members in a class or department. Other faculty advisor participants linked student-focused employees to the Christian culture, environment, and mission of the institutions. Nearly every faculty advisor participant brought up his or her Christian faith in their interviews and talked about how it influenced and shaped the purpose of their relationships with students. Thus, it was apparent that the faculty advisors saw such personal relationships as a strength in the faculty advisor model at small, Christian universities.

My observations of academic advising sessions at CCU, GU, and MCU revealed that, in general, students also enjoyed and were satisfied with their interactions and relationships with their faculty advisors. As part of my data collection process, I observed six freshman students, one sophomore student, three junior students, and one senior student. Two of the three junior students were recent transfers to their institutions as well. Observations of such advising sessions highlighted the different expectations and needs of the students at their small, Christian colleges and universities, which connected with existing literature on student satisfaction with academic advising.

For example, the students who frequently met with their academic advisors seemed more satisfied with those relationships (Lowe & Toney, 2001). This included the sessions I observed between Ms. Sharp and Catherine and Dr. Underwood and Gillian. These upperclassmen knew their advisors well, enjoyed their company, and trusted their advice. The freshman students, however, had broader, more exploratory conversations with their faculty advisors. I witnessed such interactions with each of the freshman students in my study; they either brought up topics related to double-majoring/major exploration or what classes they should take at what times. The literature on student satisfaction with academic advising reinforced such relationships. Of the six most important advising tasks ranked by student participants in a study conducted by Lowe and Toney, four of them were understanding certificate and degree requirements, sharing graduation requirements, assisting their students with career goals, and orienting new students to campus life.

Finally, two of my observations were of transfer students, who seemed to view their relationships with their faculty advisors as more transactional than the students who started and stayed at the same institution. Both Patricia's and Freddie's conversations revolved around their transfer credits and possible graduation dates. Instead of trying to foster relationships with their advisors or gain academic advice, they were focused on policies, procedures, and degree plans that would get them closer to commencement. I could tell the perceived differences in such interactions during the interviews with my faculty advisor participants. Nearly every participant commented on how difficult it was and how long it took to advise transfer students. Thus, faculty advisors (and those who support, train, and reward them) should use different academic advising approaches with transfer students and be prepared to invest in such relationships differently than they would with non-transfer students.

Faculty Had Demanding Schedules and Little Time for Advising Functions

The second collective finding, a challenge, was in direct competition with its strength. The finding was that my faculty advisor participants' schedules were demanding with multiple prongs and they did not feel like they had time to properly fulfill the academic advising function. All of the faculty advisors were expected to teach classes and grade assignments. They held office hours to help their students with coursework and/or other questions and concerns. The faculty advisor participants were also on committees and conducted occasional research. In fact, at the time of this case study, both Mr. Meechum and Ms. Barnes were in the process of completing their doctoral degrees. Several of these individuals either held positions off-campus or made efforts to maintain specialized accreditations as well. The faculty advisors who were department chairs also spoke of finding, hiring, and keeping quality adjunct professors. Thus, it was challenging for them to meet with their student advisees, especially if their academic advising loads were significant. A few of my participants said that their course loads were reduced because of the number of students they advised, but the majority indicated that this was not the case and there were no compensations or rewards for their academic advising responsibilities. Such findings were not a surprise since they were prevalent throughout the literature and research on faculty advising (Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Habley, 2004; Lowe & Toney, 2001; McGillin, 2003; Myers & Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2006; Tien & Blackburn, 1996; Vowell & Farren, 2003).

Meeting with student advisees was a demanding responsibility in and of itself as students expected their advisors to enroll them in classes; provide academic, career, and personal advice; assist them in finding internships and/or jobs; and answer questions about nearly every aspect of the university. As a result, Tien and Blackburn (1996) wondered if faculty advising was similar to faculty research; perhaps intrinsic motivation (interest and enjoyment) for academic advising led to greater results and productivity than extrinsic motivations (compensation, promotion, and rewards) for academic advising. If that was the case, faculty advisors who enjoyed academic advising were more likely to do it, regardless of institutional recognition or rewards. As a result, faculty advisors and their administrative supervisors were not likely to compensate for or prioritize effective academic advising to the extent that it should have been compensated and prioritized.

Theoretical Application

Much of the literature that I reviewed on retention, persistence, and degree completion rates noted the influence of environmental factors on student success. After designing my dissertation study and collecting and analyzing my data, I became aware of the impact of such factors on the success of faculty advisors as well. This realization reminded me of Nevitt Sanford's theory of challenge and support (as cited in Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998), which I first learned about from Dr. Nancy Evans, my advisor and chair when I was working on my master degree at Iowa State University. In his theory, Sanford proposes three developmental conditions for undergraduate students: readiness, challenge, and support. Here, readiness is not always an environmental factor, but rather the readiness with which individuals can exhibit specific behaviors. If a student does not have the maturity or appropriate conditions to act a certain way, he or she will not do it. The concept of challenge and support, however, is that of a balanced environment that encourages "the range of optimal dissonance for the person" (p. 26). An environment that is too challenging can cause individuals to regress in maturity and become less adaptive to their environment, either by escaping or ignoring the challenge altogether. An environment with too little challenge, however, may provide individuals with a sense of safety and security, but it does nothing to foster their development and growth.

Thus, Sanford's theory stated that "the amount of challenge a person can tolerate is a function of the amount of support available" (Evans, et al., 1998, p. 26). In the case of my study, every faculty advisor develops and succeeds in his or her range of optimal dissonance, which is determined by environmental challenges and supports and individual characteristics. While this theory is targeted at the development of young college students, it can also be applied to my study of faculty advisors at small, Christian colleges and universities in the United States.

For example, my faculty advisor participants indicated that they enjoyed spending time with their students and believed that such interactions and relationships led to student success. My participants appeared to feel this way because they chose to work in environments that were small, teaching institutions that encouraged and promoted relationships between professors and their students. However, at all three universities, my faculty advisor participants also identified areas in which their academic advising responsibilities were challenged. Overall, my participants were busy and “wore too many hats” to make academic advising a priority and do it well. Individually, though, they were challenged by misunderstandings of their advising roles and responsibilities, details related to their general education programs, perceived limitations caused by FERPA, and issues related to their technological enrollment systems. My faculty advisor participants each required different levels of challenge and support to improve as academic advisors and the findings of this study revealed that perspective.

When I started designing my dissertation study, I decided not to employ a theoretical lens or framework. I made this decision because I wanted the themes and findings to emerge from the data on their own and without the influence of an additional theory. At the time, utilizing a theoretical lens or framework also felt cumbersome, like something that would confuse or distract me as I engaged in my research. By the end of my dissertation process, though, I realized that applying a theoretical lens or framework to my data, specifically Sanford’s theory of challenge and support, would have resulted in several advantages. First, it would have produced a different perspective or view of faculty experiences and needs as academic advisors. Second, it would have strengthened the theoretical applications and implications of my study by applying a student development theory to faculty advisors. Finally, it would have resulted in specific directives for practice as faculty advisor “challenges” and “supports” could be defined and achieved by the people and programs that support academic advising at small, Christian institutions.

Implications

The findings from the individual institutions, as well as the collective case study, resulted in significant implications for research, theory, and practice. Thus, the following paragraphs report these suggestions for research, implications for theory, and actions for practice for those involved in higher education in such capacities. Because of my current position as a registrar who works with many faculty advisors at a small, Christian university, my recommendations for practitioners are particularly thorough and robust.

Research

At the end of this chapter, my future research section addresses several areas of study that would enhance my study and contribute to the existing literature on retention, persistence, and degree completion as they relate to academic advising. As an introduction to my future research section, the findings from my dissertation study emphasize the need for further research regarding faculty roles and responsibilities and the relationships between institutional cultures and expectations of academic advising and enrollment often attributing to faculty members feeling overworked and overwhelmed. Future research should address adjustments to faculty roles and responsibilities, especially as they relate to the training and use of technological enrollment systems, engagement in general education courses and programs, and the limitations of FERPA regulations on academic advising and customer service. The findings from my study reveal an undeniable need for further exploration of faculty advisor needs in regard to their education, resources, and training as academic advisors. As a result, such implications and suggestions for research in these areas are further developed in the future research section of this chapter.

Theory

Although my dissertation study did not employ a theoretical lens in its design or analysis, it did utilize the theoretical perspective of constructivism. Constructivism states that realities and truths are established by the individuals who experience a specific occurrence or phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). Thus, the theoretical perspective of constructivism worked well with my case study design as it revealed faculty advisors' perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of faculty-provided academic advising at small, Christian universities. Such data impact the building of future theories of leadership and organizational development, specifically in areas of faculty and student development.

Practice

The findings from my individual and collective case studies offer several implications and recommendations for the practice of faculty advising at small, Christian universities. Both the literature on academic advising and my faculty advisor participants provided suggestions on academic advising models to encourage thorough and quality advising sessions between faculty members and their students. One such suggestion was for academic advising expectations and responsibilities to be clearly communicated to faculty advisors at all of the institutions in my study. If faculty advisors were aware of their roles as academic advisors and received appropriate training of their responsibilities, they would be more likely to succeed in such areas. Similarly, intentional and meaningful rewards must be given to faculty advisors who excel at advising, especially at GU, which did not utilize a tenure structure. The form of such compensation would likely vary from institution to institution, depending on the rank and tenure levels and/or other reward structures, in order to assist faculty advisors in investing in faculty-only academic advising models.

Another suggestion to assist with "unloading" faculty advisors at CCU, GU, and MCU is that of a central advising office or staff who meet with freshman and sophomore students to help them enroll in classes. Once students advance to junior and senior academic levels, they would be assigned to a faculty advisor in their major. Such models allow faculty advisors some release from their academic advising loads and encourage faculty advising sessions to focus on academic and career objectives and mentoring rather than just course sequencing and enrollment.

Unfortunately, small, private institutions like the ones in my case study may be limited in funds or other resources, which make it difficult to establish an academic advising office or staff responsible for lowerclassmen. In such situations, I recommend using existing academic support programs, such as first year experience programs, a general education director, the Registrar's Office, or a student success center to help unload faculty advisors at all three of these universities. These offices could function as enrollment locations for lowerclassmen and require them to enroll in at least one major class each semester of their first two years of college. Taking major classes every semester has a couple of advantages. First, it allows lowerclassmen to connect with full-time faculty in their intended department, which the literature on retention and persistence repeatedly emphasizes. Second, it provides opportunities for academic major and career exploration as well as introducing a discipline to students early in their college careers, which helps them to determine whether or not it is the right field.

As a registrar, I also noticed that the only institution of the three that seemed to have issues with faculty being engaged in general education courses was CCU, the one without a director of general education. Likewise, it seemed that the Registrar's Office had some responsibilities regarding general education courses at each of my institutions. Thus, academic advising models that utilized directors of general education assist faculty advisors by deeper engagement in general education courses. The individual owns such courses in a way not possible by other individuals or offices on campus. He or she corresponds with college deans and department chairs to schedule such classes and require faculty to rotate the instruction of general education courses in their academic areas. This model not only engages faculty advisors in general education courses, but it familiarizes all faculty advisors with details related to core classes, which, in turn, help them share such requirements with their advisees.

The central advising office or staff could also unload faculty by arranging appropriate technology and FERPA training for faculty advisors who mentor junior and senior students. Such training and resources were undoubtedly needed at GU and MCU. Thus, it is important for institutions to hire competent employees in information technology and make efforts to create and purchase technological systems that align with institutional needs as closely as possible. The same is true for individuals who work in offices that handle sensitive student information. Every institution in my study would benefit from a virtual and/or physical "one stop shop." Such programs enable students to take care of multiple academic tasks in one location – online and/or in one physical building – and remove perceived FERPA-related barriers and issues from faculty advisors, thus improving processes for prospective and current students and their parents while freeing faculty of additional roles and responsibilities. Although the creation of physical "one stop shop" locations requires time, money, and organizational restructuring, virtual ones are much more affordable and often easier to implement. Therefore, if the designs and purposes of a central advising office or staff and a physical or virtual "one stop shop" are intentional and well-communicated at CCU, GU, and MCU, they could be a component of an effective solution to several of the challenges raised by my study.

Limitations

This dissertation case study attempted to explore faculty perceptions of current academic advising structures at small, Christian universities in the United States. As a result, my study did not examine any institutions that utilized academic advising models with full-time staff, which are common at large, public colleges and universities. It also focused on faculty advisors' perceptions of advising undergraduate students, but not graduate students or combined undergraduate and graduate students. The study explored faculty advisors' perceptions of such academic advising systems, which means that the opinions and perspectives of full-time faculty member who were not academic advisors – those who did not formally offer academic advice to students – were not represented in my findings.

It is also important to note that two faculty advisor participants at CCU, Mr. Meechum and Ms. Sharp, were professors in academic departments that did not provide general education courses at the institution. This limitation is an important one since their perspectives made up the majority of those explored at their institution. Thus, further interviews with faculty advisors outside of the engineering and nursing departments at CCU coule reveal that faculty advisors were more engaged or interested in general education courses than I originally determined. Likewise, the transition from one piece of enrollment technology to another at MCU likely contributed to the finding that faculty advisor participants' felt limited by their technological systems. Follow-up research would have to be conducted at a later date to remove that factor from the case study.

Since my dissertation study employed qualitative research methods and procedures, the findings are not generalizable to other institutions, though the nature of case studies enables some aspects to be applicable to similar structures at similar institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to understand such limitations of the study, especially as they relate to areas for future research in academic advising.

Future Research

After sharing the findings and limitations from both the individual institutions and the collective case study, it is important to also discuss the areas in which future research should be conducted in academic advising. Such research is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of how academic advising systems and perceptions integrate with or enhance the findings from my study. This research is also helpful to academic advising models and processes at different types of colleges and universities with similar or varied issues from the ones that I explored in this dissertation. Consequently, areas for future research in academic advising are addressed in the following paragraphs.

There is a need to explore faculty roles and responsibilities (not just academic advising) at differing types of institutions or as a whole. Such roles and responsibilities are likely significant for all full-time faculty members, though they probably vary from one institution to the next. My data at CCU, GU, and MCU insinuated that there may be a relationship between institutional cultures and expectations of academic advising and enrollment and faculty members feeling overworked and overwhelmed. However, since this was not the focus of my study, more research would have to be conducted in this area. For institutions that employ faculty advisor models, future research should also address possible adjustments to faculty responsibilities so as to allow more time for quality academic advising relationships and sessions with students. Such adjustments could be made in the training or use of technology systems, which were a source of anxiety and additional workload for some of the faculty in my study. Similarly, there is a need for future studies that explore faculty engagement in general education courses and programs. Because GU and MCU both had directors of general education and CCU did not, there is value in examining such general education structures at different colleges and universities.

Additionally, my dissertation study revealed a need for deeper explanations of FERPA and how personal academic and financial information about students discourages and limits academic advising. The findings from such research may be helpful at a number of institutions, including those that utilize professional staff as academic advisors. If FERPA rules and regulations truly limit academic advisors and slow down customer service processes, then it would be beneficial to audit such systems and make adjustments to encourage and promote academic advising, customer service, and student success.

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities. I examined such perceptions through a qualitative case study that was conducted at three small, Christian universities and utilized interviews, documents, and observations as data collection methods. Organizing, coding, and analyzing my data, with the assistance of a qualitative data analysis software program called MAXQDA, revealed five themes that eventually developed into individual institutional findings at CCU, GU, and MCU, as well as collective case study findings.

The four findings at CCU included one perceived strength, which was that it made sense for full-time faculty members to advise students because they knew their institution, industries, and students very well. The findings at CCU also included three perceived challenges, which were that faculty advisors were busy with a number of responsibilities, they saw the function and process of academic advising as different from that of enrollment, and they were not engaged or especially interested in general education courses. My research at GU revealed four findings as well, two of which were perceived strengths and two of which were perceived challenges. The strengths were that faculty accessibility and good customer service were vital aspects of effective academic advising and that personal relationships among faculty advisors and their student advisees contributed to student success. The challenges were that FERPA slowed down the academic advising and customer service processes for students and that faculty advisors were busy, which resulted in limited time and ability for advising students. Finally, there were three findings at MCU, which included one perceived strength and two perceived challenges. The perceived strength was that faculty advisors enjoyed interacting with their student advisees and wanted to know them well and help them succeed. The perceived challenges were that faculty advisors often felt limited by the technological systems used to enroll students and that they had many responsibilities that left little time for academic advising.

Thus, the two findings for the collective case study consisted of one perceived strength and one perceived challenge. The perceived strength was that faculty advisors knew their students and enjoyed interacting with them, while the perceived challenge was that faculty advisors were busy with multiple responsibilities and did not have the time they wanted or needed to properly advise their students. I discussed and integrated such findings with existing literature in these areas of academic advising. I then addressed and developed implications for theory, research, and practice, as well as the limitations of the study and academic areas in which there is a need for future or further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. How would you describe the current academic advising model/structure at your college or university?
    - How does this align with the institutionally stated academic advising expectations for faculty?
    - What are the implied academic advising expectations for faculty?

2. Tell me what the advising process looks like for you and your students. How is this different from the model?

3. What limitations do you currently face in your ability to advise your students?

4. What advantages do you believe you have in your ability to advise your students?

5. What would you change about the academic advising process and/or expectations at your college or university?
    - What are the built-in rewards that recognize good advising at your institution?
    - What are the organizational systems or practices that discourage it?

6. What resources of tools would help you facilitate this change/improve your academic advising abilities?

7. What role does your faith play in your academic advising practices?

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Application

HANDWRITTEN FORMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

APPLICATION MUST BE SINGLE SIDED – DO NOT STAPLE

APPLICATION FOR REVIEW OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH SUBMITTED TO THE OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Pursuant to 45 CFR 46	________________ IRB Number FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Title of Project: A Qualitative Study of Faculty Perceptions of the Strengths and Challenges of Academic Advising at Small, Christian Universities

Is the Project externally funded? ☐Yes ☒No If yes, complete the following: ☐Private ☐State ☐Federal

Agency: Grant No: OSU Routing No:

Type of Review Requested: ☐ Exempt ☐ Expedited ☐ Full Board

Principal Investigator(s): *I acknowledge that this represents an accurate and complete description of my research. If there are additional PIs, provide information on the additional PIs continuation page form located on the URC website.*

Stephanie Baird		*03/03/2014*
Name of Primary PI (typed)	Signature of PI	Date
Educational Leadership	*Education*	
Department	College	
PI's Address	Phone	E-Mail

Required IRB Training Complete: ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Training must be completed before application can be reviewed)

Dr. Kerri Kearney		*03/24/2014*
Name of Co-PI (typed)	Signature of Co-PI	Date
Educational Leadership	*Education*	
Department	College	
Co-PI's Address	Phone	E-Mail

Required IRB Training Complete: ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Training must be completed before application can be reviewed)

Advisor (complete if PI is a student): *I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are properly protected.*

Dr. Kerri Kearney		*03/03/2014*
Advisor's Name (typed)	Signature of Adviser	Date
Educational Leadership	*Education*	
Department	College	
Advisor's Address	Phone	E-Mail

Required IRB Training Complete: ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Training must be completed before application can be reviewed)

NOTE: If sufficient space is not provided below for a complete answer in sufficient detail for the reviewer to fully understand what is being proposed, please use additional pages as necessary.

1. Describe the purpose and the research problem in the proposed study. *Your response in this section will enable the reviewer(s) to determine whether the project meets the criteria of research with human participants and also the extent to which the research may produce new generalizable knowledge that may benefit the participants and/or society.*

The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian universities.

2. (a) Describe the subjects of this study:

1) Describe the sampling population: *Nine faculty advisors from a total of three Christian universities – Camden Christian University, Gaffney University, and Metropolitan Christian University. IRB approval for this study was obtained from each of these institutions.*

2) Describe the subject selection methodology (i.e. random, snowball, etc.): *Purposeful sampling – subjects should be full-time faculty members who also have academic advising responsibilities. Efforts will be made to select at least one junior and one senior faculty member at each institution, as well as at least one male and one female faculty member at each institution. A diversity of ages and academic areas will also be attempted to be represented.*

3) Describe the procedures to be used to recruit subjects. Include copies of scripts, flyers, advertisements, posters, and letters to be used. **If recruitment procedures will require access to OSU System email addresses you will need to include Appendix A of this application**:[7] *Possible subjects will be identified at different institutions through professional contacts, then contacted via email about participating in the study.*

4) How many subjects are expected to participate? *Nine – three from three different institutions.*

5) What is the expected duration of participation for each segment of the sampling population? If there is more than one session, please specify the duration of each session: *Faculty advisors will be asked to commit to two research "sessions" – the first will be a one-on-one interview with me. The second will be for me to observe an academic advising session with them and one of their student advisees.*

6) Describe the calendar time frame for gathering the data using human subjects: *All data is hoped to be collected from the Spring-Fall semesters of 2014.*

7) Describe any follow-up procedures planned: *Faculty who participate in the study will be asked to review the transcripts from their interview sessions as member checks.*

(b) Are any of the subjects under 18 years of age? ☐ Yes ☒No

If Yes, have you completed the training for minors participating in OSU-related activities and programs? ☐ Yes ☐No Date of completion _______________ If no, the training must be completed before IRB approval can be given. Click here to access the training. Click here to view policy 1-0135 "Minors Participating in OSU-Related Activities and Programs".

If using minors in research, you must comply with special federal regulations. Please refer to the IRB Guide.

3. Provide a detailed description of any methods, procedures, interventions, or manipulations of human subjects or their environment and/or a detailed description of any existing datasets to be accessed for information. Please indicate the physical location where the research will take place (if applicable). Include copies of any questionnaires, tests, or other written instruments, instructions, scripts, etc., to be used.

The methodology for this qualitative case study will include document analysis, interviews, and observations. Data collection will begin with the identification and selection of three full-time faculty members at three small, Christian institutions that are similar in mission and size and located in the same Midwestern city. These faculty members will first be emailed about participating in the study. Next, one-on-one interviews with each faculty member will also be conducted, resulting in a total of nine interviews. The interviews will consist of open-ended questions that address current institutional academic advising models and processes, their advantages and limitations, what the faculty members would like to change about the models and processes at their colleges, and the resources or tools that they believe would be most effective in their changes or improvements as academic advisors. These interviews will be audio recorded and additional field notes will also be taken. If faculty members mention any documents in their interview, they will be asked to share them with me then or at a later time. Efforts will be made to select at least one junior and one senior faculty member at each institution, as well as at least one male and one female faculty member at each institution. A diversity of ages and academic areas will also be attempted to be represented. Finally, observations of academic advising sessions with each of the interviewed faculty members will be conducted as well. I will schedule these sessions by asking the faculty members to communicate with me about when they have advising meetings scheduled with their students. I will then contact at least one of their students (through the faculty advisor), describe my study, and ask if I have their permission to observe the advising session. I will ask them to fill out a consent form for this observation. These observations will not be audio recorded, but field notes will be taken. Demographic information of the students will include their gender, major, and year in school. Once the data have been collected, the interview transcripts, interview field notes, documents, and observation field notes will be uploaded into a qualitative data analysis program to be organized and coded. As coding continues, findings will be interpreted and reinforced by the data and reported in the case study format, based on individual institutions and then shared as an overall collective case study.

4. Please list by position any additional personnel (undergraduate assistants, graduate research assistants, members of the community) who will be involved in the recruitment or consent process or data collection and/or analysis. Names are not necessary.
   Include a description of the training in the protection of human subjects in research that these individuals will be required to complete.

No additional personnel will be involved in the recruitment or consent process of data collection and/or analysis.
5. Will the subjects encounter the possibility of stress or psychological, social, physical, or legal risks that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please justify your position:
6. Will medical clearance be necessary for subjects to participate because of tissue or blood sampling, administration of substances such as food or drugs, or physical exercise conditioning? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please explain how the clearance will be obtained:
7. Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please explain:
8. Will information be requested that subjects might consider personal or sensitive? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please explain:
9. Will the subjects be presented with materials that might be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please explain, including measures planned for intervention if problems occur.

10. Will any inducements be offered to the subjects for their participation? ☐Yes ☒No

If Yes, please explain:

NOTE: If extra course credit is offered, describe the alternative means those students who do not wish to participate in the research project may employ to obtain the course credit.

11. Describe the process to be used to obtain the consent/assent/parental permission of all subjects (as appropriate). Who will seek the consent/assent/permission? Describe the steps taken to minimize coercion or undue influence, and the method(s) to be used to document consent/assent/permission.

Please submit copies of all consent documents with your application

Possible subjects will be identified through professional contacts and emailed about participating in the study. I will contact these individuals and provide them with the consent script, information, and form. The consent document reminds subjects that their participation is completely voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time.

12. Are you requesting a waiver of documentation of consent (no signature on consent/assent forms)? If you are conducting a survey, online or in paper form, check yes if respondents will remain anonymous.

☐Yes ☒No

If yes, provide a justification for waiving documentation based on one of the two criteria allowing the waiver.

13. Do you wish to waive some of the elements of consent/assent/ parental permission or the entire consent/assent/parent permission process?

☐Yes ☒No

If yes, provide a justification for the waiver that addresses all criteria that must be met for the waiver to be approved.

14. Will the data be a part of a record that can be identified or linked to particular subjects? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please explain:
15. Describe the steps you will take to protect the confidentiality of the subjects and how you will advise subjects of these protections during the consent process. Include information on data storage and access. If data will not be reported in the aggregate, please explain how the data will be reported. *As interview transcripts, interview field note, documents, and observation field notes are collected, identifying information will be removed from the data and then stored on a password protected computer in my home. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each of the subjects, and once all of the data are collected and organized, the code list of this information will be destroyed. I will transcribe each of these materials myself so as to further ensure the confidentiality of my subjects. (These audio recordings will be made on an application on my iPad. Once the interviews have been transcribed, saved on the computer, and uploaded into MAXQDA – a software program that assists in the organization and analysis of qualitative data – any audio recordings of this data will be deleted.) The only person who will have access to this data is me, the primary investigator, and I will keep the data stored in this location until my dissertation has been defended. Useful texts from the interviews and information from the documents and observations will be used throughout the dissertation to discuss the findings of the study. This data will be presented in a case study format, first in discussion of each individual institution and then a collective case study of faculty advising at Christian colleges and universities. Quotes used will be for the purpose of providing an increased understanding of the faculty experience and perceptions of academic advising. Faculty will be offered the opportunity to review the transcripts prior to their publication and submission. Subjects will also be advised of these protections in the consent document.*
16. Will a subject's participation in a specific experiment or study be made a part of any record available to his or her supervisor, teacher, or employer? ☐Yes ☒No If Yes, please explain:
17. Will the consent form and other documents (i.e. recruitment materials, surveys, etc.) be translated into non-English versions? ☐Yes ☒No If yes, please attach the Translator Declaration Form.
18. Describe the benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society. *Note that 45 CFR 46, Section 46.111(a)(2) requires that the risks to subjects be reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits. The investigator should specifically state the importance of the knowledge that reasonably may be expected to result from the research*

The findings of this study will contribute to a void in the literature on faculty perceptions (as opposed to student perceptions) of academic advising models and processes. It will also contribute to a void in the literature on academic advising structures and processes specifically at small, Christian institutions.

Application Submission:

Checklist for application submission:

☒Completion of required IRB training (http://compliance.vpr.okstate.edu/IRB/gs-CITI.aspx)

☐Grant Proposal, if research is externally funded

☒Outline or script of information to be provided prior to subjects' agreement to participate

☒Copies of flyers, announcements or other forms of recruitment

☐Informed consent/child assent/parental permission forms

☒Instrument(s) [questionnaire, survey, tests]

☒Résumés or CVs for all PIs (faculty or student) and advisors (**4 page maximum for each**)*

*CVs should highlight the education and research expertise of the researcher. Researchers may submit CVs prepared for federal grant proposals (e.g., NIH, NSF, USDA, etc.).

Appendices Included:

☐Appendix A - Request for OSU System Email Addresses for Human Subject Research Recruitment Purposes

Number of copies:

One (1), **single sided** copy of the application and associated attachments, signed by all PIs and advisor (if appropriate).

Submission Addresses:

Mail to:

IRB/University Research Compliance

Oklahoma State University

219 Cordell North

Stillwater, OK 74078-1038

Hand deliver to:

IRB/University Research Compliance

208 or 217 Cordell North

Email Submission (Application must be signed):

irb@okstate.edu

For assistance, please contact the IRB staff in the Office of University Research Compliance at 405-744-3377 or email irb@okstate.edu.

Appendix C

Subject Recruitment Email

Greetings!

You are receiving this email because you have been identified as a faculty member who also has academic advising responsibilities at the institution where you are employed. My name is Stephanie Baird and I am a Ph.D. student at Oklahoma State University. I am working on a dissertation study that explores faculty perceptions of the strengths and challenges of current systems of academic advising at small, Christian colleges and universities. For this study, I would like to interview you about your current institutional academic advising models and processes, their advantages and disadvantages, what you would like to change about the models and processes at your college, and the resources or tools that you believe would be most effective in your changes or improvements as an academic advisor.

I would also like to collect some documents to which you may have access at your institution, such as academic advising training materials. If you would be able to assist in the collection of these documents, that would be extremely helpful to me and my study.

Finally, I would like to observe an advising session with you and one of your advisees. I will notify your advisee of my presence in advance and request their permission to sit in on and observe the advising session prior to doing so.

Please see the attached consent script and let me know if you have questions. If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign the consent script and return it to me.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Stephanie Baird
Ph.D. Student, Oklahoma State University

VITA

Stephanie Borgert Baird

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF ACDEMIC ADVISING AT SMALL, CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2015.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Education at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa in 2008.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts and Communication at Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida in 2006.

Experience:

University Registrar — January 2014 – Present
Oklahoma Christian University, Edmond, OK

Success Strategies Adjunct Professor — January 2012 – April 2013
Success Central Adjunct Professor — August 2011 – November 2013
First Year Experience Programs, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK

Program Director — June 2011 – December 2013
Graduate School of Engineering, Oklahoma Christian University, Edmond, OK

Professional Memberships:

Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce (Leadership Edmond XXVIII Alum)

Oklahoma Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers