

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

2011

Academic Advising Experiences Of First-Year Undecided Students At A Public Southeastern High Research Activity Institution

Kyle Ellis

University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ellis, Kyle, "Academic Advising Experiences Of First-Year Undecided Students At A Public Southeastern High Research Activity Institution" (2011). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1043.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/1043>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

ACADEMIC ADVISING EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-YEAR
UNDECIDED STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC SOUTHEASTERN
HIGH RESEARCH ACTIVITY INSTITUTION

Doctor of Philosophy

Higher Education

The University of Mississippi

Kyle C. Ellis

December 2011

Copyright © 2011 by Kyle C. Ellis
All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

In today's market for higher education, students are often viewed as consumers. Institutions rely on the revenue from these tuition-paying students as the primary form of funding. Additionally, institutions are accountable for their students retention and graduation rates, thus must ensure that students are able to efficiently progress from new freshmen to graduating seniors in a timely manner. Academic advisors are often the front-line campus professionals that interact with these students. Academic advisors are presented with the opportunity to offer academic support and guidance to students. This support is very important throughout a student's academic career, but no time is greater than during the first-year while students are trying to successfully transition from high school senior to college freshman. Advisors have the potential to impact both students' academic experience and satisfaction with the institution as a whole.

This qualitative case study focused on first-year students who were undecided in their major while attending a high research activity institution in the Southeastern United States. The study explored the participants' expectations and experiences with academic advising throughout their first year of college. Five themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) High school advising experiences: A mixed bag; (b) No major, no problem. Or is it; (c) So many choices, so little time; (d) Learning to crawl before you walk; and (e) If only I would have known.

College academic advising was well received by the participants in this study. From first-hand student accounts, participants articulately revealed how they made meaning of academic advising. Students acknowledged both good and bad experiences with high school advisors, they

noted key people in their lives who helped them with academic decisions, and even addressed being an undecided student while in college. Participants went on to discuss their thoughts on college advising expectations and experiences from when they first entered the university to how they changed over time. Additionally, students were able to provide self-reflection and offer direct insight to help future first-year students and academic advisors and administrators. Findings from this study allowed for recommendations to be made for future practice, policy, and research.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every college student who was ever unsure about what the future held for them. As a senior in high school I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. My mother suggested sports medicine, as I have always loved and played sports, but was unable to continue playing after high school. Experiencing the life of an athletic trainer as a freshmen and sophomore in college, made me appreciate the hard work these dedicated professionals display every day. The experience also showed me my dedication to this profession was not enough to make a career out of it. I reverted back on my perceived safety net of teaching and coaching. As the saying goes “history repeats itself” could be applied here. After student teaching at a high school and elementary school and serving as an assistant basketball coach, I knew a career in secondary education was not for me. There I was a twenty-two year old college graduate back at square one with questions about what will I do with the rest of my life. I decided to prolong my decision, and pursue my graduate degree in education. I was fortunate enough to obtain a graduate assistantship as an academic advisor in the School of Education at Tennessee-Martin. I thoroughly enjoyed helping college students pursue their educational goals. Once I realized there were multiple fields dedicated to helping college students succeed, I knew I found my calling.

My education and career thus far in higher education are a testament to exploring one’s options while in higher education and not to settle on a career that will not make you happy. Therefore, here is to you, you undecided student who may have no clue what the future holds, who’s parents tell them to hurry up and pick a major and a career, who’s friends all have majors

and do not let you in on their inside jokes, who is an upperclassman but taking a freshman introductory level course welcoming them to their new major, and most importantly who is very happy to have taken time to explore their many options before making the right decision.

ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Advising Center
AP	Advance Placement
IR	Institutional Research
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NACADA	National Academic Advising Association
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
SU	Southeastern University
SUG	Southern University Group

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel like a Hollywood celebrity giving an acceptance speech at an awards show. Most likely I will leave someone out, but please realize I truly acknowledge and appreciate everything everyone has done for me no matter how big or small as it relates to this monumental task. First I would like to thank my dissertation chair and advisor throughout my graduate program, Dr. Amy Wells-Dolan. Dr. Wells-Dolan cannot be thanked enough for the vital role she played in my success. Additionally, I would like to thank my dissertation committee members Dr. Whitney Webb, Dr. John Holleman, and Dr. Holly Reynolds for their guidance.

I truly appreciate my colleagues and friends in the Academic Support Center. Dr. Ann Canty in the Provost's Office has been very supportive of my graduate work from the beginning. Academic advisors and fellow Ph.D students Jennifer Bennett and Dr. Travis Hitchcock were always there to answer questions and bounce ideas around. In direct relation to this research, a tremendous amount of gratitude goes out to Mary Ann Crocker and Genie Henson who single-handedly found students for my study. Jackie Certion, Matt Bowman, and Brittany Galloway were all very important as well. Thank you to the entire ASC team.

Chances are graduate students will only write one dissertation in their lifetime. Therefore, it is a new experience for everyone. I must thank Dr. Shara Crookston, Dr. Amy Mark, and Dr. Vera Chapman as they were fellow graduate students who worked with Dr. Wells-Dolan and allowed me to use their dissertations as guides in my own work. Additionally, the advice and encouragement they gave was very helpful.

Dr. Kathleen Smith from Florida State University and Macey Edmondson were instrumental in the completion of my work, as they volunteered their time to serve as my expert in the field and peer-debriefer. I valued their comments and willingness to take on the additional responsibility of helping me. Dr. Stephen Monroe also served as an unofficial reader before my prospectus defense. His suggestions were more valuable than he will ever know. Thank you all for your assistance.

The last six years have been a very rewarding experience while working with the faculty and staff in the Higher Education program. Dr. Tim Letzring, Dr. K.B. Melear, Dr. Lori Wolff, and Dr. Wells-Dolan were excellent instructors in all my courses. Of course Kim Chrestman must be acknowledged for all the assistance she provided me during my time in the program. They are a great group and cannot be thanked enough.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the willingness of the volunteer participants in my study. Many said it would be difficult finding participants who are freshmen to be willing and accountable for a year-long study. However, the 30 participants that started the study and the 25 that finished, here is a big thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank the most important people in my life, my family. My wife Laurie Beth and son Carson have been very supportive throughout the program and dissertation. Although Carson is only one and does not realize it yet, his limited crying and sleeping through the night at an early age helped me stay focused and able to complete tasks. Laurie Beth was always very agreeable and knew when I needed support or to be left alone. My mother Paula Spears has been an asset from the start. Whether she was offering encouragement or proofing a rough draft, she was there for me. Again, thank you to everyone who helped me achieve this monumental goal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Significance of the Study.....	6
Purpose Statement.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Theoretical or Conceptual Framework.....	8
Overview of the Methods.....	10
Delimitations.....	10
Limitations.....	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
Conclusion.....	14
Organization of the Study.....	14
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Academic Advising Structure.....	16
History.....	17
Advising Models.....	19
Advising Approaches.....	21
Academic Advisors.....	28
Analysis of Advisor Types.....	28
Primary Advising Functions.....	31
Additional Roles and Responsibilities.....	31
Impact of Academic Advising.....	33
Model Practices.....	37
Freshmen Experiences with Advising.....	39
Defining the Undecided Student.....	44

Gordon’s Tenets of the Developmental Approach Theory	46
Conclusion	49
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	51
Introduction.....	51
Research Design.....	52
Qualitative Tradition.....	52
Case Study	53
Rationale for Qualitative Research	55
Individual Interview Design	57
Role of the Researcher	58
Professional Position.....	58
Assumptions by Researcher	60
Data Collection	62
Setting	62
Participants.....	64
Instrument	65
Gaining Access	66
Procedure	66
Research Questions.....	70
Data Analysis	70
Interview and Mid-Year Notes Analysis	70
Coding and Theme Development	71
Triangulation.....	72
Peer Debriefing.....	72
Conclusion	73
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	74
Participants.....	74
Demographic Data	76
Annotated Narratives	76
How Are Things Going.....	94
Analytic Themes	97
Mid-Year Phone Interviews.....	99
High School Advising Experiences: A Mixed Bag	99
Satisfaction with Academic Advising Prior to College	100
Who Helped Before College.....	106
No Major, No Problem. Or is it	110
Concerns About Being Undecided.....	110
Messages From Others.....	117
So Many Choices, So Little Time.....	121
Majors Under Consideration.....	122
Appeal of Certain Majors.....	125
Learning to Crawl Before You Walk.....	130
Initial Advising Expectations.....	131
Actual Advising Session.....	139

Preparation for the Next Session.....	152
Thoughts on College Advising	158
If Only I Would Have Known	164
A Look Back.....	164
Advice for Future First-Year Students.....	168
Making Advising Better.....	172
Conclusion	175
CHAPTER V: Discussion.....	177
Overview of the Study	177
Discussion of the Research Findings	179
Advising Satisfaction: A Tale of Two Situations	179
A Sprint Versus a Marathon: Short-Term and Long-Term Goals	184
It is No Coincidence, It is Confidence	190
Implications for Policy and Practice.....	194
High School Personnel.....	195
Students' Families.....	198
Future Students	200
Academic Advisors.....	202
Academic Advising Administrators.....	205
Implications for Future Research.....	207
Quantitative Research	207
Qualitative Research	208
Mixed Methods Research	211
Conclusion	212
EPILOGUE.....	216
LIST OF REFERENCES	219
APPENDICES	234
Appendix A: Fall Interview Questions	235
Appendix B: Spring Interview Questions	237
Appendix C: Letter Seeking Research Permission	239
Appendix D: Participant Flyer.....	241
Appendix E: Winter Interview Phone Script	243
Appendix F: Expert in the Field and Peer Debriefing Information	245
Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet	247
VITA.....	250

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	55
2. Six-Year Graduation Rates	63
3. Average ACT of First-year Students	64
4. First-year Fall to Fall Retention Rate.....	64
5. Interview Dates	75
6. Participant Gender and Ethnicity	76
7. Advising Help Before College.....	106
8. Majors Under Consideration.....	123
9. Advising Session Description Fall.....	142
10. Advising Session Description Spring	145
11. Advising Process Thoughts Fall	159
12. Advising Process Thoughts Spring.....	162

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Academic advisors and advising programs can have a major impact on first-year students in higher education. As new students are facing the transition from high school to college, academic advisors serve as a primary connection for first-year students to institutions of higher learning. This connection presents advisors with an excellent opportunity to engage students in positive experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Harvard professor Richard J. Light (2001) supported this notion when he stated, “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81). Students who engage in interactions leading to positive experiences will form a cohesive bond to the university. This bond potentially benefits both the student and the institution for many years to come.

Through their research on student experiences, Noldon, Kim, and Sedlacek (2000) found that engagement with advisors correlated to increased student persistence and satisfaction. Students who are able to develop strong and satisfying relationships with an advisor are poised to form a positive interaction that promotes a favorable attitude towards the overall academic experience. Based on the belief that advising positively affects student success, and that in-depth, personal relationships between advisors and students are most effective, universities have sought to provide more opportunities to develop student-advisor relationships (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

Research has shown that a personal relationship between the academic advisor and the student is important for student satisfaction, success, and retention (Alexitch, 2002; Habley & Morales, 1998; Yarbrough, 2002). Tinto (1999) concluded that universities are able to retain

students when the institution is committed to all facets of student support services with effective academic advising being at the forefront. For example, a survey of student satisfaction involving 226,423 undergraduates in 425 universities was conducted by Noel-Levitz, Inc (2006). In this study researchers found that academic advising was the second most important area of the college experience, behind quality of instruction. Furthermore, the satisfaction levels of academic advising related to overall student retention. Thus, universities that are able to extend positive advising experiences to students will be rewarded with increased retention and an atmosphere of student satisfaction.

Effective academic advisors realize they are on the front line of support and strive to make sure that students' academic needs are met and their problems resolved expeditiously. In today's higher education consumer culture where rising tuition, tremendous student loan debt, and overbearing parents are all highly visible issues, student satisfaction is paramount (Smith & Fleming, 2007). Academic advisors have the ability to assist in all facets of higher education, which should potentially enhance consumer satisfaction. Unfortunately, not all academic advisors and advising programs are meeting the satisfaction levels of students. Gardner (1995) acknowledged that first-year students expect advisors to be caring and competent, while displaying professionalism in their availability, knowledge, and accuracy during the advising process. However, Low (2000) indicated that academic advising services are often the area students are least satisfied with as reported on national studies of student satisfaction.

Academic advising offers the potential to help students clarify educational and career goals, select coursework that is compatible with interests and skills, and develop a personal relationship with a university faculty or staff member (Metzner, 1989). The connection that advisors help students create between their personal goals and institutional resources may lead to

greater involvement in the institution, increased learning, and retention (Astin, 1994).

Universities are recognizing the potential that academic advising affords to all students, and therefore are devoting greater resources to academic advising programs (Frost, 1991).

Institutions “will develop policies, make decisions, and allocate resources to enhance freshman success. They will do so because there is overwhelming evidence that students’ success is, in large part, determined by their experiences during freshman year” (Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989, p. 12). Higher education institutions must do what is necessary and put forth extra efforts to retain the students they worked to recruit (Gardner, 1986).

College students have implicit standards when it comes to expectations from the college experience and how the total college experience should be. What students have heard from family, peers, or may have experienced in high school during visits to campuses assists in the creation of these expectations. One area in which high expectations are shown is in relation to academic advising. Expectations concerning preferred models, approaches, and the type of advisor that appeals to students have been a major focus of efforts to promote academic success. Students may respond better to an advisor who utilizes a specific advising approach such as appreciative: a positive question-based advising model (Bloom, 2008); developmental: a student decision-making advising model (Crookston, 1972); intrusive: a targeted advising model for at-risk students (Earl, 1988); or, prescriptive advising: a model that addresses specific student issues (Crookston, 1972). Other students, however, may be more concerned about the type of advisor such as faculty, professional, or peer who will assist them on their academic journey. Excellent advising interactions have a profound impact in promoting student satisfaction, which in turn can lead to greater student retention (Astin, 1994). Academic advising serves as a powerful force in promoting the overall college student experience. According to King and Kerr

(2005) “academic advising can be viewed as the hub of the wheel that establishes links to all other support services on campus” (p. 320).

Prior studies conducted by researchers in academic advising have found room for improvement in the field of academic advising as it relates to students being satisfied with their advising experiences and the institution in general (Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Gallagher & Allen, 2000; Harrison 2006). Further research on student expectations and experiences with academic advising will assist students, academic advisors, and university administrators with creating more positive experiences for everyone involved in the overall educational process.

Statement of Problem

In today’s higher education society, student retention and graduation rates are closely monitored. Institutions with higher rates are viewed as more successful than their peers. Unfortunately, not all institutions have high retention and graduation rates. One factor that must be taken into account is admission standards. According to a report from the Gates Foundation, schools with the least selective admissions criteria have the lowest average graduation rates (Hess, Schneider, Carey, & Kelly, 2009).

Private groups such as the Gates and Lumina Foundations are contributing a significant amount of money for higher education to ensure an educated society. According to the Lumina Foundation’s website (2010), their goal is for 60% of all Americans to hold degrees by 2025. To support their goal, they donated \$58.1 million in 2009. With this funding comes increased institutional accountability. In Lumina’s Four Steps to Finishing First in Higher Education Report (2009), it is noted that “taxpayers need more value from their existing investments. Governors and legislators should use the annual budget and appropriations processes to stimulate

attention, action, and collaboration by chancellors and presidents” (p. 2). Lumina advocated for “rewarding institutions that focus on students’ completing quality programs, not just attempting them” (p. 2).

Six-year graduation rates are the primary metric used to track accountability. Thelin (2009, ¶ 3) pointed out that, “few state universities graduate more than about 65 percent of their undergraduates in six years.” Losing 35 percent of students is an issue that needs to be addressed, but where does one begin? Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1985) found “overwhelming evidence that student success is largely determined by experiences during the freshman year” (as cited in Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989, p. 1). Helping students succeed during their first year is the initial step on the path to success in higher education, and a key strategy for improving six-year graduation rates.

Another important problem that needs to be noted is with the slowing economy and government funding decreases, tuition is the primary form of an institution’s revenue (Weisbrod, Ballou, & Asch, 2008). Institutions are faced with tough decisions regarding how to address the shortcomings in government funding, while not out pricing their students through tuition increases. The cost of recruiting one new student to college approximates the cost of retaining 3-5 already enrolled students (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Bean and Hossler (1990) noted that a student who graduates from an institution in four years will generate the same income as four new students who do not persist after their first year. New student recruitment is important, but retaining current students is more important from a cost analysis model. In order to maintain the tuition revenue, student satisfaction is paramount in attracting and retaining the consumer, which in this case are students.

Student satisfaction with academic advising is related to overall student satisfaction and retention (Corts, et al., 2000; McCalla-Wriggins, 2000; Tinto, 2004). A satisfied student who is persisting toward his/her degree is more likely to graduate. Because academic advising plays a major role in student retention and graduation, every effort must be made to ensure universities are delivering what students expect from successful academic advising.

Students may not graduate, or even persist from year one to year two for a variety of reasons. However, students with declared academic majors and career goals have been reported to persist and graduate at higher levels when compared to their peers who are undecided (Anderson, 1997; Leppel, 2001; Noel, 1985). Those students who are uncertain of their majors and future careers are still very important. From an accountability perspective, the institution needs these students to graduate. Additionally, the institution would like to keep them satisfied in order to sustain tuition revenue. A major concern among institutions is balancing the accountability risk of undecided students not persisting and graduating at the same rate as their decided peers, while willingly accepting their tuition checks. Tinto (2004) noted that successful retention programs must have effective advising. Furthermore, he acknowledged that effective advising must give superb support to students who enter college undecided in their major.

Significance of Study

The institution in this study, a doctorate-granting university classified by the Carnegie category as a high research activity institution, values the importance of high retention and six-year graduation rates. According to the Institutional Research (IR) Department, the institution had a 78.1% acceptance rate in 2009. This is problematic, as the institution has limited control of the high acceptance rate, yet is still accountable for the graduation rate of this cohort of students who are less college ready than a cohort of peers entering a more selective institution. Admission

standards for the institution under study, and all public 4-year institutions in the state, are administered by a selected board of officials within the state government. Additionally, there are students who do not meet initial admission requirements, but are allowed to enroll in a summer development program. If they successfully complete the summer program, they are allowed admission in the fall. According to IR data, the six-year graduation rate for the 2000-2003 cohorts is 56.22%; significantly less than the 65% Thelin (2009) claimed should be goal.

One group that has been documented to have lower retention and graduation rates in national studies is students undecided in their major (Anderson, 1997; Leppel, 2001; Noel, 1985). Institution data from the most recent six-year cohort (students that began in 2003) indicated that 60.5% of undecided students graduated in six years. Although this is better than the 2000-2003 average for the entire institution, it is parallel to the overall institution graduation rate of 2003 which was also 60.5%. This rate revealed that 39.5% of students who were undecided in the major failed to graduate.

In the previous section it was noted that students who persist from year one to year two have a better chance of graduating. According to IR data, the freshmen cohorts had a first-year retention rate of 80.3%, 80.5%, and 78.3% from 2005-2007. Undecided students had a retention rate of 81.6%, 78.8%, and 75.9%. Undecided students returned at a lower rate 2 out of 3 years when compared to their peers with declared majors. This specific population is advised by the campus Advising Center (AC). Institutions need to be proactive in finding a solution to this known deficiency. Experts believe that quality academic advising for undecided students can be a major facet in this populations' success (Corts, et al., 2000; McCalla-Wriggins, 2000; Tinto, 2004).

This research was a preliminary exploration of a larger problem of undecided students being retained and graduated from the institution under study. I sought to understand ways to improve academic advising based on first-year undecided students' perspectives. Understanding how first-year undecided students view academic advising experiences can help advisors better serve this specific population, and increase satisfaction levels with academic advising. Furthermore, it was important for this study to attain rich, meaningful data from the students. This data provided insight for academic advisors and administrators associated with the AC to better understand how advising experiences can assist in the students' overall satisfaction with the institution, thus improving institutional retention and graduation rates.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore academic advising experiences of first-year students who are undecided in a major at a public southeastern high research activity institution, and how academic advisors could better serve them relative to these experiences.

Research Questions

I proposed a qualitative case study grounded in phenomenology to address the following questions:

1. How do students being advised by the AC describe their experiences and perspectives on academic advising during their first year of college?
2. How can the AC and the academic advisors better serve these first-year students relative to their experiences and perspectives of the advising process?

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

For this qualitative case study, I used Gordon's (2007) Development Approach regarding college students' indecision regarding selecting a major. Gordon addressed five key tenets of

student development theory and how they relate to undecided students. Gordon claimed (p. 56-60):

1. All human beings develop through a life cycle that has continuity and form.
2. Development is stage and task related.
3. Certain developmental tasks are more dominant at certain stages in the life cycle than others.
4. Developmental tasks progress from the simple to the increasing complex.
5. Many developmental tasks are interrelated and are dealt with simultaneously.

Gordon's work with Development Approach was very useful because this study consists of only first-year undecided students. The development of the undecided students in this study mirrored aspects Gordon addressed in her five tenets. The stage of development a student was going through impacted his/her academic advising experience. Therefore, academic advisors knowledge of Development Approach may assist the advisor in his/her advising practice. Implications for first-year undecided students regarding the Development Approach Tenets are further explored in Chapter II.

The qualitative theoretical orientation for this study was phenomenology. I chose phenomenology because of Patton's (2008) central phenomenological question: "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people" (p. 132)? Patton elucidated that phenomenology was human beings making sense of a lived experience. In this study the central focus was the academic advising process first-year undecided students encountered as described through their lived experiences during the fall and spring semesters in college. Phenomenological inquiry is further explained in Chapter III.

Overview of Methods

This study sought first-hand academic advising accounts from first-year undecided students who are advised in the AC. Data was collected through various forms of personal communication. Students for the study were chosen by purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) described purposeful sampling as “information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling” (p. 230). Most students selected for this study participated in two face-to-face interviews and a mid-year phone interview. The first interview occurred after the fall advising session, while the second took place following the spring advising session. The mid-year phone interview occurred after the fall semester.

The researcher was the primary investigator and conducted all interviews. Additionally, the researcher recorded field notes during the mid-year phone conversation which assisted in further understanding the advising experience. Used together, these three interviews provided a semblance of triangulation. Triangulation “builds on the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach” (Patton, 2002 p. 307). Interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded in order to determine emerging themes. The opened-ended interview questions allowed the students to discuss their academic advising experiences in their own words. Interview questions are listed on appendices A and B.

Delimitations

This study involved one academic advising program and academic advisors within the program at one public Carnegie high research activity university. The data was collected through individual student interviews and mid-year phone conversations with first-year students who were classified as undecided during the 2010-2011 academic year. Although other first-year

students may have had some indecision regarding their major, only undecided students were included in this study. Undecided students were advised by professional academic advisors in the AC, while faculty members advised students with declared majors in the Liberal Arts.

Groups that will benefit from this study include: students, faculty, staff, and administrators at the institution. This study was not designed to generalize findings to be used at other institutions. However, results could assist other four-year public higher education institutions across the Southeastern United States who enroll a significant number of undecided students and utilize centralized advising.

Limitations

Patton's (2002) discussion of qualitative inquiry limitations guides the possible limitations that may impact this study. Truthfulness of the participants was difficult to gauge, and could have created problems with the research data. Participant ability to articulate individual experiences limited students' descriptions of their experiences. Some students may have had a personal bias or varying emotional states that could have affected the account of their experiences at the time of their interview. It was impossible for the researcher to completely be aware of the participants' backgrounds. The researcher had no control if a student made an advising appointment early in the semester, or came for advising during walk-in advising. Walk-in advising occurred during priority registration. The volume of student traffic significantly increased during priority registration. Therefore, students may have felt the advisor did not address all of their concerns or spend enough time with them individually.

Notes taken during the mid-year phone interviews may have had limitations such as being "incomplete or inaccurate" (Patton, 2002, p. 306). The potential for researcher error must

also be noted. Misinterpretations of observations or inaccuracy in coding interview data were all limitations that had the possibility to affect this study.

Students were asked both written and orally to not say the advisor's name or give any personal characteristics of the advisor during the interviews. Students were reminded of this before each of the three interviews. However, a student may have forgotten and acknowledged which advisor he/she met with, thus I considered this a possible limitation of my study.

Definition of Terms

1. Academic Advising: "Situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 3).
2. Appreciative Advising: "Intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials" (Bloom, 2008, p. 179).
3. Case Study: "A qualitative strategy in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (Creswell, 2009, p. 227).
4. Developmental Advising: Advising that is concerned with students' academic decisions, but also with assisting students develop holistically through interactions with others, learning attitudes, problem-solving strategies, and decision-making skills (Crookston, 1972).

5. Faculty Advisors: Institutional faculty that are “able to answer discipline-specific questions and have the greatest understanding of course content and curriculum rationale in their own areas” (Reinarz, 2000, p. 214).
6. Intrusive Advising: “Advising with an at-risk student that is designed to (a) facilitate informed, responsible decision-making, (b) increase student motivation toward activities in his/her social/academic community, and (c) ensure the probability of the student’s academic success” (Earl, 1988, p. 27).
7. Peer Advisors: “Undergraduate students in various roles to support academic advising efforts” (Self, 2008, p. 274).
8. Phenomenology: “A qualitative approach in which the researcher focuses on capturing the experience of an activity or concept from participants’ perspectives” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 600).
9. Prescriptive Advising: Address specific student problems by answering specific questions. Larger issues of student development are rarely addressed (Crookston, 1972).
10. Professional Advisors: Institutional professionals “employed to devote the majority of their workday to meeting directly with students to address academic curriculum requirements, college policies and procedures, and general student development and success issues” (Self, 2008, p. 269).
11. Retention: Observing the number of students who enroll in a university and remain to graduate or persist in their studies at the university (Wyman, 1997).
12. Undecided Students: Students who are “unwilling, unable, or unready to make educational and/or vocational decisions” (Gordon, 2007, p. x).

Conclusion

Academic advising can play a major role in student success, satisfaction, and retention. This study was important for academic advisors and administrators to understand students' experiences regarding academic advising through first-hand accounts, and how proactive approaches can increase the quality of academic advising at institutions of higher learning. The statement and significance of the problem demonstrate why the study was necessary, and how the outcomes can guide positive implementations to the academic advising process.

Potential contributions from this study will help guide the academic advising program and advisors for first-year undecided students. Research questions were noted and directed the study under the two primary focal points of student experience with the advising program, and academic advisor improvement. The theoretical and conceptual framework assisted the reader in further understanding the specific population used in data collection through phenomenological inquiry, while the overview of the study briefly described the research format used. The delimitations and limitations sections described the study's parameters and issues that could have limited the scope and findings of the study. The chapter closed with definitions that will help the reader easily understand academic advising terminology in which he/she may be unfamiliar.

Organization of the Study

In Chapter II the reader will gain a better understanding of the importance of academic advising and discover prior research in the field. This information will allow the reader to appreciate and further understand why a study examining undecided students' experiences regarding academic advising is very important. The literature review is organized in several sections entitled Academic Advising Structure, Academic Advisors, Impact of Academic Advising, Freshmen Experiences with Advising, and Defining the Undecided Student. Chapter

III describes the methods used for this study. Sections in the third chapter include: Research Design, Role of the Researcher, Data Collection, Research Questions, and Data Analysis. Chapter IV describes the findings from the study. The two sections in Chapter IV include: Participants and Analytic Themes. Chapter V concludes the study with a discussion. The discussion addresses: Research Findings and Implications for Policy, Practice and Future Research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review is based on a series of related themes. The first theme addresses academic advising structure. Within advising structure there are three subthemes: history, advising models, and advising approaches. The second theme comprehensively explores academic advisors. This theme is categorized by analysis of advisor types, primary advising functions, and additional roles and responsibilities. The third theme investigates the impact of academic advising, and includes model practices. The fourth theme examines freshmen's experiences with academic advising. The last theme defines the undecided student, and explores Gordon's (2007) tenets of the developmental theory approach.

Academic Advising Structure

Academic advising centralizes the students' goals and objectives and ties them to the educational experience. There are many ways to deliver advisement services to students. Although there is general agreement concerning the importance of academic advising for the efficient and effective functioning of the student, there is little agreement regarding the nature of academic advising and who should perform the function. Habley (1983) makes it clear that the organizational structure alone will not "make or break" an advising program. Whereas the organizational structure is important, harmony between the institution's mission and the arrangement of academic advisement is the key to the successful delivery of advising services. To fully evaluate and understand all aspects of effective academic advising, the crucial issues of

advising models and approaches must be reviewed. To gain an appreciation of current advising practices, one must understand academic advising from a historical perspective.

History

Student services at institutions of higher learning were extremely limited and even non-existent during the Colonial Era in the United States. Fenske (1980) acknowledged that early colleges had religious affiliations. Clergy served as the faculty and administrators for the colleges. Colleges required all students to attend chapel and most of the lessons came from the Bible. However, this structure eventually diminished. “Consistent with decreased societal concern with religion, many facets of higher education related to religion also changed by the time of the Civil War” (p. 6). As colonies became states, state-supported institutions began to increase. States such as Virginia, Wisconsin, and Michigan found this to be a difficult task in the beginning. The creation of the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act was influential in supporting public access to state institutions. According to Thelin (2004), “some historians have hailed this legislation as the genesis of ‘democracy’s colleges’ – sources of affordable, practical higher education offered by state colleges and universities” (p. 75). By the early 1900s colleges began to take the shape as we know them today. “Nearly every state had committed itself to significantly upgrading its state university or universities in size and quality. Most of these institutions included research and service as part of their mission” (Fenske, p. 10).

With greater access and less religious affiliation, college students began to make more choices for themselves. Thelin (2004) documented, Charles Eliot’s elective system at Harvard afforded the opportunity for students to be actively involved in decisions that affected their education. Some institutions followed Harvard’s lead, while others continued a fixed course of study. The elective system drew strength and spread as faculty members began conducting

research in their fields, or developed new ones. Having different scholarly fields required students to make choices regarding academic majors. With the faculty increasingly focused on research, and the new decision-making responsibilities placed on students, student services emerged as a valuable resource for college students.

In the years following the religious to secular movement, faculty and tutors assisted in roles other than pure course instruction. These additional responsibilities are some of the first documented cases of advising. Academic advising was not a defined practice, yet additional roles faculty played are similar to certain roles advisors oversee today (Frost, 2000). During this time period Kuhn (2008) pointed out that faculty and students did not always agree and disorderly conduct was common throughout. Horowitz (1987) agreed as she wrote, “college life was born in revolt. Not just the insubordination inherent in youth, but a wave of violent, collective uprising in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries against the combined authority of college professors and presidents” (p. 23). Fortunately for all parties involved students became more involved in the education process through academic majors and electives, thus resulting in less student resistance. “The introduction of curricular electives in the 1870s initiated the need for advisors to guide students in the successful pursuit of their chosen paths” (Kuhn, p. 5). By giving students a choice in their curriculum, students and faculty shared common interests and formed a good working relationship. Frost (2000) reported that Harvard and Johns Hopkins were two of the first institutions to acknowledge advising. Leadership at these two institutions connected the students and faculty in such a manner that a system of academic advising could be identified.

President Daniel Coit Gilman at Johns Hopkins University, whose initiatives helped to usher in this second advising era, not only used the word ‘adviser’ to refer to someone

who gave direction to a student concerning an academic, social, or personal matter.

(Kuhn, p. 5)

“Continued formalization of academic advising on most campuses was one response to two forces: student populations that were increasingly numerous and diverse, and faculties that were devoted to research” (Frost, 2000, p. 11). The World War II Serviceman’s Readjustment Act and the Higher Education Act of 1965 were direct causes of the increased number of students entering college in the mid-1900s (Fenske, 1980). As demands of the faculty increased, along with student enrollment, the need for professional advisors developed. In earlier eras, advisors were primarily used for course registration. Frost pinpointed the 1970s to the present day as a time when advising became an examined activity. Advisors, both professional and faculty, began to examine exemplary practices at other institutions.

According to Thurmond and Miller (2006) the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was formed in 1979. The establishment of NACADA allowed academic advising to be identified as an established profession. Today NACADA is the global leader in higher learning academic advising with over 11,000 members worldwide, multiple publications, conferences and institutes, and numerous other resources for advisors. Academic advising continues to be an important aspect in the higher education experience. Although the terminology used to describe advising has varied throughout the years, the founding principle of institution professionals helping students has remained constant.

Advising Models

Pardee (2000) addressed the two primary types of academic advising models utilized in advising. The model structures are classified as decentralized and centralized, with various

categorized models within each structure. An understanding of these models is crucial to appreciate the effects of advising for students.

One important decentralized model is the faculty-only model where all students have departmental faculty advisors (Pardee, 2000). Students with majors are assigned to a faculty member within their discipline. This model is beneficial because of the low direct institutional cost. Additionally, students have both direct and indirect contact with their advisor throughout the year. A weakness of this model is that advisors may face time constraints due to teaching, research, and publishing that may affect their availability to students.

The satellite model is another example of the decentralized model. According to Pardee (2000) “Advising is provided by central offices in each of the academic subunits at the institution” (p. 194). This model is more expensive to incorporate because extra space, staff, and other resources are required. One prominent disadvantage of this model is that when students change majors, they may have difficulties in switching from one center to another.

The centralized model is exemplified by the self-contained model. The self-contained model is where all advising occurs in an advising center that is staffed by professional advisors. Under this model, faculty may be assigned to advise students at the center on a part-time basis. In this model, all academic advising, from orientation to graduation, is provided from a central administrative unit. The dean or director oversees all advising functions. This model has several advantages: trained staff, consistent quality of advising, easy accessibility, and on-site supervision of advising services. In using a central location, such as an advising center, students lose the expertise of faculty and the faculty-student interaction that the advising role promotes (King & Kerr, 1995).

A combination of both decentralized and centralized is represented by shared models (Pardee, 2000). The supplementary and split models are two shared models that are used by many universities. In the supplementary model, all students have departmental advisors. The advising office serves the department advisors by providing resources such as advising information systems, handbooks on policies, and training on advising techniques. For students, advising office typically operates as a referral source for advising. This model offers a certain degree of coordination and a consistent quality of administrative support services. Habley and Morales (1998) stated that a drawback of the supplementary model is that students with special needs may not be served.

Pardee (2000) noted the split model of advising, characterized by initial advising of students being divided between department faculty advisors and professional advisors in a central office, is common on many university campuses. “Students with majors may be assigned to faculty in their major department while students without majors are assigned to staff in an advising center. Advising center staff have authority for monitoring and approving academic transactions for students” (p. 197). Additionally, the advising center serves the department faculty advisor as a clearinghouse on advising information and as a referral for students with academic difficulties. This model has the advantage of offering high-risk students the additional support needed to improve chances for academic success (Pardee, 2004).

Advising Approaches

Over the years, two prevailing approaches to academic advising have come into view: developmental and prescriptive. O’Banion (1972/1994) proposed that advising by faculty may not be the best approach, and indicated that a developmental academic advising approach would be better. O’Banion recommended that advising address the needs of the whole student. In

addition, O'Banion stressed the importance of a counseling-based advising service. Advising would be seen as a partnership between the advisor and advisee. He stated, "Students are responsible for making decisions throughout the advising process. The advisor is responsible for providing information and a climate of freedom in which students can best make such decisions" (p. 11).

Within developmental advising the advisors' role is primarily one of an enabler. Under this theory, the advisor seeks to assist in the development of the students' potentialities. Developmental advising sessions are planned for the student to have regular input and students and advisors participate together in decision-making responsibilities. The focus of the experience is on learning for the student and the advisor (Frost, 1991).

One of the characteristics of the developmental advising style is that advisors look for students who need help with planning and provide assistance by helping them reach their goals (Crookston, 1972). Advisors offer support to students and help them find personal satisfaction by assisting them with goal setting and achieving their goals. Ender, Winston, and Miller (1984) described developmental advising as a continuous process. The student is responsible for taking advantage of information presented and guidance that is offered. Advisors collaborate with others on campus to help provide a well rounded experience.

Developmental advising is characterized by ways in which the students make a connection with the advisor. Advisors who advocate the developmental advising style address students with a caring and sympathetic approach (Creamer & Creamer, 1994). Academic advisors must know the students in order to match the correct approach with each student. By using developmental academic advising, the use of interactive advising, counseling, and other support strategies are employed to assist students in setting and obtaining goals. The University

of Memphis employs developmental advising as a common advising approach. According to the university's website, "In order to serve in the roles of facilitator, coordinator, and referral agent, an advisor must enter into a partnership with his/her advisee and go beyond ensuring that the student is choosing coursework that is directly applicable to his/her major" (§ 2). Advisors at Memphis have five major areas they address with students: exploring life goals, exploring career goals, choosing programs, selecting courses, and scheduling courses.

In contrast to developmental advising, prescriptive advising is founded on an authoritative relationship (Crookston, 1972). Crookston looked at prescriptive advising in terms of a medical relationship. Crookston stated, "The advisor is the doctor and the student is the patient. The patient comes in to the advisor and describes some 'ailment.' In turn, the advisor prescribes a 'remedy.' The student is then responsible for following the advisor's advice" (p. 13). The advisor is an authority figure who teaches and the student learns. The advisor believes the main consideration in this type of relationship is that when the advice is given, the task has been completed. The student must take action at this point.

Advisors who use a prescriptive advising style often consider the students' limitations instead of what they are capable of doing (Crookston, 1972). According to Crookston, advisors may form their opinion and base the type of advising intervention on students' college entry scores. In the prescriptive advising style, advisors sometimes feel that students are unable to make wise decisions. Prescriptive advising assumes that all students are equally prepared for the work required and simply provides students with the agenda of courses needed to complete the degree. The burden of finding additional information falls on the student.

Prescriptive advising focuses on the requirements of academic performance and not on the holistic development of students. Prescriptive academic advising is a more traditional

advising process, in which the advisor takes the responsibility for determining the students' problems and gives solutions. Academic concerns such as course selection are the only or primary focus of the process (Appleby, 2001; Grites & Gorden, 2000). As student satisfaction continues to be a primary concern for academic administrators, some institutions are moving away from prescriptive advising, and exploring other approaches that may yield higher satisfaction levels among students. For example, Utah State University acknowledged that prescriptive advising did address an immediate need, but "does not take advantage of the professional advisor's expertise, and requires students to discover academic and professional opportunities on their own" (Harrison, 2009, ¶ 2). Additionally, by allowing prescriptive advising to give a quick fix, it "may be allowing a growing issue to fester" (¶ 2). By Utah State acknowledging some of the flaws with prescriptive advising, they can identify another approach that will yield positive relationships between advisors and advisees.

While O'Banion (1972/1994) was a staunch supporter of developmental advising, O'Banion also supported an "either/or" approach and suggests a philosophy recognizing that prescriptive advising as well as the use of both faculty advisors and academic advisors can be valuable depending on the situation. Fielstein (1994) supported this notion stating,

Perhaps in our enthusiasm for developmental advising, we overlooked the obvious, the value of certain traditional, prescriptive activities as prerequisites to developmental advising. It could be that some of the so-called prescriptive activities have been given a bum rap and are actually critical building blocks that enable developmental advising to evolve. (p. 77)

Using the analogy of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Fielstein (1994) suggested that efforts to work with students on higher level needs will be unsuccessful unless basic needs have been met.

Perhaps O'Banion and Fielstein recognized that an integrated or comprehensive approach may best meet the individual needs of different students at various times and stages within development and the advising process. Fielstein (1987) also found that students wanted an advisor who assisted students with registration, major and minor decision making process, and course selection. Further studies from Fielstein (1989) found that not all students want a personal relationship with an advisor. Future approaches may combine developmental with prescriptive advising in a more meaningful and agreeable way.

Two other innovative academic advising approaches that have gained popularity in recent years are intrusive and appreciative advising. The intrusive advising approach recognizes unique needs of at-risk students including those from ethnic or minority groups, those who are academically disadvantaged, or students from low-socioeconomic levels. According to Upcraft and Kramer (1995), since many first-year students are not well prepared and do not want to seek academic assistance, intrusive advising may be the best process in which the university and advisors take the first step to help these students find success. As Earl (1988) stated, "the intrusive approach of advising is action-oriented to involving and motivating students to seek help when needed" (p. 16). Intrusive advising utilizes the good qualities of prescriptive advising and developmental advising to identify academic crisis. Glennen (1995) acknowledged that intrusive advising uses a variety of interventions where the academic advisor is more involved in the affairs of the student.

Two examples of intrusive advising can be viewed at the University of Minnesota and Old Dominion University. The University of Minnesota's General College utilizes intrusive academic advising. Albecker (2005) noted at Minnesota "the intrusive model is proactive and seeks to address problems as they emerge, rather than being reactive. Essentially, advisors reach

out to help students instead of waiting for students to seek help” (§ 4). Earl (n.d.) acknowledged “a study at Old Dominion University of an intrusive model that identified students on probation at the end of their first semester and contracted with them for specific strategies of academic assistance resulted in a statistically significant improvement three semesters later in grades and in persistence as compared to a control sample” (§ 6). Students may not realize they need help, or may be unfamiliar with how to seek assistance. Intrusive advising targets the students who need assistance before it is too late.

Appreciative advising is an approach used by advisors that allows advisors to empower students by asking positive questions. The primary goal of appreciative advising is to make students aware of their strengths. Bloom (2008) defined appreciate advising as “the intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials” (p. 179). Appreciative advising has four phases: “discovery, dream, design, and destiny” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Academic advisors that utilize appreciative advising have the opportunity to assist students make educated decisions based on their strengths. Bloom and Martin (2002) reported on how academic advisors can use the four phases of appreciative advising during academic advising meetings. During the first phase (discovery) advisors ask students about their strengths and passions. Advisors must carefully listen while asking positive, constructive questions. There is some carry-over from the discovery phase to the second phase (dream). Using students’ responses, the advisor assists students in clarifying their interests based on individual strengths. In a cooperative effort, students’ dreams are broken down into an attainable plan. In the third phase (design), advice is offered on how to achieve short and long term goals which align with the students’ dreams. The final phase (destiny) is where students strive to accomplish these

goals. However, the student is never alone, as the advisor is still there to offer advice and support. Appreciative advising can be a great advising approach for students undecided in their major. Allowing students to appreciate their strengths, combined with the expertise of the advisor, should make a winning combination. Students can explore majors that will highlight their strengths, and lead to future careers where the students can maximize their full potential.

The University of South Carolina's Academic Centers for Excellence (ACE) began using appreciative advising in 2007. Students who seek services from ACE fill out an assessment before meeting with an academic advisor. The assessment identifies students' strengths and assets. Academic Advisors use the assessment to help build a rapport with the students by asking positive open-ended questions regarding the students' strengths and abilities. The new approach has been considered to be an effective tool for building a successful advising relationship (Hall, 2008).

The University of North Carolina Greensboro is another example of appreciative advising in action. According to an article titled *Does Appreciative Advising Work? The Answer is YES!*, the institution found appreciative advising to be very successful.

In a fall 2006 pilot, readmitted dismissed students were asked to voluntarily sign a contract with Student Academic Services in which they committed to several Appreciative Advising sessions in which developed a personal academic recovery plan. At the end of the fall 2006 semester, 90% of the participants in the program were eligible to continue in the spring 2007 semester, and 58% earned term GPAs of over 3.00. The mean GPA among participants was 2.86. Conversely, among students who did not participate, 33% percent were eligible to continue, and the mean GPA was 1.29. Since

then the average growth of participants' GPA has been consistently higher than those who did not participate in the program.

University of North Carolina Greensboro continued to see positive outcome from appreciative advising, as 92% from the fall 2007 cohort were eligible to continue. Appreciative advising is a good approach to use to build student confidence, while assisting them with other common advising procedures.

Academic Advisors

Academic advisors vary from institution. Professional rank, job qualifications, responsibilities, and reporting structure are some of the ways academic advisors differ from institution to institution. Regardless of the differences, academic advisors still have one primary goal which is helping students. Habley (1995) addressed three key areas advisors must be knowledgeable of in order to be successful: conceptual theories, informational issues, and relational skills. Knowledge in student development theory will allow the advisor to better serve a variety of students. Academic advisors must be knowledgeable in institutional policies and procedures. Additionally, knowledge in the specific curriculum along with trends in the field will also make the advisor effective. Relational skills are another good attribute in order to be a quality academic advisor. An advisor who shows genuine interest in an individual student, while allowing the student to develop a comfort zone will make the advisor/advisee relationship more effective.

Analysis of Advisor Types

The delivery of academic advising has evolved rapidly in the recent past and advisor characteristics are extremely important to the variety of advising approaches. Advising roles have emerged to address the changing needs of students and institutions. Chancellor Robert M.

Berdahl, chief academic officer of the University of California at Berkeley, said, “It is necessary for the academic advising structure to be flexible. The pool of advisors ought to have varied expertise and experience to accommodate transitions in student needs” (Berdahl, 1995, p. 8). The advising environment calls for flexibility and a mixture of skill types as advising systems respond to institutional changes and student expectations. Students have a variety of complex needs, and the advising delivery approaches and individual advisors must be able to accommodate all needs. King (1998) provided a useful template for comparing the strengths and limitations of all advisor types. King explained several ways in which to fit these comparisons, including access and availability to students, priority placed on academic advising, knowledge of the area of study, knowledge and experience in student counseling roles, credibility with faculty, and training requirements.

Faculty members provide many advising services exceptionally well and are able to answer discipline-specific questions and have the greatest understanding of course content. In their mentoring relationships, faculty may open a line of communication with students both inside and outside the classroom. Such rapport is a significant contribution to the undergraduate experience for students (Lagowski & Vick, 1995). Experience and ability to counsel students in nonacademic problems varies throughout institutions. Although all faculty members are not expected to deal directly with students’ personal problems, it is essential to be informed about support services. According to the 308 four-year public institutions that participated in the ACT’s Sixth National Survey on Academic Advising, 100% responded that instructional faculty are used to advise in some departments (Habley, 2004). However, the number of institutions that practice a faculty-only advising model is steadily decreasing. In the 1987 ACT Survey 32% of

participating institutions acknowledged using a faculty-only advising model. In 2003, only 12% used this approach.

The number of full time professional advisors in higher education continues to increase. Habley (2004) reported 15% of campuses surveyed utilized full- and part-time academic advisors in all departments”. Additionally, “61% utilized these advisors in some departments on campus” (p. 29). Universities have recognized the importance of full-time advisors because of the unique value provided in the delivery of effective academic advising. Full-time advisors are committed to the role and choose to work with students in advising relationships. Professional advisors’ expertise and enthusiasm can be coupled with an infrastructure that provides continuing availability and regular accessibility to students (Pardee, 2000).

In some delivery systems, counselors are used to provide academic advising. Institutions such as community colleges may be likely to use counselors as advisors. For example, a counselor at a community college may offer guidance in several areas. This may include assistance with problem solving, personal issues, career and life planning, and academic advising. The strengths and limitations of using counselors, as described by King (1998), to deliver advising are comparable to those associated with professional advisors. One difference is that professional counselors can provide more in-depth counseling and career services. Strengths of counselors include accessibility to students, and knowledge about curriculum and policies.

Carefully selected and trained peer advisors are used principally at four year public colleges (Halbey & Morales, 1998). Peer advisors may be limited to involvement in support roles in orientation, although institutions may assign additional advising responsibilities. Graduate and undergraduate strengths in advising derive from the ability to relate to advisees. In ACT’s 2003 Survey, 42% of participating institutions acknowledged the use of peer advising in some

departments (Habley, 2004). As department budgets continue to be a concern, the utilization of peer advisors may be a cost efficient solution at some institutions.

Primary Advising Functions

The three most documented evaluation elements of an academic advisor are availability, knowledge, and helpfulness (Creamer & Scott, 2000). These three primary advising functions are vital if an academic advisor is going to be effective. Availability is the pinnacle element, as without availability no other function can be assessed. Academic advisors must have clear knowledge of the academic programs and curriculum of the institution. The ability to give accurate information and correct academic guidance will assist the student in reaching his/her goals. Helpfulness is another key attribute of successful academic advisors. An advisor needs to be available and have knowledge, but in order to fully meet students' expectations, the advisor should be perceived as helpful.

Effective communication is also a key element to the one-on-one academic advising relationship. The advisor must have excellent communication skills in order to build meaningful and lasting relationships. Advisors must understand that listening effectively to what the advisees are saying, and or not saying is an essential communication skill (Halbey & Morales, 1998). In addition to having good listening skills, advisors must become adept at using questioning skills. Learning how to ask questions in order to assist students is vitally important. Advisors also must use referral skills. Effective referral skills depend on an advisor's listening and questioning skills (Nutt, 2000).

Additional Roles and Responsibilities

In today's profession of academic advising, it is common to hear the phrase, "academic advisors must wear many hats." An academic advisor may be known as a friend, mentor, teacher,

gate-keeper, facilitator, or any other term referring to a role the advisor may play in the advisor/advisee relationship. Nutt (2000) stated “Often the one-to-one relationship between the student and the advisor is the only opportunity a student has to build a personal link with the institution” (p. 220). Therefore, the advisor may be the one person a student feels most comfortable with. In this case it is common for the student to open up to the advisor regarding non-academic issues. A good advisor should strive for an open relationship, but understand where to draw the line. The advisor can listen to the student and offer assistance if qualified. However, if the student shares sensitive information in which the advisor is not trained to provide assistance, it is pertinent the advisor make appropriate referrals. A good academic advisor should have knowledge of the institution’s counseling center, and the ability to refer a student in need.

Advisors are frequently seen as instructors in introductory-level, freshmen experience, or academic skills courses. Interaction with students outside the advising office allows advisors to increase their presence on campus, and disseminate their knowledge to a larger audience. Advisors serving as instructors must have good presentation and communication skills. Instructing twenty or more students in a course is vastly different from a one-on-one advising meeting.

Advisors are also asked to support initiatives as needed. In the Academic Support Center at The University of Mississippi, professional advisors have responsibilities other than academic advising. For example, one academic advisor coordinates a campus wide first-year attendance based initiative. This comprehensive program tracks first-year students’ absences, and performs an intervention based on the number of absences a student accumulates. Another advisor coordinates a career decision making course and organizes a campus wide major’s fair. Retention

initiatives are very important to the third professional academic advisor in the Academic Support Center. This advisor serves in any capacity related to retention. Examples of services provided include contacting first-year students that have not registered for the upcoming semester after priority registration has ended, contacting first-year students with low mid-term grades to offer academic assistance, and contacting first-year students who are not returning in order to document specific cases. Although the actual function of advising on classes, curriculum, and campus policies is very important, academic advisors do much more than merely advise.

Impact of Academic Advising

Academic advising offers the potential to help students clarify educational and career goals, select coursework that is compatible with interests and skills, and develop a personal relationship with a university faculty or staff member (Metzner, 1989). The connection that advisors help students create between goals and institutional resources may lead to greater involvement in the institution, increased learning, and retention (Astin, 1994). Universities are recognizing the potential that academic advising affords to all students, and therefore are devoting greater resources to the academic advising programs (Frost, 1991). One area having a strong impact on student satisfaction is the development of personal relationships between advisors and students.

Research has shown that a personal relationship between the academic advisor and the student is important for student satisfaction, success, and retention (Alexitch, 2002; Habley & Morales, 1998; Yarbrough, 2002). Based on the belief that advising positively affects student success, and that in-depth, personal relationships between advisors and students are most effective, universities have sought to provide more opportunities to develop student-advisor relationships (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). According to a study by Alexitch (2002) students with

help-seeking tendencies are more likely to form a positive relationship with an advisor, and will show a better academic performance. Academic advising centers must continue to develop programs to integrate advising into student life with the hope that this will have the greatest impact on students. The increased convenience of academic advising services may lead students to make greater use of the services, and therefore may have a positive impact on student satisfaction with academic advising in the university setting.

Researchers of higher education who have investigated undergraduate education, such as Chickering (1994), have declared that one of the most important factors playing a role in student success and satisfaction is the significance of their association with a responsible, caring adult person in the institution. Based on interviews with undergraduates at Harvard, Light (2001) found that at important junctures in the students' college career, advisors asked specific questions or presented scenarios that made students think about the connection of academic work to personal lives. Light reasoned that advisors do have the ability to affect the way students make decisions. In many cases the only appointed and stable direct attachment a student has with an adult is one with the academic advisor. This relationship with the advisor helps a student shape a meaningful learning experience and has an impact on satisfaction with the advising process.

Banta, Hansen, Black, and Jackson (2002) indicated several areas in which advising was found to relate to student success and overall satisfaction. These areas included: "the transition to college life, academic and social needs integration, adjustment and need satisfaction during the first year, decision making process in selecting the appropriate academic programs and careers, achievement of maximum potential, and academic success and retention" (p. 6).

Academic advisors are often the primary connection first-year students have to an institution. This connection presents advisors with an excellent opportunity to engage students in

positive experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Student engagement with academic advisors correlated to increased student persistence and satisfaction in a study by Nolden, Kim, and Sedlacek (2000). Additionally, Gallagher and Allen (2000) found that students who met with their advisors more frequently displayed greater levels of satisfaction when compared to their peer group who had optional meetings. These advisors utilized a developmental approach, thus created an atmosphere more conducive to engaging the student.

Roderick and Carusetta (2006) researched the implementation of a problem-based learning model designed to increase student engagement using real-life problems. Their findings suggested that students who are more actively engaged develop the appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes to succeed. Students were satisfied with the close faculty interactions and benefited from the additional support.

The quality of academic advising can have a direct effect on student retention. Cuseo (2003) noted that, although a formal connection between advising and student retention had not been established, a substantial argument could be made that academic advising does have a significant impact on student retention. A year later Tinto (2004) acknowledged there is in fact a connection by stating “effective advising is an essential part of successful retention programs” (p. 8). To be effective, Tinto reported advising must address two issues, “students who begin college undecided about their majors and careers” and meet “the needs of the large number of first-generation students” (p. 8). There is a strong connection with factors that are associated with student persistence. Some of these factors are: the overall college experience, positive educational and career planning decisions made by the student, whether the student makes use of support services, student-faculty contact outside the classroom, and the type of advising relationship.

Advising has been shown to have a positive effect on student satisfaction and retention especially in conjunction with the student making wise decisions in choosing the appropriate academic programs and careers (McCalla-Wriggins, 2000). It has been found that student commitment to academic and career goals is one of the major factors that leads to students staying in college and completing their academic studies. Anderson (1997) understood these concepts when he addressed the importance of students who have a meaningful academic and career goal are more likely to remain enrolled. He acknowledged the best way to understand and reach those goals is through informed academic advising. Academic advising is well positioned to make a strong statement on the importance of student planning and decision making (O'Banion, 1972/1994). The demand for student support in this area was supported by research that found that student doubts about their chosen academic goals and the tendency to change educational plans has been reported at various institutions (Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Yarbrough, 2002).

As with most research, similar studies can yield different results. DeBerard, Espielmans, and Julka (2004) did not find clear indicators to predict student retention based on pre-determined variables, while Harrison (2006) found the opposite. Although findings of DeBerard et al. did not produce substantial results, their ideas for identifying at-risk students can be helpful in future research. Harrison expanded on these ideas when he studied withdrawal of first-year students, finding that negative experiences of induction into the academic environment and early teaching and support were two primary factors for student withdrawal. Furthermore, Harrison's findings proved that universities must find ways to get students attached to something at the university in order to increase retention. Tinto (1999) championed academic advising as a way to get first-year students attached to the institution.

Academic advising should be an integral part of the first-year experience, not an adjunct to it. Advising should be woven into the fabric of the freshman year in ways that promote student development and that provide clear, consistent, and accurate information that is easily accessible to students. It should reflect the best professional knowledge of the day. Quite simply, good advising should not be left to chance. (p. 9)

When an advisor is in a position to provide services to students, the advisor has the ability to impact the rate of retention and student satisfaction. Studies on student satisfaction with the excellence of academic advisement in higher education in the past have shown the tendency of low levels of satisfaction. Ender, Winston, and Miller (1984) came to the conclusion that the greatest difficulty students pointed out with the quality of their academic experiences was advising. Despite this prevalent dissatisfaction with advising, students expressed a strong desire for advisor contact.

When initiating or refining an academic advising program, it is often helpful to know what organizational structures institutions display and how certain programmatic components or activities were implemented. Each campus is unique, and the final form of any program reflects the academic and career advising structure and delivery systems that are already in place. Habley (1997) discussed different advising model systems and described how an institution's organizational structure influences the type of advising programs a campus develops. Effective programs have assessed student needs, established efficient communication and information flow patterns, and have in place a system for coordination and supervision.

Model Practices

Michael Brown, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Services and Director of Admissions at the University of Iowa, uses the latest technology and innovative marketing techniques to

highlight the values of the institution. Brown as cited in Farrell and Hoover (2007) stressed, “Iowa is a place where students can come to discover themselves, where there is no rush to declare a major, and where they can explore different options with the help of the intense academic advising program” (p. B4). The Academic Advising Center serves over 8000 students each year with a mentoring program, study skills seminars, writing and speaking labs, and numerous other services.

At Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, the mission of the academic advising program is to prepare students for lifelong learning by empowering students to be self-directed learners and decision makers through a shared advisory process. The system was transformed into an advising mentoring program after a 2006 survey showed results indicating less than 50% of first year students found the advising system met student needs. Mentoring is the cornerstone of the first year advising program, promoting quality interaction between students and advisors. Mandatory attendance is required at advising workshops and an online advisor chat is established (Pedescleaux, 2008).

An early-alert program established at Hanover College in Indiana was established to reinforce the personal connection with academic advising. “Hanover is one of a growing number of colleges with a system that takes into account the ‘whole student experience’,” says Charlie L. Nutt, (as cited in Wasley, 2007, p. A27) associate director with the National Academic Advising Association. The program was set up by a network of interpersonal relationships that is in place from the dean’s office to the dorm room. “Programs like Hanover’s can do more than other approaches to improve retention rates and increase student satisfaction because Hanover looks at student success as a campus wide project,” (Wasley, 2007, p. A27).

Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia has put into place a number of changes to student support services and academic advising. New programs were incorporated as evidence was gathered regarding the effect of advising on student engagement. Regular meetings and ongoing contacts confirm that the more times the students meet with academic advisors, the more satisfied students are with the advising services received. “Similarly, students who meet with their advisors at least twice per semester persist at a much higher rate and are more likely to be in good academic standing at the end of the first year in college compared to peers who met fewer times” (Steingass, 2008 p. 30).

Freshmen Experiences with Advising

Academic advising, whether good or bad, affects the overall student experience. Advising is critical to student success and helping students achieve career goals. Academic advisors play an integral role in helping students with academic and career choices. A look at student perceptions is necessary to understand what students hope to achieve and what they expect from advising. The obstacles faced by students may affect the advising relationship and may lead to particular advising preferences. The overall expectations and experiences play a major role in student satisfaction with a university.

Thompson, Orr, Thompson, and Grover (2007) conducted a study that examined perceptions of freshmen students. The findings showed that students’ perceptions of the college experience influenced grades, degree completion, satisfaction and other positive student outcomes. Additionally, students who rated their satisfaction with advising as high also reported greater stimulation from their courses. The study indicated the importance a university must place on academic advising services, including mentoring of freshmen. The use of effective and efficient advising is important in regard to student perceptions.

Research conducted by Thompson (2008) addressed the need for a variety of support measures to be in place for freshman year success. The study emphasized the importance of strong student communication and the need to have academic support among peers. Thompson stated, “Students believed they learned material more effectively when they worked with other students outside the classroom setting” (p. 140). The students’ perceptions of strong peer communication helped them to see that the idea of peer support can serve as a valuable tool for success that goes beyond student/advisor communication. Gordon and Steele (2003) found that advisors must determine the type of information a student requires and support the student in every step of the advising process.

Academic advising must be a collaborative effort between students and advisors. Ender et al. (1984) found some common elements that are necessary in the advising process. These elements are essential to student perceptions regarding advisors. Students want the advisor to be available to them when the need arises. It is important for the advisor to be helpful and know what they are doing. Students want continuous contact with the advisor over a period of time. Noel (1985) said, “A caring attitude has been identified as the most potent retention force on campus” (p. 17). Allen and Smith (2008) provided a quantitative study that looked at perceptions students have in relation to advising interactions. Advising interactions provide students with the opportunity to learn and connect with faculty outside the classroom. The findings suggested the path through which students access advising must be open and clear.

Challenges and obstacles are forefront when it comes to surviving the freshman year at any institution of higher learning. How students handle the obstacles that come before them will determine their satisfaction with the first-year experience. Clark (2005) explored how first-year students negotiate the transition to college by using various strategies. Based on interviews with

students, Clark found classes, academic responsibilities, and studying to be among the major challenges. Some successful strategies adopted by the students included using peer mentors and advisors. Students who were able to use helpful coping strategies reported greater satisfaction with the first year experience.

Alexitch (2002) investigated different variables that come about when students express certain preferences for the type of advising they want to receive from professors. One obstacle the study found was in the way that students go about seeking help from advisors. Students who do not exhibit help-seeking tendencies will shun the student/advisor relationship. The evidence from this study suggested that students who are in the greatest need of help will probably be the ones who do not seek out help from an advisor.

Students at universities always seek help and advice on a variety of topics and issues and request help both inside and outside the classroom. The manner in which this help is extended to the students sets the stage for formation of opinions regarding advising preferences. Research on advising preferences shows that many factors are taken into consideration when students express a desire for one type of advising over another (Berdahl, 1995; Habley & Morales, 1998; Lagowski & Vick, 1995).

Using a policy capturing approach, Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) examined variables that contributed to student satisfaction. The researchers investigated student preferences for advising. The findings supported the fact that advisors need to give specific care to establishing a relationship and conveying support of the relationship. According to the researchers, “The results of this study suggest that the depth and emotional nature of the advising relationship contributes the most to student satisfaction with their advising” (p. 59). Based on

this study, the need for using different advising approaches and clearly defining the perimeters of the advising relationship will promote student satisfaction with their chosen advising preference.

Research conducted by Alexitch (2002) focused on exploring ways that students seek help from advisors. The study showed that students who seek help look for advisors who are knowledgeable, and the implication was strong that females favor a clear developmental advising partnership. Students who seek help from an advisor are more likely to form a positive relationship with an advisor and show better academic performance. Alexitch stated, “Student satisfaction with previous advising received from faculty contributed significantly to their preference for advising style” (p. 180). The way academic advising is received from advisors can have a significant impact on student success.

Academic advising preferences impact the overall satisfaction of the student with the university and strongly affects a student’s desire to remain at a university. Research conducted by Metzner (1989) found that high quality advising positively influenced grades and student satisfaction. On the other hand, low quality advising was associated with students’ desire to leave the university and not enroll for a new term. Students expressed their preference for quality advisors who were helpful and able to give them sound advice. Yarbrough (2002) found that students who learn from committed academic advisors will become better professionals. Through the engagement model for academic advising, the focus is on the goals and objectives of the student. The student is paired with an academic advisor/mentor who shares the same interest. This shared interest leads to a mutually satisfying advisor-student relationship.

First-year college students’ expectations about college do not always fall in line with the actual experience. Entering students have expectations about participating in the educational environment. These expectations are based on their past experiences. As students encounter new

experiences, expectations may need to be adjusted or changed. How the student handles these conflicts will shape the success of the student in the university setting.

In an attempt to examine student satisfaction within university departments, extensive research has been conducted that examined student expectations regarding satisfaction within departments. Corts et al. (2000) investigated a psychology department by creating a comprehensive measure of student satisfaction. The greatest area of concern was related to academic advising. Students expected advisors to be readily available to them and wanted the advisors to be prepared to answer their questions. The reality was that the advisors were not always available and were vague in their answers. The study was significant in pointing out that both faculty and students should be better prepared for academic advising.

First-year students leave higher education for a variety of reasons. Harrison (2006) conducted a study which focused on negative student experiences forcing them to leave a university. Many of the negative experiences were in direct control of the university and could have been prevented by better planning. These experiences were centered on academic induction and support in the first few weeks of class. The most common negative experiences reported were courses not as expected, difficulty in settling in, accommodation was not suitable, financial difficulty, and teaching style, content, and quality was subpar. Dissatisfaction was usually with the total university experience and not with higher education goals. It was noted by the researchers, “The aim thus becomes to provide wider and stronger ties to ‘attach’ students to the university community especially in the early stages of study” (p. 309). Academic advisors are capable of assisting in student attachment to the campus. Advisors can advise on more appropriate courses, suggest campus groups and activities to help gain a sense of belonging, and make a referral to the Financial Aid Office to seek financing opportunities. The negative

experiences reported in this study can be easily remedied by quality academic advisors working the front lines of student support services.

A study performed by Gallagher and Allen (2000) examined the premise of whether student expectations measured up to their actual experiences. In the same study, the researchers tested a hypothesis on developmental advising and increased satisfaction levels among students. The study provided evidence that students do have high expectations for advising. Gallagher and Allen found, “The one clear relationship is: greater dissatisfaction with advising was associated with larger discrepancies between expectations and experience regarding perceived availability of the advisor” (p. 121). Data suggested that students who withdrew from the university may have experienced problems with advising and believed the advisors were not helpful. If this is a common complaint of students who withdraw, an institution must take action. Students leave college for a variety of reasons. However, an institution should be able to ensure effective, quality academic advising across campus.

College students have strict standards when it comes to what they expect from the college experience. One area in which high expectations are shown is in relation to academic advising. Expectations concerning preferred models, approaches, and the type of advisor that appeals to a student has been a major focus of academic success. Excellent advising interactions may have a major impact in promoting student satisfaction, which in turn can lead to greater student persistence. Academic advising serves as a powerful force in promoting the overall college student experience.

Defining the Undecided Student

Gordon (2007) defined students without a declared major as those who are “unwilling, unable, or unready to make educational and/or vocational decisions” (p. x). Astin (1977) noted

that between 20-50% of newly enrolled college students are undecided about academic and career aspirations. Additionally, between 50-60% change their minds after entering. These statistics indicate a large portion of an entering freshmen class is undecided early in their academic journey. Lewallen (1994) addressed an interesting aspect regarding undecided students. Students' indecision upon entering college can be two-dimensional. Students can be undecided about their educational and occupational goals. It is possible for students to be decided in one area, but not the other. A student may enjoy a specific subject, and want to spend his/her undergraduate career attaining as much knowledge as possible in this specific field. However this same student may be unsure of his/her occupational interest. Another student may be certain of the occupation he/she wants to enter, but unsure on what to study in order to best prepare for a career in the specific field.

Gordon (1998) reviewed fifteen studies that investigated types of undecided and decided students. She labeled undecided students into four categories: "Tentatively" undecided, "Developmentally" undecided, "Seriously" undecided, and "Chronically" indecisive. Gordon characterized tentatively undecided students as students who have self-confidence, and do not perceive barriers to their goals. Just below tentatively undecided students are the developmentally undecided students. These students need to gather pertinent information while developing their decision-making skills. They may be interested in a variety of areas. Seriously undecided students usually have lower levels of self-esteem, and limited knowledge on educational and occupational choices. Chronically indecisive students have excessive anxiety that affects many parts of their life. Additionally, these students are unclear on educational and occupational opportunities, and seek approval from others when making a decision.

Undecided students face a variety of transitions when entering college. Steele and McDonald (2008) acknowledged that some undecided students may go through anticipated transitions while others face unanticipated transitions. Students entering college undecided may feel they will find the right major after completing various college courses or gaining a variety of experiences. Other students believe the right major may find them; such as volunteering for a Psychology research study and realizing you like Psychology. These are anticipated transitions students may accept relating to being undecided. Unanticipated transitions may occur if a student does not acquire the needed grade point average to declare a certain major. Another unanticipated transition is when a student may begin in one field only to realize it is not for them.

These transitions regarding a student's level of decidedness closely relates to Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) described Schlossberg's Transition Theory as having three distinct types of transitions: Anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevents. Undecided students face transitions in all three facets. How students address the transition is very individualized, but a good academic advisor can help immensely when the need for transition does arise.

Gordon's Tenets of the Developmental Approach Theory

Students may be undecided in their academic major for a variety of reasons. Gordon (2007) explored undecided students from a theoretical perspective. "The insights these theoretical constructs provide can be applied in many practical approaches to help undecided students through their transition to decidedness" (p. 55). Virginia Gordon chose to examine undecided students through a developmental approach. Gordon stated:

The developmental approach views undecided students not as persons searching for an academic or career niche, but as individuals continually engaged in a series of

developmental tasks that ultimately enable them to adapt and change in a pluralistic world. (p. 56)

Academic advisors who work with undecided students should be knowledgeable in student development theories. These theories will assist the advisor in better serving the individual student based on his/her level of development.

The five tenets Gordon (2007) identified regarding undecided students are as follows (p. 56):

1. All human beings develop through a life cycle that has continuity and form.
2. Development is stage and task related.
3. Certain developmental tasks are more dominant at certain stages in the life cycle than others.
4. Developmental tasks progress from the simple to the increasing complex.
5. Many developmental tasks are interrelated and are dealt with simultaneously.

In her first tenet, Gordon acknowledged that students develop at their own pace, and it is difficult to make generalizations for the entire undecided student population. Advisors should offer services based on individual students' needs and not general university policies or basic advising practices.

The second tenet allows advisors to understand undecided students. Advisors can view development as stage and task related. Many students, especially first-year students, are not at the stage to commit. First-year students should not be expected to commit based on their limited career knowledge, education experiences, and real world work. Perry's (1999) theory on cognitive and moral development support Gordon (2007) in that students early in their college careers are in a closed dualistic perspective, but will eventually move into an open relativistic

one. Advisors acknowledging the stage some of the undecided students are in will help the advisor better understand the type of advice an individual student may need at that point in time.

Similar to Gordon's second tenet, her third tenet acknowledged that students move through stages differently. Career development, which can also be related to major selection development are often age related. As Gordon pointed out, "learning the career choice process, is more important for a freshman than making the choice of major or career itself" (p. 57).

Eighteen-year-old students may be more aligned with Chickering's vectors such as managing emotions and establishing identity, rather than making major and career decisions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Advisors can aid in the current development of a student, while realizing the time will come when that student is ready to make a major and/or career decision.

In her fourth tenet, Gordon (2007) noted, "Programs and services offered to undecided students must reflect many levels of ability to differentiate and integrate aspects of the decision-making process" (p. 58). As students are gathering information on various majors and careers, the advisor must be cognizant of the individual student's ability. Lower ability students may not be able to process all the information higher level students ascertain. This lower ability could discourage and even embarrass some students. Advisors should plan advisement and information-gathering suggestions accordingly. Advisors who are sensitive to this level of complexity can help undecided students plan different tasks based on their cognitive ability.

The final tenet recognized that several developmental tasks are related and can be addressed concurrently. While new freshmen are adjusting to college they face many new challenges. Gordon proposed in Tenet Five that some of these challenges can be worked on simultaneously. Students who are trying to establish identity and manage their emotions, can integrate those tasks into major and career exploration. Advisors can practice a developmental

approach in which they assist the student's overall development. Environment plays a key role in student development. Academic advisors who create an environment that supports major and career development while addressing other critical student development needs will help the student link different areas of natural development. In opposition to Chickering's vectors, which are viewed as building blocks, Gordon believed student development aspects for undecided students do not have to be sequential, but rather coincide together.

Conclusion

The literature review supports the claim that quality academic advising is important and shows the components that contribute to highly effective advising practices. The literature review addressed the significance quality advising has on the success of the college students overall educational experience. Previous reports demonstrated the strong relationship between academic advising satisfaction and the students' ability to form a binding connection to the university (Alexitch, 2002; Habley & Morales, 1998; Metzner, 1989; Yarbrough, 2002). However, there is limited research on undecided students' experiences with academic advising. This study, using a qualitative case study design, will further explore how undecided students describe their academic advising experiences throughout the first year. Using an expert in the field, Virginia Gordon's (2007) tenets on developmental approach with undecided students, this study will guide advisors who work primarily with first-year undecided students. The results will provide information to use in the narrative depiction of academic advising outcomes based on the students' experiences. If findings are rich and thick in description, I am confident this study will contribute to a gap in the current literature, and assist advisors and administrators in creating a positive academic advising experience. Chapter III will convey the methods for my study which

are consistent with the purpose of qualitative research. These methods will assist me as I further explore students' academic advising expectations and experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The following chapter addressed the research design of the study. Exploring the qualitative tradition validated my choice for qualitative research in this study. Describing case study research provided background information as to why I chose a case study as a part of my research approach. The rationale for qualitative research provided details on the study's central research focus. The individual interview design justified the design of the study. The researcher's role allowed for an open look at who is conducting the study, by addressing my professional position and the assumptions by the researcher. The data collection section was divided into several parts. The sections about the setting, first, and then participants described the location and people who participated in the study. The instrument section addressed the trustworthiness of the study. The part entitled "gaining access" described the appropriate steps that were taken in order to complete the study. The procedure segment explained the study from start to finish. The design and data collection sections of this study assisted in the exploration of the research questions: How do first-year students who are undecided in the academic major at a public high research activity institution describe their experiences regarding academic advising during college? And how can academic advisors better serve these undecided first-year students relative to their experiences? The chapter concluded with the data analysis, which was broken down into interview and observation analysis, coding, and triangulation.

Research Design

The research design for this qualitative case study focused on rich, meaningful narrative data gathered through a series of individual student interviews. The single site study occurred at Southeast University (SU), a public high research activity Carnegie classification institution. Open-ended questions focused on first-year students' experiences encountered during the academic advising process. The participants were 30 first-year students undecided in their major, and were advised through the campus Advising Center (AC). Findings from this study will help guide the practice of academic advising for first-year students undecided in their major.

Qualitative Tradition

This qualitative case study was based on phenomenology. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) defined phenomenology as “a qualitative approach in which the researcher focuses on capturing the experience of an activity or concept from participants' perspectives” (p. 600). Furthermore, Rossman and Rallis (2003) concurred in that the researcher in phenomenological studies “seeks to understand the deep meaning of a person's experiences and how she articulates these experiences” (p. 97). The participants in this study were first-year undecided students who received their academic advising in the AC. The first-year students shared their perspectives on the academic advising experience with the researcher.

The use of phenomenological approaches in educational research has been around for many years. Patton (2002) wrote “Phenomenology as a philosophical tradition was first used in the development of a rigorous science by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl (1859-1938)” (p. 105). The manner humans experience phenomena allows them to make meaning of the occurrences. Patton further explained the importance of how people interpret their experiences, as it relates to their worldview. A study grounded in phenomenology gave

participants the ability to describe their experiences supported by first-hand personal accounts. By conducting in-depth interviews, I was able to “really know what another person experiences” (p.106) regarding a specific phenomena, which in this case was the academic advising process for first-year undecided students.

In Rossman and Rallis’ (2003) description of phenomenological studies, they documented three specific questions researchers should seek during data collection:

1. What has this person experienced?
2. What meaning does this person make of this?
3. How does the person understand his or her experience?

This study sought to answer those questions from individuals and connect first-hand experiences to a larger picture regarding academic advising for undecided students.

Case Study

“Case studies, especially qualitative case studies, are prevalent throughout the field of education. This type of research has illuminated educational practice for nearly thirty years” (Merriam, 1998, p. 26). The purpose of this research was to further discover how first-year undecided students describe their academic advising experiences. Case study research was the best method to use to explore the specific issue of academic advising for first-year undecided students in one institutional setting. Punch (1998) defined case study as:

The basic idea is that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible. (p. 150)

Yin (1994) solidified my choice for case study as he noted that case studies are the preferable method when seeking further exploration in contemporary events. Additionally, Yin pointed out that case studies assist the researcher in getting “from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (p. 19). Yin’s description correlated to my desire as a researcher to relate my findings to practice, making a useful contribution to the field and practice of academic advising.

Stake (2000) identified three different types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Collective case study described this research study, as this was “where a number of cases are studied in order to investigate some general phenomenon” (p. 438). The general phenomenon in my study will be academic advising experiences of first-year undecided students at SU. By conducting multiple interviews with several students, my goal was “to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details” (Yin, 1994, p. 112).

According to Merriam (1998), “the case study can be further defined by its special features. Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (p. 29). I valued Merriam’s thoughts on descriptive approaches. She defined descriptive case studies as having a specific goal in which “the end product of a case study is a rich thick description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 29). Rossman and Rallis (2003) supported Merriam’s thoughts on case studies that are descriptive in nature by explaining that case studies enlighten the reader on specific events or circumstances. This description made case studies very useful. Rossman and Rallis noted “the strength of case studies is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives” (p. 105). Gathering

qualitative data through direct contact with first-year undecided students provided that rich description of the phenomenon under study. This data gave me a holistic view of the advising process from multiple student perspectives.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) gave a compelling outline of qualitative research. The characteristics they identified assisted me in choosing qualitative research for my study. They acknowledged “the central focus of qualitative research is to provide an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 402).

Participants’ views guided my study on their experience with academic advising. Allowing participants to recall first-hand accounts of their advising experiences both before entering and while attending college provided rich and meaningful data regarding this specific population.

The institution in this study was an active participant in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). From 2006-2009 the NSSE assessment collected data regarding first-year students’ evaluation of academic advising. Data indicated that first-year students at this institution rated the quality of their academic advising higher when compared to their regional peers for 3 out of 4 years. Additionally, for all four years, students at this institution rated quality of academic advising higher when compared to their Carnegie Classification peers (see Table 1).

Table 1

NSSE Assessment Data

Year	Selected Institution	Regional Peers	Carnegie Peers
2006	3.18	3.11	2.98
2007	3.00	3.04	2.98
2008	2.99	2.97	2.92
2009	3.00	2.94	2.89

NSSE Question: Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?

1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent

While this was positive news, there was a need for explanation on why the institution received high levels of satisfaction compared to peers. My qualitative study enhanced the quantitative NSSE results, which further explained students' ratings of advising. A first-hand account of academic advising directly from undecided first-year students, allowed for better exploration by the researcher, and could lead to new initiatives in the field of academic advising. Furthermore, qualitative research focused on the individual. Allowing individual students to describe their experiences provided for unique advising experiences. Gay et al. (2006) described the value placed on including the voices of the participants. The participants' views were the primary data that drove this study. Student insight was rich and meaningful, and allowed the researcher to make recommendations based on the voices from the population selected.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) provided a key insight that further solidified my decision to use qualitative research. They accurately described qualitative research in a learning context. A qualitative researcher should understand that he/she is a learner throughout the research process, explain that learning can occur by the participants, but definitely occurs by the researcher. Questions drove qualitative research, with the ultimate goal of finding answers that will become knowledge. My purpose was supported by research questions, which will guide the practice of academic advising for first-year undecided students, and inform academic advisors that serve this specific population.

Individual Interview Design

Student interviews were used to gather data. “Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4). Open-ended questions focused on first-year students’ experiences encountered during the academic advising process. The open-ended questions provided the researcher with an in-depth, first-hand account from the student’s point of view (Patton, 2002). I conducted individual interviews at three different intervals during the students’ first year. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), interviews provide depth and detail about the topic being explored. The interviewer should focus on a narrow range of topics in order to gain information in great detail. In order “to get this level of detail, depth, and focus, researchers work out main questions, probes, and follow-ups” (p. 13). As Patton (2002) noted we interview people for a variety of reasons. One reason was because interviews provide insight which cannot be directly observed. Patton strengthened his point by stating “we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe situations that precluded the presence of an observer. We have to ask people questions about those things” (p. 341). In order to fully understand first-year students’ experiences with academic advising, individual interviews are crucial. Student interviews provided direct accounts which the researcher would otherwise have been unable to obtain.

Interviews were appropriate for this research topic. First-year students had the opportunity to share their thoughts on academic advising through open-ended questions. If a student wished to expand on one or more particular areas of academic advising, individual interviews provided them with the medium to communicate their experiences in their own words. The goal of this study was to explore student experiences with academic advising, and provide

recommendations for academic advisors. Interviews rich in detail from the students' perspectives supplied the needed information to attain this goal.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I understood how important it was to build a solid rapport with the student participants. A trusting interviewer/interviewee relationship allowed the students to open up freely and provided me with rich, meaningful data. Martin and Glesne (2002) understood how important it is to build a trusting relationship with the participants. Specifically, Glesne's research practice focused on building "relational bonds that reverberated with a sense of community" (p. 211). The two researchers expressed the importance of acknowledging that researchers often invade participants' space. Therefore, it was paramount that researchers understood that "responsibilities and obligations accompany research, and that these responsibilities and obligations involve relating and relationships, commitment, and co-motion" (p. 219). My goal was to effectively communicate with student participants before the interviews, thoroughly explain the study, and provide a relaxed atmosphere in which the students felt comfortable relating their advising experiences to me in an open and honest manner.

Professional Position

I have been practicing in the field of academic advising for over seven years. Throughout the last two years, I have served as an academic advising administrator. Five of my seven years of professional experience have been directly working with students who are undecided in their major. All seven years of professional experience have been at my current institution. However, before beginning at my current institution, I served as a graduate assistant academic advisor at a different institution working with a different student population. I am an active member of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). In NACADA, I have served in various

leadership roles including my current position on the NACADA Council. In addition, I have presented at several regional and national conferences.

As an administrator in academic advising, I valued the outcomes from this study. My current position as an assistant director in the AC allows me to view this specific population with an eye of familiarity. Working with undecided students has positioned me to a person of knowledge and advocate for positive outcomes with this group. Although I interact with this population on a daily basis, limited research has been conducted in my department. This research opportunity assisted in further understanding undecided students in regards to academic advising, and will serve as a guide to help professional advisors in the AC better serve their students.

My current position as assistant director imposes certain ethical considerations that must be addressed by me as a researcher. In my position, I assisted in the supervision of four advisors and one graduate assistant advisor who advise students that were undecided in their major. My responsibilities included: working in coordination with the director to plan the budget, supervising staff, organizing programs, coordinating initiatives with other departments on campus, and overseeing of the day-to-day operations of the AC.

Because of supervisor responsibilities, this study was purposefully designed to focus specifically on the experiences of first-year students with attention to their broader prospective rather than soliciting feedback on advisor performance. In this way, additional steps were taken to decrease the possibility that I would be able to identify any participants' advisor. More details about sample selection and processes for recruiting participants are included in the procedure section of this chapter.

Assumptions by Researcher

Experience in the field of higher learning, graduate education, and information presented from NACADA guided my practice in academic advising. The three previously mentioned factors may have contributed to certain assumptions on my behalf. My goal was to present all biases and assumptions in an open and honest format.

Merriam (1998) stated, “in producing a qualitative study, the researcher must also be sensitive to the biases inherent in this type of research” (p. 22). One assumption I had entering the study was advising makes a difference in students’ lives. Furthermore, good advising made a significant impact on students’ successful navigation to achieve a college degree. I believed advisors made an impact due to my personal experience, and Astin’s (1994) work which acknowledged advisors play a significant role in student learning, institutional involvement, and retention. Another assumption I had was students that get advised early in the semester formed a better connection with their academic advisor. Early in the semester advisors had more time to work with individual students. Additionally, students that put forth the effort to be advised early were typically more motivated students regarding their education. Alextich (2002) found students with help-seeking tendencies admitted to having a better connection with their advisor, and performed better academically.

I must acknowledge a bias in the role academic advisors can play in the lives of first-year students. I believed academic advisors can be the primary connection a first-year student has to a campus. During the freshman year, students take general education classes that count toward most majors on campus. Because many students need these courses, general education classes can be very large. Even if a student sought out a professor for individual attention, it was unlikely the professor will know all campus resources available to students, or have time to

discuss issues not related to the class. Faculty were busy with teaching, research, committees, and other facets of higher education. However, an academic advisor was able to inform students on all campus resources, and had time to assist students with a variety of first-year issues. The acknowledgement of my biases contributed to the trustworthiness of my study. Glesne (1999) expressed, “continual alertness to your own biases, your own subjectivity, also assists in producing more trustworthy interpretations” (p. 151).

In order to control for any bias I may have, I utilized suggestions from Patton’s (2002) research criteria. Patton noted that to minimize investigator bias, cross-checking was important. I recorded my assumptions before each interview. A peer debriefer cross-checked my assumptions with the coded notes from the interview. This was described further in the peer debriefing section later in this chapter. A second method of controlling my bias was in the form of empathic neutrality during interviews. Patton stated an “empathically neutral inquirer will be perceived as caring about and interested in the people being studied, but neutral about the content of what they reveal” (p. 569). I showed no reaction to any responses given by students during interviews.

As I approached the study, my goal was to have 100% of the participants complete all three data collection procedures. However, familiarity with this specific population I assumed not all students may complete the study in its entirety. Students could have removed themselves from the study for a variety of reasons including: declared a major, transferred to another institution, decided they do not want to continue, or had grown weary with participating. However, if a student completed any part of the study, I applied their responses in my data analysis. I did this because it was more realistic scenarios advisors see on a frequent basis with this population. Undecided first-year students must eventually declare a major. This was a common occurrence and was seen in my study. Some students in this population may not have

returned for a second semester. Again, this was an issue that academic advisors were accustomed to with this population. Therefore, I believed it was important to keep this study in a real world setting as much as possible, while acknowledging obstacles that were known to occur and described them in detail as consistent with qualitative research. By utilizing information gained through participants who left the study, it revealed insight as to why they declared a major, transferred, or any other reason for not continuing.

Data Collection

Collecting data for this study occurred through student interviews and mid-year phone conversations with participants. “In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews. The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter” (Merriam, 2006, p. 71). Instruments used, the role of the researcher, assumptions by researcher, gaining access, and the research procedures will be addressed in this section. Once all data was collected the data analysis transpired. Data from this research assisted me in answering the two research questions that guided the study.

Setting

The single site study occurred at SU, a public high research activity Carnegie classification institution. Like other institutions of higher learning, student recruitment, retention, and graduation were extremely important and closely monitored. According to IR data, entering freshmen cohorts from 2000-2003 at the institution in this study graduated at an average of 56.23% in six years (see Table 2).

Table 2

Six-Year Graduation Rate				
Reporting	Cohort	% Graduated	% Graduated	% Graduated
<u>Year</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>in 4 Years</u>	<u>in 5 Years</u>	<u>in 6 Years</u>
2004-05	2000	33.00%	51.60%	55.50%
2005-06	2001	29.90%	49.00%	53.30%
2006-07	2002	32.40%	50.50%	55.60%
2007-08	2003	35.30%	55.70%	60.50%

Thelin (2009) noted that 65% is acceptable, yet few state universities achieve this. Undecided students are one of the largest populations of entering majors at the institution, thus a significant population to target in order to increase six-year graduation rates.

The AC at this institution advised approximately 1200-1300 students in the fall and 900-1000 students in the spring. The AC did not differentiate between first-year and other students when maintaining semester data. However, most AC academic advisors estimated that two-thirds of the students they advised were first-year students. This equated to approximately 792-858 first-year students in the fall, and 594-660 first-year students in the spring who were advised in the AC. According to the University's IR website, the number of first-year students in the three previous cohorts was: 2009: 2550, 2008: 2317, and 2007: 2437. The 2010 freshmen cohort at SU was announced as having 3089 members. A report created by the researcher at the end of the first week of fall classes displayed that 777 students with 15 hours or less were classified as undecided in their major. If all 777 remained undecided, advisors in the AC would have had an opportunity to interact with 25% of the freshmen class. Therefore, one can observe how the AC served a large percentage of first-year students. Academic advising services in this area have the potential to affect a large population of first-year students on campus.

Participants

The sample for this study was collected from the entering Fall 2010 freshmen class at a public high research activity institution. According to statistics obtained from IR, the average ACT score for entering 2006-2009 first-year students was 23.05 (see Table 3). The average fall to fall retention rate for entering 2006-2008 first-year students was 79.9% (see Table 4).

Table 3
Average ACT of First-year Students

Year	Selected Institution
2006	23.0
2007	22.9
2008	23.0
2009	23.3

Table 4
First-year Fall to Fall Retention Rate

Year	Headcount	Retention Rate
2006	2527	80.5%
2007	2434	78.3%
2008	2317	81.0%

Thirty first-year students, without declared majors, were classified as undecided, and assigned a professional academic advisor in institution’s AC were chosen using purposeful sampling. “Purposeful sampling allows researchers to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 214). Participants who volunteered for the study, met with the researcher following their advising sessions.

As an incentive to volunteer for this study, four (4) \$50 gift cards to the University’s bookstore were given away through two random drawings. The first drawing occurred at the conclusion of Fall 2010 interviews, while the second took place following Spring 2011

interviews. To encourage future participation, winners from the first drawing were eligible to win again if they participated in the second interview.

Instrument

“In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). In this study, I used open-ended questions (see Appendices A & B) to explore experiences of first-year students regarding academic advising. The open-ended questions I used produced rich, narrative data directly from the student perspective. The interview questions and responses were analyzed for emerging themes.

In order to ensure trustworthiness in my study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were given high priority (Schwandt, 2007). Credibility addressed “the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents’ views of their life ways and the inquirer’s reconstruction and representation of same” (p. 299). Guba (1981) noted that member checks, peer debriefing, and triangulation were all strategies to assist with the credibility of a study. In order to achieve transferability, the researcher must provide enough sufficient information on the study so that readers may understand similarities in the case studied and the degree to which those findings may be transferred to other settings; transferability may be achieved by collecting detailed data and developing descriptions of the context (Schwandt, 2007; Guba, 1981). Schwandt noted that dependability “focused on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer’s responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented” (p. 299). Strategies for dependability include overlapping methods and auditing (Guba). The final criteria needed to establish trustworthiness was confirmability by showing that data and interpretations are logical. The ability to link data to findings is the goal of confirmability

(Schwandt). Guba acknowledged the use of triangulation and reflexivity will help achieve confirmability.

Strategies to ensure trustworthiness in my study included triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and rich description to convey the findings (Creswell, 2009; Guba, 1981; Schwandt, 2007). I called all participants after final grades were released during Winter Break. These phone interviews allowed me to follow-up on our one-on-one interview. Rubin and Rubin (2005) acknowledged phone interviews to be “useful for follow-up questions after you have read an interview with a person with whom you talked face to face” (p. 125). The notes from our phone discussion contained key information such as how the advisor’s advice assisted during the remainder of the fall semester, student questions for the advisor now that he/she has one semester of college experience, and advisement for spring semester now that fall grades have been released. Mid-year phone interviews combined with the student one-on-one interviews allowed a more complete view of the topic being studied.

Gaining Access

Appropriate approval was sought from my dissertation chair and committee, The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the Director of the Advising Center (see appendix C). The research ensued in the Fall semester of 2010. However, no data was collected until my dissertation committee confirmed that I passed the prospectus stage of the dissertation. I have been trained through the IRB’s Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training, which was also a requirement to collect data.

Procedure

In Fall 2010, the researcher sought participant selection from first-year students who were classified as undecided. Thirty students were selected by purposeful sampling. Purposeful

sampling allowed me to select “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Flyers (see appendix D) seeking participants were displayed throughout the AC. Students interested in participating in the study were asked to give only their first name and cell phone number to the secretary. The secretary gave the information to me. I contacted the students shortly after their advising session and explained the study in more detail. If a student was still interested in participating in the study, I met with them in a conference room away from the AC and conducted the interviews.

On the day of the interview, I gave each participant an information sheet (see appendix G) to review. The students were asked, both written and orally, not to identify the advisor’s name or personal characteristics of the advisor during the interview. This further ensured I had no knowledge of the advisor the student met with. I conducted one-on-one interviews with almost every participant three times during the academic year. Creswell (2008) noted that one-on-one interviews are one of the more popular methods to use in educational research, but are the most time consuming. University policy required all students to meet with an academic advisor once a semester in order to register for classes the following semester. These two mandatory advising sessions allowed me two distinct opportunities to explore two different academic advising sessions. One interview occurred in the fall, and the second took place in the spring. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a conference room away from the advisors’ offices. The study began in November 2010 immediately following the students’ first academic advising sessions.

The first meeting included interview questions (see appendix A) that focused on students’ initial academic advising expectations and their recent advising experience. During the interviews I used an electronic recorder to document the sessions. Immediately after the interview I downloaded the interview to my computer. This ensured two recorded copies of each

interview in case one was unable to be used for transcription. At the first interview, I asked each participant open-ended questions allowing the student to fully explain academic advising expectations upon entering the University, and the academic advising experience that just occurred.

The second interview (see appendix B) was conducted in March and April 2011 after the student had completed a second academic advising session. During this session, I asked open-ended questions focusing on students' advising experiences from advising session one to session two. Gay et al. (2006) noted by conducting a longitudinal study the data should show growth or change over time. Open-ended questions were used in each interview "so that the participants could best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (Creswell, 2008, p. 225). Before the interview questions are used in the interviews, questions were critiqued by an expert (see appendix F) in the field of academic advising. Dr. Kathleen Smith served as the expert to ensure the questions would accurately probe the student for desired information. The accounts from the student's perspective allowed me to gather valuable first-hand information directly from the target sample.

Notes from mid-year telephone interviews were written to accompany the interview transcripts ensuring triangulation. Triangulation increased research validity. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989) positive aspects from one data collection method may balance the weaker aspects from another. Mid-year telephone follow-up interviews included follow-up on the prior face-to-face interview, as well as students' plans for the upcoming semester. Rubin and Rubin (1995) noted that phone interviews are helpful "for following up on specific topics with people with whom they have already established a conversational partnership" (p. 141). The phone interview occurred after final grades for Fall 2010 were released allowing the student to

process how they did academically during the previous semester while considering advice they received from their advisor. The student also began planning for the spring semester and questions, concerns, or other needed information from their advisor may be an area which needed to be addressed.

Student confidentiality was upheld throughout the study. Students were given pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality. To ensure accuracy, a pure member check was utilized. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated to “ensure representation of the emic perspective by member checking, which involves having research participants review statements in the report for accuracy and completeness” (p. 475). Additionally, my peer debriefer (described later in Ch. III) reviewed my study to ensure trustworthiness. Once all data was collected and a draft of findings had been created, each participant had the opportunity to review his/her individual statements in the draft. Participants had the option to discontinue participation in the study at any time. If students did not finish all three steps of data collection, their data was still considered unless they indicated they preferred me not to use it. Students participating in this study may have declared a major, not returned for spring semester, or dropped out of the study. These factors did inhibit some from completing the duration of the study. However, because issues mentioned above were a common occurrence with this population, I feel it was necessary to retain their information for the study. This record allowed the study to be applicable in a real world setting.

Research Questions

I proposed a qualitative case study grounded in phenomenology to address the following questions:

Research Question One: How do students being advised by the AC describe their experiences and perspectives on academic advising during their first year of college?

Research Question Two: How can the AC and the academic advisors better serve these first-year students relative to their experiences and perspectives of the advising process?

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis was essential to fully understand the case study. The data analysis for my case study was guided by Creswell's (2009) six steps: preparing for the analysis, reading through all data, coding, generating categories and themes, advancing descriptions and themes for qualitative narrative, and making the interpretation of the data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) described analyzing qualitative data as:

The process of deep immersion in the interview transcripts, filed notes, and other materials you have collected; systematically organizing these materials into salient themes and patterns; bringing meaning so the themes tell a coherent story; and writing it all up so that others can read what you have learned. (p. 270)

In order to analyze case studies, data was organized by specific cases and was rich and meaningful. Patton (2002) listed three steps in constructing a case study analysis: assemble the raw case data, construct a case record, and write a final case study narrative (p. 450). Student responses were categorized and I looked for themes that emerged. Field notes were used in conjunction with the interview data.

Interview and Mid-Year Notes Analysis

Once all interviews occurred, the face-to-face interviews and the mid-year phone interviews were transcribed by the interviewer. As interviews were transcribed, student's specific thoughts became clear to me. I made some general notes on thoughts I had while reading through the interviews. During this phase I ran a preliminary exploratory analysis. Creswell (2008) defined a preliminary exploratory analysis as "exploring the data to obtain a general sense of the data, memoing ideas, thinking about the organization of the data, and considering whether you need more data" (p. 250). Notes taken during the mid-year phone interviews were reviewed and documented in the findings to assist in exploring the complete experience of the students. Additionally, any missing data and justifications were noted.

Coding and Theme Development

It was important for data to be broken down into smaller, manageable pieces. Coding was one of the most frequent methods used to achieve this outcome in data analysis (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Coding was using "a word or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analysis issue" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 146). Guided by Rossman and Ralli (2003), I coded my data more than once. This allowed me to update my categories based on the evidence. In the initial coding phase I used four or five broad categories. As I recoded, I refined the categories and added new ones. The codes assisted me as I created a description of the student voice categorized by themes for the qualitative narrative (Creswell, 2009).

Using thematic analysis I reviewed the codes and sorted by theme. "Themes are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database, they form a core element in qualitative data analysis" (Creswell, 2008, p. 256). Themes became headings and included

individual responses to support the findings. I checked with participants to confirm the themes accurately described their academic advising experiences.

Triangulation

Triangulation was commonly used to validate the findings in research. Creswell (2008) defined triangulation as “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 266). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), triangulation is one strategy that helps enhance the credibility of a qualitative study. Similar to Creswell, Rossman and Rallis define triangulation as:

Multiple sources of data, multiple points in time, or a variety of methods are used to build the picture that you are investigating. This helps ensure that you have not studied only a fraction of the complexity that you seek to understand. (p. 69)

Using different methods helped ensure the accuracy of the study. Gaining information from more than one person and in more than one manner made the findings more credible. Additionally, Denzin (1978) boldly stated “no single method ever adequately solves the problem. Because diverse methods reveal different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed” (p. 28). By using a variety of first-year students, two different semesters for interviews, and two different data collection techniques, triangulation was achieved in my study.

Peer Debriefing

An additional trustworthiness verification technique was peer debriefing. Based on the work of Guba (1981), as cited in Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), peer debriefing was defined as the ability to “provide yourself with the opportunity to test your growing insights through interactions with other professionals” (p. 404). Having a peer debriefer (see appendix F), provided me the opportunity to reflect and gain valuable input on my work from an unbiased

colleague. My debriefer had limited knowledge of my study prior to reading my work. The peer debriefer was a fellow doctoral student, but had no direct responsibilities in academic advising.

Conclusion

With the high levels of accountability associated with higher education, student satisfaction needs to be constantly assessed. Research has shown that highly satisfied students are more likely to persist and graduate in a timely fashion. Academic advisors have the unique opportunity to interact with students on a variety of levels. This interaction can be as in-depth or as casual as the situation requires. Professional advisors who have ample availability to meet with students play a key role in student satisfaction regarding academic advising. Whether a student issue calls for a proactive or a reactive response, professional advisors need to place high priority on student needs. This chapter outlined the study that provided advisors and administrators a first-hand observation of what undecided students experience with the academic advising process. Research obtained from this study can be used to assist policymakers in keeping student satisfaction and success a primary factor in all decision-making. Chapter IV will include the interview analysis, mid-year phone conversation notes, and specific comments made directly by students regarding their academic advising experiences.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter addressed the findings from the data collection. There were two primary sections in Chapter IV: participants and themes. The participants section included an overview, demographic information, participant narratives, and an interesting look at students' responses to a simple introductory question. The second section identified analytical themes discovered in the research. Themes discovered during the first interview included experience with academic advising before college, being undecided in a major, majors under consideration, and college advising. During the spring interview several of the themes from the fall interview were continued, while a new theme also emerged. The new theme, developed in the spring, was based on student reflection after a full academic year's experience with academic advising.

Participants

The participants in this study were all first-year students who were undecided in their major at Southeastern University (SU). Participants volunteered when they came to the Advising Center (AC) for their fall academic advising session. Thirty students were initially interviewed in a one-on-one setting from October 21, 2010 to November 10, 2010. Mid-year phone interviews occurred with 25 participants from January 11, 2011 to January 18, 2011. Participants were called on January 11th and 17th; voice messages were left for those that did not answer. One participant's phone was disconnected, and four were unable to be reached. The final one-on-one interviews occurred from March 7, 2011 to April 7, 2011 with 25 students participating. Table 5 showed the number of participants and interview dates.

Table 5
Participants' interview dates

Pseudonym	Fall Interview	Winter Interview	Spring Interview
Jason	10/21/2010	1/11/2011	Transferred
Carla	10/22/2010	1/11/2011	3/9/2011
Tamara	10/22/2010	1/11/2011	3/23/2011
Chad	10/22/2010	1/11/2011	3/9/2011
Monique	10/25/2010	1/11/2011	3/10/2011
Roxanne	10/25/2010	1/11/2011	3/10/2011
Fadra	10/25/2010	Phone Disconnected	3/11/2011
Bernard	10/26/2010	1/11/2011	3/25/2011
Rick	10/27/2010	1/17/2011	NA
Keisha	10/28/2010	NA	NA
Jackie	10/28/2010	NA	3/23/2011
Sara	10/28/2010	1/18/2011	NA
Walt	10/28/2010	1/11/2011	3/10/2011
Chuck	10/28/2010	1/12/2011	NA
Sue	10/28/2010	1/11/2011	4/6/2011
Karl	10/29/2010	1/11/2011	3/9/2011
Ralph	10/29/2010	1/11/2011	3/31/2011
Lucy	10/29/2010	1/17/2011	3/10/2011
Heather	10/29/2010	1/17/2011	3/9/2011
Wesley	10/29/2010	NA	3/11/2011
Cathy	11/5/2010	1/11/2011	3/10/2011
Clay	11/5/2010	NA	4/7/2011
Karen	11/5/2010	1/11/2011	3/7/2011
Josh	11/5/2010	1/11/2011	3/31/2011
Zairia	11/8/2010	1/11/2011	3/9/2011
Alex	11/8/2010	1/11/2011	3/8/2011
Thad	11/9/2010	1/11/2011	3/11/2011
Chris	11/9/2010	1/11/2011	3/8/2011
Paul	11/10/2010	1/11/2011	3/8/2011
Mike	11/10/2010	1/11/2011	3/7/2011

Demographic Data

Demographic data was collected at the beginning of the fall interviews. The original 30 participants included 16 males and 14 females. Twenty-one participants were white, eight were black, and one was Asian. Although no age data was collected, the researcher acknowledged all participants appeared to be of the traditional first-year college student age (17-19 years old).

Table 6 identified gender and ethnicity of participants.

Table 6
Participant demographic data

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity
Jason	M	Caucasian	Karl	M	Caucasian
Carla	F	Asian	Ralph	M	Caucasian
Tamara	F	Black	Lucy	F	Caucasian
Chad	M	Caucasian	Heather	F	Caucasian
Monique	F	Black	Wesley	M	Caucasian
Roxanne	F	Caucasian	Cathy	F	Caucasian
Fadra	F	Black	Clay	M	Caucasian
Bernard	M	Black	Karen	F	Black
Rick	M	Caucasian	Josh	M	Caucasian
Keisha	F	Black	Zairia	F	Black
Jackie	F	Black	Alex	M	Caucasian
Sara	F	Caucasian	Thad	M	Caucasian
Walt	M	Caucasian	Chris	M	Caucasian
Chuck	M	Caucasian	Paul	M	Caucasian
Sue	F	Caucasian	Mike	M	Caucasian

Annotated Narratives

This section included brief annotated narratives for each participant. The narratives contained original participant comments regarding academic advising, possible majors, being undecided, participant characteristics, and demographic data.

Jason

“I thought it was extremely helpful,” Jason (personal communication, October 21, 2010) responded when asked about his recent experience with academic advising. Jason is a white male who was considering majoring in Biology or Chemistry during the fall interview. “I really like to help people and I like sciences. I was thinking about being a doctor in the future.” During the mid-year phone interview, Jason (personal communication, January 11, 2011) reported that he did not intend to return to SU in the spring. He opted to transfer to a school on the west coast in a larger city. He acknowledged “I enjoyed my time there [SU], but I need to be in a larger city.”

Carla

Carla is an Asian female. She had good experiences with academic advising before college. “I had nice relationships with my [high school] advisors. They informed me on what I needed to do, what I had to do, and guided me with a good foundation to start off my life in college” (Carla, personal communication, October 22, 2010). In the fall she was considering a major in Business with plans to pursue a career in entertainment law. However, by spring those plans changed as she declared a major in Political Science. “I can relate to the government a lot considering what I have seen growing up, and I’m not great in math so that helped rule out Business” (Carla, personal communication, March 9, 2011). Carla found her experiences with academic advising during her first year to be good. She described advising as, “more informed than I thought I would be. I wasn’t in it alone. I had a support system.” She was especially pleased with the one-on-one interaction advising provided.

Tamara

Tamara still had some decisions to make regarding her future major in the fall. She was considering Business Management and Biology at the time of the first interview. “After college I

want to do humanitarian work, so either one of those majors can get me there” (Tamara, personal communication, October 22, 2010). Although Tamara will eventually have to make a decision, she was not concerned with being undecided. “I have a lot of people who are also undecided. We are all just trying to find what we want to do.” In the spring Tamara was able to narrow down her choice of major. “I want to do Business. I want to work with international business corporations” (Tamara, personal communication, March 23, 2011). After reflecting back on advising during her first year, Tamara stated, “I thought advising would be one way when I first got here, but it was different. My advisor really helped me.” Tamara advised future first-year students to “make sure to keep in contact with your advisor.” Tamara is a black female.

Chad

“They took time to get to know me. They had a good idea of what I could do, and would be good at,” Chad (personal communication, October 22, 2010) explained when asked about his recent interaction with his academic advisor. Chad, a white male, was impressed with the quality of advising at SU. He acknowledged that advising “helps a lot. My high school never had advising. Coming to college it [advising] is a lot better.” Marketing was the primary major Chad considered at the time of the fall interview. Spring advising saw Chad still headed down the same path regarding Marketing. He attributed his decision for Marketing based on his “outgoing personality and the ability to talk to anyone” (Chad, personal communication, March 9, 2011). Chad acknowledged a change in his outlook on academic advising due to his experiences at SU. “In session one I was clueless. In session two I was stronger, going in more confident knowing what I need to accomplish.” Chad was pleased with “how much easier it got” as he gained experience being a college student.

Monique

Monique, a black female, was extremely undecided. At the time of the fall interview, she was considering a major in Hospitality Management, Banking and Finance, or Criminal Justice. Her fall advising experience allowed her to examine each major more in-depth with a campus professional. The advising “was really helpful; a lot more helpful than in the past” (Monique, personal communication, October 25, 2010). She admitted the session helped to “ease my stress.” In a complete turn of events, Monique found a major she was seriously considering at the time of spring advising. “I’m looking at Social Work,” Monique (personal communication, March 10, 2011) said. This major was not on her radar in the fall, but fell along the same lines of consideration as her fall choices. “I just want to help people. Do something similar to what my mom does.” Monique attributed some of her success as a freshman to her academic advisor. “I definitely would not have made it without academic advising.”

Roxanne

“I really didn’t have one,” Roxanne (personal communication, October 25, 2010) responded when asked who helped her with academic advising in high school. She was pleased with her fall academic advising session at SU because “even though I’m undecided, the advisor said all the classes I’m signing up for will go to just about any major.” Roxanne is a white female who considered majoring in Nursing or Psychology during the fall. Plans stayed consistent for Roxanne as she declared Nursing during her second semester. “I’ve always wanted to help people, and nurses are always needed,” Roxanne (personal communication, March 10, 2011) said during her spring interview. Roxanne’s advising expectations have changed from when she first entered SU. “Coming to college I really didn’t know how it [advising] worked. Now I think it is

helpful and useful. I enjoy it.” Additionally, she believed the advising process was “great” at SU, and could not think of anything to make it better.

Fadra

Fadra was concerned about being undecided in her major. The black female admitted nearly all of the messages she has received about being undecided have been “mostly negative” (Fadra, personal communication, October 25, 2010). Her friends tell her “you need to hurry up and choose a major. If you don’t you will be stuck and everything will come back on you.” Fortunately the AC advisor eased her concerns during the fall advising session by discussing programs that interested her such as Criminal Justice, Nutrition, and Health. Additionally, Fadra was pleased because the advisor “really got to know me.” In an ironic twist of fate during the spring interview, Fadra admitted that “many of my friends changed to undecided since they have been here” (Fadra, personal communication, March 11, 2011). She no longer received any negative messages about being undecided. Although Fadra was still not ready to commit to one major, Health and Nutrition remained strong candidates. Fadra believed her advising sessions were helpful, but admitted “I didn’t take full advantage of them.”

Bernard

Like Fadra, Bernard was concerned about being undecided. Most of his concerns were related to his peers already having a major. “They got their major, and I don’t have mine,” Bernard (personal communication, October 26, 2010) stated. His fall advising session was positive, as the advisor was “really helpful [and] very supportive. They were open to ideas I wanted.” Bernard is a black male who considered majoring in Exercise Science, Banking and Finance, or something in Business during the fall semester. Similar to fall, Bernard still had a lengthy list of majors under consideration in the spring. He admitted to considering “Accounting,

Finance, Athletic Medical, and Math” (Bernard, personal communication, March 25, 2011) as possible majors during the second interview. Although his choices have not changed much, he realized the need to trim down his list. Before his sophomore advising session, he planned to “determine the kind of math I really like. It will help me determine what field I select.” Bernard acknowledged the usefulness of academic advising for freshmen. “It [advising] was really helpful. I wouldn’t have gotten as far as I did if I was by myself,” he stated.

Rick

“The advisor was helpful,” Rick (personal communication, October 27, 2010) responded when asked about his recent advising experience. “It was nice to have someone to go to for help.” He was comfortable with being undecided in his major during the first year. Being undecided gives him time to “get your basics [and] see what you like and what you don’t.” Rick is a white male who thought about majoring in History, with possible aspirations to go on to law school. Rick was unable to be reached for a spring interview.

Keisha

“I was nervous going in,” explained Keisha (personal communication, October 28, 2010) when thinking back about her initial feelings before her fall advising session. “I did not know what classes I actually wanted to take, but I got help. I’m not nervous anymore.” Keisha was nervous because she never had to plan her own academic experience before. “In high school we pretty much take all the same classes.” Keisha is a black female who was considering majoring in Exercise Science or Anthropology. Keisha was unable to be reached for a spring interview.

Jackie

Jackie, a black female, admitted she felt “confident after my [advising] session” (Jackie, personal communication, October 28, 2010). She acknowledged she was “kind of nervous

[before the meeting] because I'm not sure what I want to major in." However, her nervousness was put to ease as she described the AC as a "comfortable place, and the advisor made me feel comfortable." Her parents were supportive of her decision to be undecided, as they told her, "just be sure that it [major] is what I want to do for the rest of my life." Sports Rehab and Physical Therapy were two of Jackie's interests. In the spring Jackie was still considering Physical Therapy, but understood she will need to major in Exercise Science to eventually be accepted to Physical Therapy School. Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) said she was thinking Exercise Science because "I like working with people. Since I am an athlete I want to stay in sports." Exercise Science and Physical Therapy should give her the opportunity to do so. Jackie recalled being nervous at her first meeting, but noted "since I've been here for a year I'm comfortable with advising and know what to expect."

Sara

"I had bad experiences in high school. I did not get along with my advisor. We had no options," Sara (personal communication, October 28, 2010) proclaimed when describing her past advising experiences. Sara was pleased to realize college advising was different from her high school experience. "The advisor gave me options." The ability to make her own choices and the advisor's insight made Sara "very happy" with her fall advising session. She admitted, "without it [advising] I would have no idea what classes to take." Sara is a white female. She considered majors in Accounting and Marketing. Sara was unable to be reached for a spring interview.

Walt

"Going undecided is pretty much the way to go so you can figure out what you want to do during your first freshman semester," Walt (personal communication, October 28, 2010) said. Walt, a white male, thought about majoring in Accounting or Engineering because of their "high

job rate.” Walt’s goal after college was to “have a stable job so I can provide for myself and my family.” He was pleased with his fall advising as it was “fast and easy.” Walt entered spring advising confident in his ability to declare his major in the near future. “I’m going to declare Accountancy soon,” Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) said. He appreciated his spring advising session because the advice he received satisfied Accounting requirements. Walt had some good advice for future first-year students, “go in undecided and look around; test the waters. Be undecided, but talk to people about possible majors.”

Chuck

Chuck entered college with positive prior advising experiences. “I actually had really good advisors in high school” (Chuck, personal communication, October 28, 2010). He was not very concerned about being undecided, but admitted his parents talk to him about it. “My mom and dad say that I need to choose sometime so I can start on my major courses.” Chuck was satisfied with his fall academic advising. “They [the advisor] did a very good job helping me choose courses.” Chuck is a white male, and was interested in Biology. Additionally he said medical and law schools interest him. Chuck was unable to be reached for a spring interview.

Sue

Like Chuck, Sue was pleased with her advising in high school. She admitted that her high school guidance counselors “don’t really do much” (Sue, personal communication, October 28, 2010), but her AP English teacher was an excellent resource for honors students such as Sue. Sue described her teacher as “more than just a teacher. She was really good about talking to us about our options.” Sue was comfortable being undecided in her major. “Everyone tells me it is a good thing to be undecided.” Sue said she enjoys classes in the liberal arts, but is considering majoring in Business, Journalism, Accounting, or Pharmacy because of job placement after graduation.

During spring academic advising, Sue continued down the undecided path. However, she was able to narrow down her options for majors. “I’m thinking mostly in the College of Business, like Business Management or Marketing,” Sue (personal communication, April 6, 2011) noted. One of the most valuable resources regarding advising to Sue was “getting the sheets I couldn’t find elsewhere.” The ability to look at several curriculum sheets for required classes in different fields was important to her. Sue is a white female.

Karl

“I had a really horrible advisor in high school. The advisor did not take the students’ opinions or requests into account,” Karl (personal communication, October 29, 2010) stated. Karl, a white male, was thinking about majoring in History or Education at the time of his fall advising. He seemed unhappy when he discussed his previous experiences with advising. Fortunately, his fall advising session in college went better. “I was surprised I got in that quick. The advisor seemed like they were prepared for me coming. I would say “it [the advising session] went well.” Like other students in the study, Karl was ready to declare his major at the time of his spring advising. “I’m probably going to declare sometime in the near future, probably before the semester is over, as a firm History major,” Karl (personal communication, March 9, 2011) proclaimed. History appealed to Karl because “it’s kind of like a story with people you can remember; unlike math and science where it is just a cold calculation.” Karl made his positive thoughts on advising known as he declared, “advising was more personalized than I was expecting. The advisor was definitely helpful in guiding me.” Karl enjoyed the interaction with the advisor and noted how he was excited for future advising sessions.

Ralph

Ralph was pleased with how “quick and smooth” (Ralph, personal communication, October 29, 2010) his fall advising session went. “I was surprised how quickly it went. The time was used very efficiently. There was no trouble in getting what I needed to take.” Ralph, a white male, was a little concerned about being undecided. His primary concerns of “falling behind” and “not graduate” in four years are not uncommon for undecided students. Ralph was considering going into Business, so he can follow his father who is in sales. Accountancy, in addition to Business was two majors Ralph gave some consideration to during spring advising. Although he mentioned both majors, Ralph appeared to be leaning toward Business “after hearing how hard the Accounting classes are” (Ralph, personal communication, March 31, 2011). Ralph had no concerns being undecided during the spring as “all the classes would fall between either major I decide.” Ralph acknowledged that his advising expectations have changed since entering college. “Before college I thought of advising as something I did on my own based on how it was in high school. Now it is more one-on-one with someone helping you individually.” Ralph looked forward to future interactions with his academic advisor.

Lucy

“I thought I was just going to tell them [the advisor] what I wanted and they would put it down, but they helped a lot more,” Lucy (personal communication, October 29, 2010) stated when asked about her fall advising experience. Lucy is a white female who was thinking about majoring in Physical Therapy or Nursing. She was pleased with the fall advising because the advisor talked with her “about majors I was thinking about, what classes I was taking, and what classes I might want to take.” Lucy had no problem being undecided, as people tell her “it is good to be undecided during your freshman year.” Although Lucy did not seem concerned in the

fall about being undecided, early in the spring she began to think otherwise. Being undecided in the second semester “is a little scary because I want to get out of here as soon as possible,” Lucy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) announced. Fortunately Lucy did not remain scared very long as she declared her new major during her spring advising session. “I just declared Dental Hygiene,” Lucy explained. Dental Hygiene was not under consideration during the fall, but after talking to her family and looking at the requirements, she decided to go ahead and commit to the major. Lucy found her second session “a lot more helpful than the first time.” She believed this because now that she declared a major she was “definitely taking classes I will need.”

Heather

Heather, a white female, had always worked with children. At her fall advising session, she was thinking about Elementary Education as a major, but also completing her pre-requisites for Dental Hygiene. Both possible career choices would allow her to continue to work with children. This education plan was unique, so Heather was concerned entering her fall advising session. “I was scared they [the advisor] were not going to know what I was talking about. I’m going down an education path, but may want to be a dental hygienist” (Heather, personal communication, October 29, 2010). Heather’s nervousness subsided as the advisor assured her she can take classes “that fall between each other. I can take both of them and have some pre-reqs toward Dental Hygiene.” Heather’s plans changed slightly in the spring. During her spring advising session, she worked with the advisor on the requirements for Nursing. However, due to circumstances beyond her control, she was aware of the need for an additional possible major. “I am considering maybe Nutrition. I want to go into Nursing, but I don’t want to have to transfer schools. My parents bought a house here so I have to stay,” Heather (personal communication,

March 9, 2011) said. Heather viewed both majors as enjoyable occupations because with both you can “work in the hospitals and help people.” Heather admitted her expectations did not change much from advising session one to session two because “I knew more about what I needed to talk about and which classes I needed to take.”

Wesley

“I really didn’t meet with my academic advisor in high school,” Wesley (personal communication, October 29, 2010) said. Before entering college, Wesley received most of his academic information from his friends. “Primarily my older friends who were interested in the same things talked with me.” Wesley is a white male who was considering majors in Biology or Physical Therapy. He was surprised at what went on during his fall advising session. “I thought they [the advisor] were going to throw some classes at me, but they asked me what I wanted to do.” After the session Wesley admitted, “I’m looking forward to next semester and how I have everything planned out.” The spring advising session saw Wesley on a similar path regarding the possibility of becoming a Biology major. However, his professional aspirations changed. “I discussed with my advisor going into Biology and Pre-Med,” Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) stated. Although Wesley was skeptical at first, he found academic advising during his first year to be a very good resource. “When I first got here I really did not want academic advising. I thought they would make me do stuff I didn’t want to. Now you realize they [advisors] are here to help you and lead you to what you want,” he said confidently.

Cathy

“I’m being lazy and don’t want to choose,” (Cathy, personal communication, November 5, 2010) was a common message Cathy, a white female, was hearing from others about being undecided. However, she did not let their message bother her, as she was fine being undecided.

“I didn’t want to change like 20 times,” Cathy exclaimed when she discussed being undecided. She was taking her time before making a decision. Cathy considered majoring in Accounting because she has “always been good at math.” She was “nervous about it [advising] because I didn’t know what I was doing.” However, when thinking back about her session, she admitted “my advisor really helped me out.” The negative messages Cathy received in the fall slightly decreased in the spring, but she admitted that some people were telling her she needed to “hurry up and choose” (Cathy, personal communication, March 10, 2011). Cathy still considered Accounting as a possible major, but added Journalism to the list during the spring semester. “I’m starting to look into Journalism because my English teacher from last semester really bragged on my writing,” she pointed out. Cathy was quick to mention that she was “still looking at Accounting; which my parents like, but am now testing the waters with Journalism.” Cathy believed she had developed well as a college student regarding academic advising. “I was really intimidated with my first advising because I didn’t know what to expect. Now it is nowhere near as bad. It is relaxed. It is a lot better now,” she explained.

Clay

Clay, a white male, who thought about majoring in Business, was not concerned about being undecided as a freshman. In fact, he was more concerned for someone else. “I’m a freshman. It’s not that uncommon to be undecided. My brother is a junior and he is still undecided. I have more concern for him than I do myself right now” (Clay, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Clay was pleased with his fall advising experience. “Having someone to have one-on-one conversations about it [academics], who isn’t giving a biased opinion, has helped me a lot.” Spring advising allowed Clay to further explore Business as his possible major. Clay (personal communication, April 7, 2011) acknowledged, “I’m still

thinking Business, because there are a wide variety of things I can do with a Business major.”

Similar to other students in the study, Clay admitted to having “terrible advising in high school.”

He “figured it [college advising] was going to be something like that. However, his “expectations were blown out of the water. These people [advisors] helped me a lot more than I expected.”

Karen

“Everybody I talk to already knows what they are doing,” Karen (personal communication, November 5, 2010) noted when she explained her concerns about being undecided. Karen was considering majoring in Biology or Chemistry, but was worried she would “not be able to get everything I needed to get in my four years.” Karen had a roller coaster experience with her fall advising session. “I was nervous because I needed the one-on-one time. I was thinking there was going to be more than just me [in the advising meeting].” Karen’s feelings quickly changed after her one-on-one advising meeting. “I felt a sense of accomplishment. I was excited about registering.” Karen has transitioned nicely during her first year of college. She no longer had concerns about being undecided. After her spring advising session she stated, “I feel like I am prepared to go into a major” (Karen, personal communication, March 7, 2011). Karen talked to her academic advisor about becoming a Chemistry major. Parallel to fall, she appreciated “the sessions being one-on-one. My advisor worked with me individually and showed me what needs to go on.” Karen’s advice to future first year students included this valuable nugget, “get there [advising office] on time, because classes run out fast.” Karen is a black female.

John

Like other participants, John addressed the lack of choices he had regarding his academics in high school. “We had a guidance counselor, but there wasn’t much choice for

classes in high school” (John, personal communication, November 5, 2010). This attitude carried over to his college advising expectations. He expected advisors to “tell me what classes I should take.” He admitted the advisor was helpful, and “showed me what I needed to take.” John is a white male and was still very undecided after his fall advising session, but acknowledged International Studies was a major of interest. After almost a year of higher education under his belt, John confessed to still thinking about International Studies, but adding Business to the mix. “I’ve always felt Business is where I would do the best, and I’ve always been interested in international stuff. That is what made me decide to combine the two,” John (personal communication, March 31, 2011) said. John found his advising experiences during his first year to be very effective. “I would be clueless to what classes to take without it [advising],” he proclaimed. After two college advising sessions, he continued to remember the poor advising experience in high school and how grateful he was college advising was different. He considered college advising “a lot different from high school. You have a huge range of classes to take. It [college advising] helps out a lot more.”

Zairia

Prior to enrolling in college, Zairia received most of her academic information from her “mom and the counselors at school” (Zairia, personal communication, November 8, 2010). She was not concerned about being undecided, as she does not “want anything boring.” Zairia is a black female who thought about majoring in Social Work. She liked Social Work because she enjoyed working with people. “I like listening to them; hearing what their experiences are and maybe I can help.” Zairia thought college advising in the fall was “an easy process.” Following her session she admitted, “I know more information about the classes, and what I can look forward to.” During her spring advising session, Zairia talked again about Social Work with her

advisor. “Social Work would be good for me. It is just something I would like to do” (Zairia, personal communication, March 9, 2011). Zairia is content with being undecided in her second semester, as it is “not a big worry, I have plenty of time,” she said. Her first year advising experiences seemed to go well. Zairia thought the advisor “gave me some good information.” The advisor discussed “what classes I would like to take. They didn’t just give me any old classes to get me out of the way,” she pointed out.

Alex

Alex had guidance counselors available to help him in high school, but explained that “mostly my mom helped me out” (Alex, personal communication, November 8, 2010) when it came to academic advising. Alex is a white male who considered a major in Criminal Justice in the fall. He liked Criminal Justice because of how it was portrayed on television. Additionally he stated, “I like knowing why people do things; like what their motives were. Alex had a good fall advising experience, as he gave it 10 out of 10. Alex (personal communication, March 8, 2011) noted, “they [the advisor] really helped me out.” Alex allowed Criminal Justice to remain in the conversation during spring advising, but also added Law Enforcement or Law School to the mix. However, he openly admitted that selecting a major “still scares me even though I’m only a freshman. I have no idea what I’m doing.” Alex appreciated the advice he received from his advisor. Being made to “come in [for advising] is helpful. My mom use to help me pick my classes in high school. Now that I’m on my own, having someone there coaching you makes it a lot easier,” he noted. The continuation of a respected authority figure offering guidance was important for Alex. He looked forward to future advising sessions, where he will prepare ahead of time by “knowing more about what I want to do.”

Thad

Some undecided students such as Thad admitted to feeling pressure to figure out their major. He described the pressure as both internal and external. “Of course you got your parents pushing you to decide. People you see with majors, then you are undecided; you want to say you have a major too” (Thad, personal communication, November 9, 2010). Thad is a white male who was considering Pre-Optometry. His goal after college is “to be successful and be able to provide for my family.” Thad acknowledged the positive experience he had with his fall advising session. “The advisor did a good job. They answered all my questions. They even helped me prepare for future courses.” Pre-Optometry was still the primary major under consideration for Thad during spring advising. He felt this major would be a good fit because “I have a neighbor who is an optometrist and he really got me interested” (Thad, personal communication, March 11, 2011). Thad admitted that being undecided was no longer a big issue for him. “I know what I want to do. It is just written on paper that I’m undecided,” he said confidently. Thad believed the college advising process was “very easy.” The advisors “did what I expected them to do. They helped me with classes and decide on a major.”

Chris

“I don’t have to decide for a while,” Chris (personal communication, November 9, 2010), a white male, exclaimed. Chris was not concerned about declaring a major, but did admit he was considering Secondary Education so he can become a coach. Chris enjoyed the college advising experience much better than his high school advising. He described his high school advising as, “there was a lady that would come around and give out papers. It really wasn’t much of anything.” However, he said his college advisor “helped me a lot, and the session was pretty successful. I think I know what I’m looking for now.” True to form, Chris acknowledged during

his spring advising session that Secondary Education was the path for him. According to Chris (personal communication, March 8, 2011) he still had “no concerns” about being undecided. “I still want to go into Secondary Education; looking into the Social Studies program.” Because his first advising session went so well, his expectations increased from fall to spring. “I was hoping the second one [advising session] would be just as well or better than the first,” he explained. When Chris reflected on his advising expectations when he first entered SU, and compared them to how he felt in the spring, he said, “I went from not expecting anything, to expecting to get a lot of help. They [advisors] are there for me, and not just because they have to.”

Paul

Paul admitted that he was “horrible in high school. I didn’t care about grades. I was simply there just to get out” (Paul, personal communication, November 10, 2010). Now that he is in college, he was concerned about being undecided because he “does not have a direction to go.” Paul is a white male, and considered a major in Exercise Science during the fall. He viewed Exercise Science as a way to “work out and make money doing it.” Paul was a little disappointed in his fall advising session. “I have to admit it felt sort of formal. It seemed like a process, and I was just a number.” Unfortunately for Paul advising during the spring semester did not get much better for him. “I still feel like I am being pushed in a direction,” Paul (personal communication, March 8, 2011) said shaking his head. He felt the advisor “pushed me in the Business and Psychology areas instead of the primary liberal arts that would go for everything.” Although Paul admitted to primarily being interested in “Business and Psychology,” he thought the advisor could have done better. In a strange twist, when Paul was asked what could make the advising process better, he responded “I think the process is fantastic. It is definitely helpful. I have not seen any flaws with it.”

Mike

“It was pretty terrible,” Mike (personal communication, November 10, 2010) proclaimed as he thought back on his high school advising. He changed schools during his senior year. “Through the process of changing schools, I really didn’t get any help with advising.” Even though Mike came to college with minimal advising, he was looking forward to meeting with a college advisor. He was pleased with his fall academic advising. Mike acknowledged, “it [advising session] was fun. My advisor was nice. They talked to me about my possible major, and what all I was thinking.” Mike is a white male, and was considering a major in Music or Business during the fall semester. After his spring advising session, Mike (personal communication, March 7, 2011) noted a few concerns about still being undecided. “I’m about to run out of classes that are just general classes. I don’t want to take classes that are not going to count,” he announced. Mike was still considering Music or Business as possible majors, but a new major was mentioned. “My mom is a nurse, and she is trying to push me to do something like that.” Before his next advising session, he wanted to “decide what I’m going to major in.” Overall Mike was pleased with his first year advising as he stated, “the advisement went great. I like my advisor. It [advising] is definitely a good resource.”

How are things going?

At the beginning of each fall and spring interview I asked a very basic introductory question regarding how things are going at the university. This was primarily used to break the ice, and allow students to get comfortable with the interview structure. Almost all students used positive descriptors describing the fall semester such as “good” or “great”. Jason (personal communication, October 21, 2010) stated, “I love it so far. I’ve made some great friends.” Jackie (personal communication, October 28, 2010) agreed. “Everything at the university is going great.

Everybody is friendly. It's just what I expected." Unfortunately not all students felt the same. "I'm not the most social guy so it is sort of depressing. I don't feel involved or like I'm meeting people," Paul (personal communication, November 10, 2010) said. "I think it all comes down to whether I want to achieve or leave." Paul is not alone in his feelings of loneliness. Zairia (personal communication, November 8, 2010) acknowledged not knowing people at first, but that had recently improved. "I didn't know people at first, but now that I know people it is fun." Heather (personal communication, October 29, 2010) also admitted to being nervous because she did not know anyone when she first arrived. She was from another state and "didn't know anybody coming here. I got into a sorority so it is better now."

I found it interesting that eight of the students mentioned academics without being prodded. Although most students addressed the university in general terms, several mention specific issues pertaining to academics. Tamara (October 22, 2010) voiced her satisfaction by stating, "I like the classes. I like how my schedule is planned." Cathy on the other hand felt compelled to state her concerns with one class in particular. "There is one class I'm not doing so well in, the French Intensive class. It's because it is every day and I'm not use to that. It's like two courses and I wasn't prepared for that" (Cathy, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Only one student addressed being undecided in his/her major. "It is kind of confusing because I'm undecided and there are so many different ways I could go," Sue (personal communication, October 28, 2010) stated. All of these students are undecided, so Sue's concern would seem rather common. However, she was the only student to bring it up in the introductory question.

The introductory question posed to students in the spring offered similar responses. Nineteen of the participants used words such as "good, great, and well" to describe the spring

semester. Similar to the fall interview, several students mentioned academics when asked how things are going. Responses pertaining to classes and grades were the most common. One student, Bernard (personal communication, October 26, 2010) described the spring semester as “going pretty good. My classes are going good. The times of the classes are good. It’s just all going good,” he said. Zairia also used the introductory question to interject her thoughts on spring academics. “Classes are easier now that I know what I need to do,” Zairia (personal communication, November 8, 2010) said confidently. Unfortunately, not everyone who referenced classes did so in a positive nature. Spring semester has been “a little rough” (Paul, personal communication, March 8, 2011) for Paul. “Classes have gotten much harder. I’m a little rocky right now.” Two students, Tamara (personal communication, March 23, 2011) and Heather (personal communication, March 9, 2011) admitted to “falling behind” and are now trying to play catch-up with their coursework.

It came as no surprise when six students in the study openly admitted to the spring semester being better and/or less stressful than the fall. A simple question of “how is the spring semester treating you?” opened the door for students to compare their current feelings to those they had in the fall. Chad was one participant who really felt this way. “It [spring semester] is a lot better than last semester. I have more of an idea about what to expect and how to approach things,” Chad (personal communication, March 9, 2011) stated proudly. Chad was not alone in his feelings. Fadra (personal communication, March 11, 2011) echoed Chad’s sentiments, as she described spring semester as “better than fall. I feel more confident now. I’m warmed up and ready to go.” Thad had a learning experience in the fall, so he changed his approach for the spring. Spring “is going really well. I’m only taking 12 hours. It is a lot less stressful than fall,” Thad (personal communication, March 11, 2011) said while he looked at ease. Cathy (personal

communication, March 10, 2011) also acknowledged that spring is “a lot better than fall semester. It’s not as stressful.” This should come as no surprise to professionals in higher education, as most students will gain experience and confidence during the first semester. The new confidence and experiencing tasks that have already been accomplished should promote the successful transition from semester to semester for students.

The introductory questions offered student insight on how things were going for them at the university. Although most students were very generic in their answers, some gave insightful details on their college experience. All students seemed at ease discussing their lives with a stranger. The amount of detail varied, but the body language the students displayed allowed me to believe they were comfortable talking about themselves in an interview format.

Analytic Themes

In this chapter, five themes emerged from the student interviews conducted in the fall and spring. These themes highlighted students’ experiences with academic advising before college, being undecided in a major, majors under consideration, college academic advising, and reflecting back. Themes were discovered through data coding, where patterns materialized in the form of the five primary themes and sub-themes to accompany them.

The first theme, High School Experiences: A Mixed Bag, included how participants described their academic advising experience before they arrived at college. Students’ responses comprised advising during high school and after graduation. Students discussed a wide array of experiences. Several participants believed they had excellent advising before arriving at college, while others adamantly disagreed. Participants mentioned a variety of people who played a role in their academic advising. Advisors, counselors, teachers, family, and others were all given credit for advising.

The second theme, No Major, No Problem, Or Is It, addressed how participants felt about entering college without a specific major declared. Students displayed mixed emotions regarding their lack of major. Some students felt it was no big deal to be undecided as a freshman. However, others were concerned by their indecision. Concerns ranged from taking longer to graduate to not getting the classes needed once they did decide on a major. Students were evenly distributed regarding messages they were hearing from others about being undecided. Most of the students heard positive or neutral messages about being undecided, although one-third of participants did admit to hearing negative messages when it came to their indecision.

The third theme, So Many Choices, So Little Time, was about majors participants were considering at the time of the interviews. Although the students were classified as undecided in their major, very few could not pinpoint possible majors. In fact only two of the participants have no idea about what they want to major in. Most of the students in the study were considering a possible major, while half of those were considering multiple majors. Common possible majors mentioned by students included health professions, business, and science. It appeared students were undecided not because of a lack of a possible majors, but rather too many interests to narrow down.

The fourth theme, Learning To Crawl Before You Walk, covered the academic advising experiences while in college. Participants viewed college advising in a positive nature. Students were very open about how much advising helped them with their academic endeavors. Most students acknowledged that the advising process primarily focused on course and major selection, but others addressed further issues covered during the advising session. This theme explored a variety of facets including advisor's location, planning for the next advising session, and students' thoughts on the entire process.

The final theme, *If Only I Would Have Known*, allowed students to reflect back on when they first entered the university and make comparisons to what they now know. The reflections provided insight into student growth during the first year, while allowing the students to offer advice to future students and advising administrators. Students' personal experiences were valuable in telling the story of how undecided students experience academic advising during their first year of college.

Mid-Year Telephone Interviews

In order for full disclosure with my study, it is important to understand that the themes mentioned above were developed primarily through the fall and spring one-on-one interviews following each student's academic advising sessions. The mid-year telephone interviews were used as a way to check in with the student to make sure they completed the first semester and planned on returning in the spring. This also provided me with an opportunity to remind students about my study and encourage them to participate in the spring interviews. It was very difficult to get in contact with students via telephone during the holiday break. When I did, the last thing they wanted to talk about was academic advising. These barriers limited most telephone conversations to five minutes or less with students giving very brief answers. I appreciated their willingness to take time out of their break to provide any information they were willing to share. Unfortunately, the lack of depth in the conversations and the undertones to get off the phone left me with very little useable information. However, all was not lost as I was able to speak with 25 of the 30 participants, in which 24 said they planned to return to school for the spring semester.

High School Advising Experiences: A Mixed Bag

This theme addressed students' academic advising experiences before they arrived at college. Two sub-themes emerged from the data that supported the overall theme: satisfaction

with academic advising prior to college and people given credit for their assistance with a student's academic advising. Participants defined their prior advising experiences as good, bad, or neutral. Participants made specific comments and gave examples regarding what made an advising experience good or bad. Participants had varying views on what made an experience good or bad, but most were able to support their beliefs with personal anecdotes.

I expected all students to be able to name someone who assisted them with academic advising prior to enrolling at the university. This belief held true, as every student listed at least one person they gave academic advising credit. Over half of the participants listed more than one person. Even though not all students claimed to receive good academic advising prior to college, almost all identified a professional at their high school who assisted them.

Satisfaction with Academic Advising Prior to College

Students had no qualms about discussing their experiences with academic advising prior to enrolling in college. The type of advising experience was very subjective. One student may have been completely satisfied with an advisor or counselor making all the decisions for him/her, while another student would see this advising interaction as a bad experience because they were not allowed to have input. I was surprised by the evenly distributed responses from the participants. Although the students were not specifically asked if they had a good, neutral, or bad experience, I was able to deduce this from student responses. Nine students viewed their advising as good, 12 were neutral, and 9 considered their experiences as bad.

Students who had good experiences used words such as “great, helpful, and excellent.” Jason (personal communication, October 21, 2010) was pleased with his advising experience prior to college. “I had a great academic advisor back home. She really laid the groundwork for applying to colleges and getting all the classes I need. I was never lost.” Jason seemed to value

the high school advisor's role in her assistance with college information, while also keeping him on track with required high school courses. Thad agreed with Jason's positive outlook on his prior advising experiences. Thad went to a college preparatory high school, and acknowledged he had a "team for advising" (Thad, personal communication, November 9, 2010). His team consisted of guidance counselors and a professional advisor. Having multiple people who helped him apply to college, and keep on the right track for graduation was very important to him.

Not all positive advising experiences were strictly related to college application preparation and taking the correct high school courses. Sue had a great experience thanks to a teacher. "My AP [Advanced Placement] English teacher was really good about talking to us. She was really more than a teacher to all the students at my high school" (Sue, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Sue found it valuable to have a teacher to discuss specific academic fields and careers. Additionally, she admitted to having counselors at her school to help with basic functions, but the individual care and type of conversations the teacher had with students was more valuable in her opinion. Chuck also valued his experience with academic advising while in high school. He was one of the few participants that mentioned assistance with standardized tests. "I actually had really good advisors in high school. They helped us set dates and prepare for the SAT and ACT" (Chuck, personal communication, October 28, 2010). He found the assistance with standardized tests in addition to the traditional responsibilities such as helping him "get in college" to have played a role in his positive outlook on academic advising.

Students who viewed their high school advising experiences as neutral used words and phrases such as: "only met advisor once, planned for everybody, and I knew what to take without them." Unlike students who had positive things to say about their high school advising, some students remembered their advising as neither good nor bad, just average. Tamara was

considered neutral, as she admitted to “only meeting with our advisor once” (Tamara, personal communication, October 22, 2010). It seemed students would meet with advisors more than once, but Tamara only acknowledged the one meeting. Chad (personal communication, October 22, 2010) also found advising in high school to be average. “We had advisors, but they didn’t make us see them as much as we should have.” If Chad would have seen the advisors more, would additional advisor/advisee interaction have changed his opinion?

Several participants in the study stated how they were not required to get advised. Therefore, they really had no opinion on the satisfaction level with high school advising. “You pretty much decide on your own,” Walt (personal communication, October 28, 2010) said. “If you have any room you can pick extra classes you want.” When Walt was pressed for additional information on how he knew what to take he said, “they pretty much just give you a sheet and tell you what you need to graduate.” Cathy (personal communication, November 5, 2010) admitted to having advisors, but also let it be known that she rarely used them. “I was never really advised in high school. I never went there for help. I knew the classes I wanted to take.”

The students who were neutral in regards to their advising experience in high school outnumbered the separate groups who considered their advising good, or bad. I believed this was because unless the students had an outstanding advisor or very memorable experience, nothing stood out for the student to remember. On the other hand unless the student had a very bad experience, or the advisor was not helpful, there would be nothing negative to remember as time passed after the bad experience. This left the neutral group who did not have a good or bad experience, or were required to meet with the counselor/advisor often enough to form a concrete opinion.

One of the disturbing trends found early in this study was the amount of students who admitted to having a bad experience with academic advising while in high school. Nine of the 30 participants (30%) had something occur during their high school advising to make them remember the experience as being negative. I relate this to a small child who goes to the doctor's office and gets a shot. That child will likely develop a negative connotation regarding visiting the doctor's office in the future. If a student had a prior negative advising experience, why should they expect future academic advising to be any different?

Students who rated their prior advising experiences as bad used the following terms, "not helpful, horrible, and terrible." Mike (personal communication, November 10, 2010) described his high school advising as "pretty terrible." He changed schools, but neither school "offered any help with it [advising]." Mike seemed like he would have been willing to talk with an advisor, but according to him "it's hard to say any advising even happened." Fadra had a counselor, but conceded it did not meet her expectations. "Everyone had their counselors, but it really was not as detailed as it could have been or I wanted it to be" (Fadra, personal communication, October 25, 2010). This is a clear example of a student seeking more from a counselor, but was unable to have her expectations met. There are unknown variables such as the counselors' student load, Fadra's initiative displaying she wanted more from the counselor, or other factors that could have lead to Fadra's lackluster feelings regarding her prior advising.

Some of the students openly admitted to the advisor being the problem. These students were required to meet with their advisor, but the experience was not enjoyable due to the student and advisor not getting along. Karl (personal communication, October 29, 2010) did not shy away from his feelings about having a bad experience in high school. "I had a really horrible advisor in high school. They [the advisor] did not take the students' opinions or request into

account. It was whatever they saw fit.” Karl openly expressed his displeasure in not being allowed to offer input into his own academic decision making. Sara echoed Karl’s thoughts. “I had bad experiences in high school. I did not get along with my advisor. They were not very helpful. They were just like you need to take this, this, and this and nothing else. We had no options” (Sara, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Students who rated their experiences as bad were adamant about not being involved in the decision-making process. College advising should open a whole new world to the possibilities good advising can bring to these students. Hopefully it was not too late.

Students’ high school advising stories provided interesting insight as to how participants defined their advising experience prior to enrolling in college. Judging a good or bad experience is very subjective. For example, Keisha (personal communication, October 28, 2010) defined her experience as being good. She said “in high school they [the counselor] planned for everybody. We pretty much took all the same classes.” Keisha was okay having an authority figure tell her exactly what she needed. She did not express concern with not being allowed to take part in the decision-making process. Jackie felt the same as Keisha. Jackie (personal communication, October 28, 2010) admitted her high school advisor was “helpful.” However, Jackie believed she was helpful because the advisor “pretty much did everything for us. We just came in and they would pick out our classes.” On the other hand, previously mentioned students such as Karl and Sara viewed their experiences in a negative light due to the academic counselor making all the decisions for them. Having more input could have made their advising experience better, while students such as Keisha and Jackie enjoyed not having to make any decisions.

Similar advising experiences, but different interpretations could lead to relating students’ experiences to Perry’s Theory on Intellectual and Ethical Development, as defined in Evans,

Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998). According to Perry's Theory, students move through different positions with duality, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment representing key concepts within the scheme. A student in the dualistic position "views the world dichotomously: good-bad, right-wrong, black-white" (p. 131). Keisha and Jackie saw the advisor as the authority figure. Because they were still dualistic thinkers, the authority figure making all the decisions for them was perfectly acceptable. Multiplicity is seen as "honoring diverse views when the right answers are not yet know" (p. 131). I would classify the students who sought advice from more than one person in this group. Students such as Alex, who had a counselor, but also received advice from his mother, could be viewed as being in the multiplicity position. Alex received advice from two authority figures' whose opinions he found valid.

Students like Karl and Sara could be viewed as being in the position of relativism, commitment, or somewhere in between. "Relativism is initiated by recognition of the need to support opinions. All opinions no longer appear to be equally valid" (p. 132). In the commitment position students are "involved in making choices, decisions, and affirmations that are made from the vantage point of relativism" (p. 133). Although Karl and Sara did not come out and say they did not find validity in their counselors' advice, they did make it clear they wanted to be involved in making decisions. They were not given the opportunity do so, therefore I have no way of knowing if they were ready to actually make the correct decisions regarding their academic endeavors. However, based on their responses it would seem as though they have moved through the dualistic and multiplistic positions, and were genuinely ready to be more involved in their educational choices.

High school advising experiences whether good, neutral, or bad really is a mixed bag. Students were open and honest about their experiences. I found their stories and examples

interesting, and believe prior experiences shaped their initial feelings regarding academic advising while in college. For most participants, college advising will be different from their high school experiences. How they choose to approach this new advisor/advisee interaction is up to them.

Who Helped Before College

Participants acknowledged a wide variety of school professionals, family members, and friends for giving them academic guidance prior to enrolling in college. According to the students, advice could be in the form of courses to enroll, teachers to take, study strategies, college admission assistance, and other academic facets. Over half the students in this study admitted to more than one person offering academic advice while in high school. Family members and advisors/counselors were the most frequent people given credit for assistance. See Table 7 for complete assistance list.

Table 7
People who assisted participants academically before college

Pseudonym	People Who Helped		Pseudonym	People Who Helped
Jason	Academic advisor		Karl	Aunt
Carla	Teacher		Ralph	Parents
Tamara	Coach, advisor		Lucy	Principal, parents
Chad	Two college deans		Heather	Counselor, parents
Monique	Mom		Wesley	Friends
Roxanne	Counselor		Cathy	Parents, siblings
Fadra	Coaches		Clay	Advisor, parents, sibling
Bernard	Advisors, parents		Karen	Mother, band director
Rick	Parents		Josh	Advisor
Keisha	Counselor, mom		Zairia	Mom, counselor
Jackie	Counselor		Alex	Mom, uncle
Sara	Counselor, mom		Thad	Advisor, dad
Walt	Counselor		Chris	Advisor
Chuck	Parents, counselor		Paul	Parents
Sue	AP teacher, counselor		Mike	Parents, teachers

It was interesting that family members were the most common response given. Moms, dads, aunts, uncles, and siblings were all recorded answers. Ralph (personal communication, October 29, 2010) noted that his parents helped him “fill out a sheet” for the courses to take in high school. He said his parents were good at “telling me what to take and what not to take.” Rick felt the same as Ralph in regards to his parents helping him. When Rick was asked who helped him in high school, he responded “my parents told me what to do” (Rick, personal communication, October 27, 2010). Several other participants such as Mike and Paul gave credit to their parents for assisting them with academic advising before college. With the popular expression “helicopter parents” being widely used, I wonder if it was the participants’ choice to have their parents so involved, or was it the parents hovering over ready to swoop in and offer assistance. Lipka (2005) acknowledged helicopter parents as parents who “hover over their college aged children and challenge administrative decisions” (p. A22).

Other family members were also given credit for academic assistance. Karl (personal communication, October 29, 2010) gave credit to his aunt “who is a former teacher.” Karl did not specify if she was a former high school or college teacher, but it was interesting that he felt the need to identify her as a former teacher without being prodded. His willingness to divulge this extra tidbit of information leads me to believe Karl not only respects her opinion because she is family, but also was secure in her advice as a professional in the education field. Similar to Karl’s explanation, Alex received useful advice from his uncle. Alex (personal communication, November 8, 2010) said, “My uncle has a Ph.D. in Psychology so he has already been through it. The fact his uncle had a doctorate and experience being successful in college assured Alex that the information he was receiving from his uncle was legitimate. Cathy found her sibling to be a useful source of information. Cathy (personal communication, November 5, 2010) said her

parents and siblings “all went here. One of them is back in school here, so we are talking about which classes and teachers to take.” Karl, Alex, and Cathy all had family members with prior experience in post-secondary education to give them advice. As family members they had easy access to them and could be viewed as a trusted source. The additional experiences each of the family members possessed was an additional benefit to all the students.

Academic advisors/counselors were the second most popular people recognized by the participants. Almost all participants acknowledged having advisors/counselors at their school. Unfortunately, not all students had a good experience with the school’s designated professional who was there to help them. The poor experience is what I believed lead to the low measurement (16/30) of the participants giving them credit for advising prior to college.

Jason had a good experience with his high school advisor. He credited her for “laying the groundwork for applying to colleges and getting all the classes I needed” (Jason, personal communication, October 21, 2010). Likewise, Bernard attributed advising credit to his high school advisor. The advisor would tell him “I might want to take this class and that class to help me out” (Bernard, personal communication, October 26, 2010). The advisor also discussed college options with him. Keisha, Sara, and Walt among others also found the school counselors and advisors to be helpful. They primarily focused their thoughts on the advisors’ ability to help with taking the correct courses in order to meet college admission criteria.

Three students indicated that teachers provided academic advising to them before they enrolled in college. Carla (personal communication, October 22, 2010) remembered one specific teacher who guided her academically. “I had this one teacher; we were close. I told him what I wanted to do, and he told me that was a good career choice. He had some friends in that field. He gave me great advice and information.” Carla knew this person as a respected authority figure at

her school. She trusted him. In addition to him being trustworthy, he was also knowledgeable about the field she wanted to go into. Carla considered this advising interaction to be very good, because a trusted authority figure was able to provide her with accurate information. I believed this positive experience will set the tone for Carla's future positive outlook on college advising. As noted in the previous theme, Sue had a wonderful advising experience in high school thanks to her AP English teacher. The small number of counselors at her school were unable to provide a meaningful connection to the students according to Sue. However, the AP teacher only had a few students in each class, so she could devote attention to other student aspects besides English lessons. Other students from Sue's school or non-AP English students may have answered the question differently, but according to Sue (personal communication, October 28, 2010), "The AP English teacher was more involved than our counselor." Mike also acknowledged that teachers gave him academic guidance while in high school. However, no one teacher stood out, and he did not expand on what services the teachers provided.

Other people were also given credit for academic guidance by the participants; some people were a surprise to me. Coaches, college deans, principal, band director, and friends were all mentioned by at least one student. Initially I would not have thought about band directors, coaches, or college deans giving academic advice prior to enrolling in college. However, if a student has post-secondary athletic aspirations, then it is very logical for their coach to give them academic advice. I believe band directors could also fall in this category; especially if students want to major in music or a major similar to that of the band director. Chad (personal communication, October 22, 2010) caught me off guard with his answer of "two deans." He met the deans while on a prospective student visit and remained in contact with them during his senior year. It also surprised me that only one student credited his friends for giving academic

advice. I believe the students who did not get advice from their friends while in high school will see a shift in this trend once they began to look deeper in college academic requirements. The variety of responses indicated that there were specific people in students' lives that were considered to be the primary sources for information. However, as noted by the participants, anyone can give advice and help students on their academic journey.

No Major, No Problem. Or is it?

Each participant in my study was classified in the campus management system as being undecided in their major. However, the concerns of being undecided and level of indecision varied greatly from student to student. When students discussed being undecided two sub-themes clearly emerged, their concerns and what messages they received from others. Students varied greatly in the amount of concern they had regarding being undecided. Some students felt pressured to declare a major, while others realized they had plenty of time to consider their options. Messages students were receiving also varied from student to student. Certain students admitted to hearing negative messages about being undecided from their family or peers. However, other students were not receiving any messages, or considered the messages to be of a positive nature.

Concerns About Being Undecided

Selecting a major in college is very important to most students. One would think students without a declared major would fret and lose sleep over such a looming decision. The majority of participants in my study did mention at least one concern about being undecided. Common concerns included taking longer to graduate, never being able to decide on a major, and not taking appropriate classes. However, not all participants in my study viewed selecting a major as such a big decision. A handful of students admitted to not worrying about a major as a freshman.

Others noted they had time to think about possible majors while taking their general education requirements. Although I had an idea about students' concerns regarding being undecided, some of the responses really surprised me. Students in this study did a remarkable job addressing specific concerns, or lack thereof, they had as an undecided freshman in college.

Students stated numerous concerns about being undecided in their major. The most frequent concern mentioned was not graduating on time. Some students believed that entering the university undecided may not allow them to graduate in a timely manner. When Karen (personal communication, November 5, 2010) was asked about her concerns about being undecided, she responded "I would not be able to get everything I need to get in my four years." Lucy (personal communication, October 29, 2010) had a similar response in that being undecided "was going to take me a lot longer to graduate." I found it encouraging that these students as freshmen were looking ahead to graduation. That should be a goal of all students who enter college. However, they cannot put the cart in front of the horse. Graduation is very important in the future, but they must first find an academic field that interests them. Bernard (personal communication, October 26, 2010) was concerned with time implications, but not necessarily graduation parameters. Bernard was worried he would not "get my major on time." He was afraid that if he did not find his appropriate major before the university required him to, he would be in trouble. Bernard was still very undecided in the fall, so his response of "if I was ever going to find my major" did not surprise me as one of his concerns.

Another common concern among participants was that they would never be able to decide on a major. Although Bernard was concerned with time implications, he was also worried if he would ever be able to decide. Bernard's concerns were not unique. Fadra (personal communication, October 25, 2010) admitted worrying about being "constantly indecisive about

everything. Time would go by and I would just not know. I would be way behind everyone.”

Alex (personal communication, November 8, 2010) also said “just not being able to figure one out, just being lost” concerned him. Fadra and Alex were not alone in being nervous about being lost. Their apprehension was logical in that there are numerous choices for college majors, and it is a big decision for students.

A small number of students specifically mentioned the ability to register for appropriate classes as an undecided student. Roxanne (personal communication, October 25, 2010) was concerned because “I did not know what classes to take being undecided.” Keisha felt the same as Roxanne. “I am a first year [student] and undecided, I did not know what classes I should and should not take” (Keisha, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Both Roxanne and Keisha were concerned about classes they would take as a freshman while being undecided. However, students like Rick and Chuck were thinking ahead to what classes they would need once they did declare a major. Rick (personal communication, October 27, 2010) acknowledged concern with “what classes to take.” He was worried that when he “did decide on a major I would have the right classes.” Chuck (personal communication, October 28, 2010) believed that if he did not get the correct courses early it would affect his ability to get “the upper level courses later on because I have not decided yet.” All four students had valid concerns. Students such as Roxanne and Keisha who had no idea what to take during their first year as an undecided student needed the advice from an academic advisor. Rick and Chuck also needed the advisor’s guidance, but more for planning purposes in the future.

Two other responses I found interesting were from Sara and Thad. Sara (personal communication, October 28, 2010) felt some uneasiness because according to her, she was the only one in her group of friends that did not have a declared major. “Everyone knows, well they

think they know exactly what they want to do. Everyone is taking classes toward their major.” Sara did not admit to feeling pressure from her friends with declared majors, but she seemed to be putting pressure on herself because of her indecision. I believed if Sara had other friends who were undecided, or if one of her friends were to change majors, it would have eased her concerns that she is not the only one who does not have a specific direction. Thad’s response also caught my attention in regards to feeling pressure. Thad (personal communication, November 9, 2010) stated he “kind of felt pressured to figure out” a major. When I pressed him for who was pressuring him, he responded “you got your parents pushing you to decide what you want to do. People you see with majors then you are undecided; you kind of want to say you have a major.” Thad’s acknowledgment of his parents putting pressure on him allowed me to believe it was more than just Thad internally feeling pressure. From conversations or comments made by his parents, Thad had pressure from outside sources. However, similar to Sara, he was also putting pressure on himself when he mentioned other students having a major while he did not. Both Sara and Thad experienced different types of pressure because they were undecided in their major. I am hopeful that as they continue to progress in their educational journey, the pressure will ease.

Not all students in the study had concerns about being undecided. “I am not worried,” Mike (personal communication, November 10, 2010) said confidently. “Most people told me don’t jump into something unless you are really excited about it.” Chris felt the same as Mike. He was fine being undecided as he “did not have to decide for a while” (Chris, personal communication, November 9, 2010). Chris and Mike did not seem bothered by being undecided. Karl, another student in the study, was also fine with being undecided as a freshman. He viewed being undecided as “time to get my feet under me and figure out which direction I wanted to go.”

Being undecided also allowed him to “get my core classes down before I had to dedicate to one direction” (Karl, personal communication, October 29, 2010). Karl had a very logical approach in his thought process regarding being undecided. He was not going to stress over a major, while he worked on his core classes. He knew he had time to think about his options, and there was no rush to jump into any specific program until he was certain it was right for him. These students cared about their academics, and wanted to receive good advice from the advisor. Being undecided was not as big of an issue for them as it was for some of their peers in the study.

Almost all participants had some initial concerns about being undecided in their major during their first academic advising meeting. However, there were some students that were very comfortable as undecided students. I believe as time passes and students gain more college experience, some of the concerns will diminish. Of the most common concerns mentioned during the first interview, not graduating on time and never being able to decide topped the list. Additionally, some students mentioned feeling pressure to decide. I will explore this and other messages from other people in the next sub-theme.

Students’ thoughts on being undecided during the spring semester varied as well. There were still the students who voiced specific concerns about being undecided, and those who were just fine as undecided second semester freshmen. One new group did emerge, as six students declared majors or were 100% sure of the major they would declare at the time of their spring advising meeting. One significant aspect that stood out in the spring interview regarding students concerns was the change in students’ body language and descriptors they used when addressing their concerns, or lack thereof. In the fall several students appeared and sounded sincerely worried about being undecided. However, during spring interviews even students who mentioned a specific concern did not appear to be overly anxious about their indecision. They may have

been a little distressed by this, but they had an underlying amount of confidence that led me to believe this was merely a bump in the road for them.

Only eight students who participated in the spring interviews admitted concerns about still being undecided in their major. Concerns ranged from having to take freshmen classes as an upper classman, to low course availability that will count towards most majors. As a second semester freshman, Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) was worried about still being undecided because “everybody around me is starting to get on track with their classes. I don’t want to be one of the older people stuck in freshmen classes,” he said shaking his head. Wesley’s apprehension was legitimate as it is not uncommon to see an upperclassman in a freshman class because they missed the required course early in their academic career. Cathy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) also seemed a little alarmed because according to her, “I am kind of running out of time.” The fact that there are “less classes to take” was an indicator of the looming decision she must make regarding her future major. During spring advising students may begin to worry as they plan for your sophomore year. The general education classes that count toward almost all majors begin to decrease after the first year. Like Wesley and Cathy, Alex was still concerned with his indecision. “It still scares me even though I’m only a freshman,” Alex (personal communication, March 8, 2011) said. There was no one specific aspect that scared him other than he “has no idea what I’m doing.” Alex was not ready to make a decision anytime soon, but he knew a decision must be made in the near future.

A majority of the spring participants were not concerned with being undecided in their second semester. Although many of the students were not ready to declare on the spot, most of them had a workable list of possible majors. Ralph (personal communication, March 31, 2011) realized that being undecided was no big deal because he had his future major narrowed down to

two similar fields. “I’m not concerned because I’m still doing all the classes that would fall between either major I decide, which are Business and Accounting,” he said confidently. Students who had less than three majors under consideration, especially two or three closely related majors, did not seem fazed at all by remaining under the undecided label. Like Ralph, Sue embraced the undecided tag. “I’m still okay with being undecided,” she noted. “Next year is when I really need to pick a major. I would rather be undecided than switch it [her major] five million times” (Sue, personal communication, April 6, 2011). For a lot of students, the beginning of their sophomore year is when they gain a sense of urgency to find the right major. SU’s policy of requiring students to declare a major once they have earned 45 hours, may also play a role in students correlation to sophomore year equals time to get serious about my major. Chris (personal communication, March 8, 2011) echoed Sue’s sentiments regarding being undecided as a freshman. “I’m still not concerned. It is still the first year,” he stated without batting an eye. Regardless of whether students are not concerned because they have a possible major or two in mind, or they are not worried because they believe they have more time, it was apparent being labeled as a second semester undecided student did not affect them.

The new group that emerged during spring interviews was those students that declared a major, or were extremely confident in the major they would soon declare. As students take various college classes and gain new experience, it is not uncommon for their ideal major to become a reality during their first year. Carla declared Political Science as her major before spring advising began. She admitted that while she was undecided she “worried because I would not find something I like” (Carla, personal communication, March 23, 2011). However, after taking an introductory Political Science course, she realized this was the ideal major for her. Monique had not declared a major at the time of her spring advising session, but she was very

confident she would declare Social Work very soon. “I like Social Work because I want to help people,” Monique (personal communication, March 10, 2011) noted. “My mom is in Social Work. I never thought I would work in a similar field as my mom, but I want to now.” Monique had not taken any Social Work classes, but having a relative in the field gave her some key insights into the profession. Jackie also fell into this group. She was not concerned about being undecided because “I’m pretty decided now,” Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) said with a smile. “I want to do Exercise Science. I know it is hard, but I want to do it.” Other students in the study displayed the same enthusiasm and confidence these students expressed when discussing their new/future majors. Entering SU undecided allowed them time and a pressure-free environment to explore possible majors before making a firm commitment.

Messages From Others

College students receive information from a variety of people. When participants were asked what messages they were receiving from others about being undecided, the answers were evenly distributed during the fall. Eleven students said they received positive messages, ten claimed to have heard negative messages, and nine had heard nothing or neutral messages about being undecided. The students in this study valued others’ opinions, but most did not let opinions from others affect them too much.

The students who received positive messages from others about being undecided had similar responses. Many of them felt it was okay to be undecided as a first-year student. One of the students who received positive messages was happy to share with me what others have said to her. “It is good to be undecided during your freshmen year. Stay undecided as long as you can until you know definitely what you are going to do,” Lucy (personal communication, October 29, 2010) said. She elaborated further in that “you will not have to change your major all the

time and take classes you do not need.” Clay felt the same as Lucy. “I am a freshman and it is not uncommon to be undecided. My older brother is a junior and he is still undecided. I have more concern for him than I do myself right now” (Clay, personal communication, November 5, 2010). Clay was comfortable being undecided during his first year. I found it interesting that he admitted to be more concerned for his brother who was older and still unsure of his academic path. Sue continued the positive trend about being undecided as a freshman. “Everyone tells me it is a good thing to be undecided. Freshman year just go in with an open mind and decide on what you want after being here.” Like Lucy, Clay, and Sue, Walt did not seem concerned about being undecided. When asked what others had to say about being undecided, Walt (personal communication, October 28, 2010) said “going undecided is pretty much the way to go so you can figure out what you want to do during your first freshman semester. That is the best way to do it so you can make up your own mind.” These positive messages that students heard were very encouraging. The transition from high school to college can be overwhelming for some. By these students not stressing out over the selection of their major, they had one less area of pressure they would have to deal with during their first semester in college.

Several of the participants acknowledged hearing negative messages about being undecided. Some of the messages seemed harsh, and others forced undue pressure on students because of who the people were delivering the messages. The messages Cathy received from other people seemed to be mean-spirited. People told Cathy (personal communication, November 5, 2010) that she was “being lazy and just did not want to choose.” This message was harsh for Cathy, as laziness has nothing to do with her not declaring a major. Sara (personal communication, October 28, 2010) also received some unkind remarks regarding being undecided. People have implied that she “does not know what she is doing” because of her

undecided major. There are a lot of factors that should be taken into consideration when declaring a major. Being lazy and not knowing what one was doing could be legitimate concerns with some students, but not with Cathy and Sara.

Other students in the study felt pressure due to messages they have heard from others. Fadra (personal communication, October 25, 2010) was one of the students who had received bad messages about being undecided. She admitted to receiving “mostly negative” messages which caused her to feel pressure to decide. “They say you need to hurry up and choose a major. If you do not you will be stuck and everything will come back on you.” Likewise, Thad (personal communication, November 9, 2010) felt pressure from people close to him. “You got your parents pushing you to decide,” he exclaimed. Thad cared about his parents’ opinion, so their insistence on him to decide was weighing on him. Zairia (personal communication, November 8, 2010) said people have told her she needed to “hurry up and find a major so I will not be in school so long.” There is a certain amount of truth to making a decision regarding a major and graduating in a timely fashion. However, for a first-semester freshman being undecided should not extend one’s time for degree completion as long as they stick to the general education core classes.

The middle group, those that heard neutral messages or no messages at all, contained the lowest number of participants at nine. However, that is still almost one-third of the students in the study. Examples of responses from this group consisted of “nothing, it is fine, and it is not uncommon” were frequently used. These students did not acknowledge a positive feeling about being undecided based on what others have said. However, they did not experience anything negative either. While messages ranged from positive, negative, or neutral, all students except for five admitted to hearing a message of some kind.

Messages students heard from others took a different route during spring semester. Seven students admitted to hearing positive messages, while only two acknowledged negative messages coming their way. The most dramatic shift was students who were not hearing any messages. Fourteen students confirmed they were not receiving any messages during the second semester about being undecided.

Several of the students who received positive messages during the first semester were the same ones in the spring. Sue (personal communication, April 6, 2011) followed up her fall response with a similar answer in the spring. “Most people tell me it is still okay to be undecided your freshman year,” she explained. Lucy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) also followed suit from her fall response, “it is okay to be undecided during your freshman year, but by sophomore year you want to figure out what you want to do.”

Some of the participants did not openly admit to hearing specific positive messages from others. However, it was the actions of others that these students viewed as affirmation they were in good shape being undecided. Six participants gave examples of how other students they know are undecided or have changed to undecided since entering college. Fadra (personal communication, March 11, 2011) found comfort in knowing other students were in a similar situation as her. “I know a lot of my friends changed to undecided since they have been here,” she said with a smile. “They are in my shoes now.” Chad (personal communication, March 9, 2011) concurred, as he stated “a lot of people I talk to really don’t know what they want to do.” Josh echoed his peers, “I’m not really hearing anything. I know other people who are undecided” (Josh, personal communication, March 31, 2011). It appears the group-think mentality has made being undecided a common occurrence among some of the participants. Knowing others who are

undecided and seeing others change to undecided reaffirms that it is okay to not know what you want to major in as a freshman; at least it did for several participants in this study.

The amount and type of negative messages this group received decreased from the fall semester. Of the two students who received negative messages during the spring, only one was a documented case in the fall. Cathy was quoted in the fall, as others felt she was being lazy. Although her spring messages were not as harsh, they were still negative. People continued to tell Cathy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) she needed to “hurry up and choose.” She valued their opinion, but did not let it force her into making a decision she would later regret. Paul (personal communication, March 8, 2011) also said he heard some negative messages in the spring. He said “other people feel the same as me. We are being pushed to go into a direction.” Paul was primarily speaking about his perception of the advisor pushing him in a direction going into sophomore year. Zairia (personal communication, March 9, 2011) confirmed she heard negative messages in the fall, but now admitted “I heard some at first, but not anymore.” It was good to see that students received less negative messages during their second semester.

College students rely on a support network of family, friends, and campus professionals. When this support network reassures students being undecided is okay while taking time to explore future choices is a positive attribute, students will feel at ease to make the decision that is best for them, and not one they were forced into. Students who knew their major, those that received positive messages, and the ones with undecided friends, seemed the most confident when they discussed being undecided and the messages they were receiving from others.

So Many Choices, So Little Time

At Southeastern University (SU) there are over 160 majors, minors, and emphasis areas. Students have a lot of choices regarding their academic paths. It is not uncommon for students,

especially freshmen, to feel overwhelmed and confused when thinking about possible majors. Almost all students in this study were considering at least one major, and half of the participants were considering multiple majors during their fall advising session. During the spring interview 15 students were considering one major or declared a major. Ten students were still considering multiple majors, and no students were without at least one major under consideration. This section focused on specific majors participants were considering and why certain majors appealed to the students.

Majors Under Consideration

The fall semester at institutions of higher learning brings a new fresh-faced crop of students to campus each year. The group is excited about their new journeys, but must complete a smooth transition from high school senior to college freshman in order to be successful. One of the first questions these students are asked involves choice of major. For students that do not have a declared major, this can be a tricky situation. Although the students in this study were all undecided in their major, they could answer the question as they are an undecided student, but are considering majoring in Major A, B, or C. Twenty-eight of the 30 (93%) participants in the fall claimed to be considering at least one major during the fall interview. Additionally, 15 of the 30 (50%) students cited interest in two or more majors on campus. Only two (7%) students were not able to name a specific major they were considering. In the spring semester 15 of the 25 (60%) participants declared a major, or were confident in one specific major. Ten of the 25 (40%) were still mulling over multiple majors. Unlike fall semester, there were zero students that could not list at least one major under consideration during the spring interview. See Table 8 for all majors considered by participants at the time of interviews.

Table 8
Majors under consideration during fall and spring interviews

Pseudonym	Possible Majors (FALL)	Possible Majors (SPRING)
Jason	Biology, Chemistry	NA
Carla	Business, Not Political Science	Declared Political Science
Tamara	Business Management, Biology	Business
Chad	Marketing	Marketing
Monique	Hospitality Mgmt., Criminal Justice	Social Work
Roxanne	Nursing, Psychology	Declared Nursing
Fadra	Criminal Justice, Nutrition, Health	Nutrition
Bernard	Exercise Science, Banking	Accounting, Finance, Athletic Training
Rick	History	NA
Keisha	Exercise Science, Physical Therapy	NA
Jackie	Sports Rehab, Physical Therapy	Exercise Science
Sara	None	NA
Walt	None	Accounting
Chuck	Biology, Pre-Med, Pre-Law	NA
Sue	Accounting, Business	Business Mgmt., Marketing, Hospitality
Karl	History, Education	History
Ralph	Business	Accounting, Business
Lucy	Physical Therapy, Nursing	Dental Hygiene, Radiologic Tech.
Heather	Elementary Edu., Dental Hygiene	Nutrition
Wesley	Biology, Physical Therapy	Biology, Pre-Med
Cathy	Accounting	Journalism, Accounting
Clay	Business	Business
Karen	Biology, Chemistry	Chemistry, Math
Josh	International Studies	Business
Zairia	Social Work	Social Work
Alex	Criminal Justice	Law Enforcement, Law School
Thad	Pre-Optometry	Pre-Optometry
Chris	Secondary Education, Coaching	Secondary Education
Paul	Exercise Science	Business, Psychology
Mike	Music, Business	Music, Business

There was no specific identifiable trend to selection of majors under consideration. As represented in Table 8, majors fell into a wide spectrum of various career opportunities for students during the fall. Science, Business, and Health Professions were the most noted

categories, yet only four, six, and seven students respectively acknowledged interest in them. Because these students were undecided, they were able to explore current majors under consideration, while still maintaining the ability to explore other options during their first semester.

After almost a year of college experience under their belts, several participants declared a major or had one specific major in mind. Interest in science related majors decreased slightly, but that could be attributed to being unable to reach two of the students in the spring who mentioned science majors in the fall. Students considering Business majors stayed the same, and those considering Health Professions declined to some extent. It was interesting that 18 of the 25 (72%) students interviewed in the spring continued to give strong consideration to at least one major they mentioned in the fall. Six students admitted to thinking about majors in the spring that had not previously given much consideration to before.

One ironic case was from Carla. Carla mentioned the major Political Science during her fall interview, but not because she liked it. During her fall interview Carla (personal communication, October 22, 2010) was quoted, "I have learned that Political Science is not my greatest forte. I guess I could go with Business. I've discovered that I would prefer to be in Business," she said. However, several months later during the spring interview, she sang a different tune. "I declared Political Science as a major," Carla (personal communication, March 9, 2011) said proudly. "I learned that I can relate to the government a lot considering what I have seen growing up." Additionally, she acknowledged that she considered Business in the fall, but realized "math was not my strong point." It was fascinating to see how one student could be so put off by one major in the fall, and then declare that same major a short time later.

While talking with these students during spring interviews, one could almost visualize the funnel effect most of the students went through regarding selecting a major. In the fall they started off with several majors or no major at all under consideration. After gaining college experiences throughout their first year, seeking advice from family, peers, and SU professionals, and taking SU courses, many had narrowed down their choices to one specific major. I visually and aurally observed these participants' growth as college students who were now making decisions based on personal experience and guidance from others.

Appeal of Certain Majors

Students consider different college majors for a variety of reasons. Each student in the study was able to explain why he/she gave various majors consideration. Additionally, the two students in the fall that did not have a specific major in mind, were able to discuss some expectations in the type of career/lifestyle that their future major could help them achieve. Factors playing a role in major consideration ranged from helping people and gaining advanced degrees to liking specific school subjects and job security.

Several students during the fall and spring interviews mentioned a desire to help people after college. Jackie, a first-year student athlete who was considering a major in sports rehab or physical therapy during the fall was one such student. "I know what an injury is and what it feels like. I feel like I could help since it has happened to me" (Jackie, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Having experienced injuries herself, Jackie could offer a first-hand account as a physical therapist to future athletes when they are injured. Jackie gave the impression to have a natural caring nature as she stated, "I want to be around people. It does not even have to be about sports. I just want to help." Jackie did not waver from her thoughts in the fall when she was interviewed after her spring advising session. She would still like to help people rehabilitate

injuries. “I like working with people. I want to do Sports Rehab so I can stay in sports. That is a strength since I am an athlete,” Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) noted.

Wesley (personal communication, October 29, 2010) agreed with Jackie regarding helping people was one factor he considered important when thinking about a future major. He was considering a Biology degree because he “wanted to be a doctor. I like to help people,” Wesley said during his fall interview. There were several factors that could be significant when considering becoming a doctor, but Wesley’s reasoning of “helping people” was a noble one. Biology and Pre-Medicine continued to be on Wesley’s mind during the spring semester. Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) acknowledged he “discussed Biology/Pre-Med with my advisor” during his recent advising meeting. He insisted that he “still likes the medical field, and I feel like I’m the best in Biology.” Wesley’s advisor helped guide him for both the degree and professional track in which he had interest during his fall and spring advising sessions. His ambition of becoming a future doctor did not appear to be jeopardized by entering SU as an undecided major.

Tamara (personal communication, October 22, 2010) considered majors in Business Management or Biology to help her attain a career in her field of interest. “After college I want to do humanitarian work, so either of those majors can get me there,” Tamara said after her fall advising meeting. She spoke on being an advocate for underprivileged citizens in foreign countries. She anticipated her humanitarian work could benefit from several majors at SU, but Business Management and Biology are the two she gave most consideration during her first semester. Although one of Tamara’s possible majors changed during the spring, her overall goal of helping people in foreign countries was maintained. During her spring interview, Tamara (personal communication, March 23, 2011) made known that she did a presentation for a class

that provided clarity in her future major. “I want to do Business,” she stated. I want to work with international business corporations.” It was good to see that Tamara preserved her initial goal, while being able to identify a specific academic path to help become successful.

Some of the students who wanted to help people could also fall into the group that selected possible majors due to their impact on attaining advanced degrees. Thad (personal communication, November 9, 2010) mentioned his desire to become an optometrist. As a student following a Pre-Optometry track, Thad could attain the requirements to attend optometry school. Thad’s initial interest in optometry transpired thanks to a family friend. During the fall interview Thad stated, “I have a neighbor who is an optometrist and he does pretty well. I am planning on taking over his practice once I get out.” Thad’s goal of optometry school did not change from fall to spring. After his spring advising session, Thad (personal communication, March 11, 2011) admitted, “I’m still thinking about Pre-Optometry.” He even gave a brief recap on his neighbor who is an optometrist. Thad realized the road to optometry school would be difficult, but he believed he can be successful. “I’m really nervous about the hard classes. It’s just going to take more studying,” he said.

Attending Physical Therapy School following graduation was a goal for Keisha upon entering SU. She believed that a degree in Exercise Science would be beneficial. An Exercise Science degree would “help me out a lot since I want to become a physical therapist. It would get me all the right science and math classes to give me everything I need to know about the human body” (Keisha, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Additionally, Keisha noted her love for science, so a degree in Exercise Science and possible entry into a Physical Therapy graduate program may be in her future. Unfortunately, Keisha was unable to be reached for a spring interview.

Similar to Keisha, other students were fond of specific subjects. Their fondness of a particular subject allowed them to consider majors based on the type of coursework required for a specific field. Cathy (personal communication, November 5, 2010) noted her affection for a specific subject. “I’ve always been good at math because it is right or wrong,” she said. Cathy was considering Accounting as a major during the fall semester. Accounting appealed to her because “it’s math so it’s simple.” Additionally she received some excellent guidance close to home. “My mom was an accountant. I like talking to her about it,” Cathy recalled. Spring semester saw Cathy still interested in Accounting, but she added Journalism to her list. It was no coincidence that her affection for one subject i.e., math, linked her to a major in that field. True to form, her skills in writing and a little nudge from her English professor was just enough to open the door for Journalism to be explored as a possible major during the spring. “I’m still looking at Accounting. I’m just kind of testing the waters with Journalism,” Cathy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) revealed during her spring interview.

Like Cathy, Karl (personal communication, October 29, 2010) enjoyed History and spoke with his advisor about it during his fall advising meeting. “I have always enjoyed History. I have had several people tell me that I would be good at teaching and I agree with them.” Not only was Karl considering a History degree because of his interest in the subject, he was also thinking about his future career. “With a History degree you can pretty much teach or go into politics.” During Karl’s spring advising meeting, he continued to be interested in History. In fact Karl (personal communication, March 9, 2011) said he was “going to declare sometime in the near future.” Now that he was certain on becoming a History major, he upped the ante with his future goals. “I’m trying to aim for my Ph.D. I’m going to look into some internships,” he boasted. Taking his first year of college to explore various fields allowed Karl an opportunity to fine-tune

his future ambitions. Being good at a particular subject or having a genuine interest in a specific field can be a driving force behind major consideration as evident by Keisha, Cathy, and Karl's future endeavors.

In today's economy and slow job market, several participants mentioned job security and high job rate as important factors for majors and careers. Walt liked Accountancy and Engineering for their reputation of yielding high job placements. According to Walt's fall interview, both Accountancy and Engineering "have such a high job rate" (Walt, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Walt also noted his desire to "just have a stable job with the economy." His continued referral to the "high job rate" seemed to be the most important factor in major selection. Walt's plans for a major that could produce a high demand job stayed on course during the spring. "I'm going to declare Accountancy soon," Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) replied when asked about majors he was considering after a year in college. Other than the high job placement rate, Walt valued this degree because "accounting is pretty much straight answers. I like that it is straight cut," he announced.

Sue had several majors in mind after her fall advising session. She admitted to "being interested in History, but there is not much you can do with a History degree other than graduate school" (Sue, personal communication, October 28, 2010). She cited "100% of Accounting majors get jobs" as the primary reason she was interested in Accounting. However, Sue appeared to be struggling with her upcoming decision. "The liberal arts classes are appealing, but the job security with Accounting is appealing too." Sue's plans changed significantly from the fall to spring. What she valued in the fall, i.e., a high job rate, did not appear to be as important to her in the spring. The majors she was considering after her spring advising were "mostly in the College of Business, like Management or Marketing, or a Hospitality major," Sue (personal

communication, April 6, 2011) said. In the spring she based her possible majors on “classes I’m good at and which classes I’m not. I’m not good at science classes. I’ll stick more toward English or Business that does not require it,” she announced. Perhaps Sue will find a major that provides job security, yet allows her to take specific courses that fit her strengths. As she continues to grow as a student, I’m confident she can find a way to have both.

Students utilized a variety of factors when considering possible majors. As noted in the previous examples, factors often overlap. A student’s passion to help people can overlap with their desire to attain a degree that will help them get into medical school. A student’s interest in math and working with numbers may overlap with the high job rate certain majors proudly boast. The students in this study were all undecided freshmen at the time of the fall interviews, and almost all remained undecided during the spring interviews. I am confident their aspirations will continue to transform as they proceed on their journey through higher education.

Learning to Crawl Before You Walk

College provides numerous new opportunities and experiences for students. As an entering first-year student, so many new tasks being introduced can become overwhelming. Students are expected to be accountable for all aspects of their academic and social lives without parents or guardians right beside them. Things most of us take for granted such as when to eat, sleep, and study are now a challenge to some first-year students, as they have always been told when to do those basic tasks. One such task, academic advising, can be both welcomed and feared by entering students. Academic advising provides the opportunity to interact with a campus professional in a more intimate setting. Students can discuss a variety of issues while being confident the discussions will remain confidential. Although most conversations revolve around academics, advisors have been known to assist students in other college issues such as

financial concerns, roommate problems, and adapting socially to a new environment. This section will explore first-year undecided students' experiences with academic advising from the first session in the fall to last session in the spring.

Initial Advising Expectations

When participants were asked during their fall interviews about their expectations going into their first advising session as an undecided college student, some responses came as a surprise. Nineteen of the 30 participants expected to receive help selecting appropriate courses for the upcoming semester. Andrew and Thad had similar responses when asked about their advising expectations. "Just getting my classes scheduled, nothing too out of the ordinary," Alex (personal communication, November 8, 2010) stated when I asked the question. Thad followed suit when asked the same questions. He said, "Just to get my classes in order and be able to get the correct classes. I wouldn't want to be here any longer than I had to be" (Thad, personal communication, November 9, 2010). Wesley also thought class selection was going to be a part of the advising session, but he was pleasantly surprised the session did not play out like he thought it would. "I had no idea what to expect. I thought they were going to throw some classes at me, but they actually asked me what I wanted to do" (Wesley, personal communication, October 29, 2010). Although course selection was expected, the ability to contribute to the decision-making process was pleasing to Wesley.

I was unsure how to feel about five of the students not having any expectations during the fall. I understand it is a new experience, so expectations may be hard to verbalize. However, one would think that everyone would have some type of expectation as they enter the door to a mandatory advising session. When Tamara was asked about her expectations she sat silently. I rephrased the question to "Did you have any thoughts about what might happen before coming

into the meeting?” Tamara (personal communication, October 22, 2010) briefly responded “I really didn’t. I didn’t have any concerns.” I am uncertain if she truly had no expectations or chose not to divulge them. Chris (personal communication, November 9, 2010) admitted to not having any expectations due to his description of not having “much of anything” in terms of high school academic advising. “I really didn’t know what to think,” Chris boldly stated. “Like I told you, I really didn’t have much advising, so it was a new experience.” With Chris’s extra details, I understand why his expectations may have been nonexistent.

One major surprise this question revealed was only five students expected to discuss academic majors during the fall advising meeting. These students were all classified as undecided in their major. Therefore, I anticipated at least half to expect to discuss possible majors. However, only five (16.5%) participants entered the session expecting to discuss this topic. When Keisha (personal communication, October 28, 2010) was asked about her expectations going into the first advising session, she replied “with me still being undecided, we talked about some majors I was thinking about.” Although Keisha did not come out and say she expected to talk about majors, her answer showed she had given prior thought about possible majors to discuss with the academic advisor. Like so many others in the study, Chuck expected help with class selection. Additionally, Chuck (personal communication, October 28, 2010) mentioned his expectation to receive help regarding a future major. After hearing my question on expectations prior to the session, Chuck answered, “Basically just get the courses I need to help me graduate and maybe help me choose a major.” I found some irony in Chuck’s answer. He wanted to get the classes he needed to help him graduate, but he was unsure about what degree he wanted to graduate with. Like other first-year students, Chuck is already thinking about the finish line (i.e. graduation), and not the journey to get there.

A few other responses were nice surprises. Carla (personal communication, October 22, 2010) revealed that she expected the advisor to make her feel comfortable. “I wondered if my advisor could help me to explain some of the classes I might need to take. Go into detail on what classes are about, and just make me feel comfortable.” It was interesting that she expected comfort from her advisor. I believe this correlated to her having a positive relationship with her high school advisors. Carla previously responded she had “nice relationships” with her high school advisors. Monique gave another answer that caught me off guard. She expected the advisor to relieve her stress. It makes sense when you think about it, but definitely not something I was expecting an undecided freshman to say. Monique (personal communication, October 25, 2010) stated she expected the advisor to “ease my stress. I’ve been worrying about when I’m going to make my schedule, what I’m going to do, and what my major is going to be.” Those were some big decisions, and I can understand how looming issues can create anxiety among certain students. Two students acknowledged they thought more students would be in the advising session with them. The thought of not having a one-on-one advising meeting actually made Karen (personal communication, October 28, 2010) nervous. “I was thinking there was going to be more than just me [in the session]. I was nervous because I needed the one-on-one time.” I am unsure if these students had group advising in high school, or they assumed they would here because of the large number of first-year students.

From our talks in a relaxed atmosphere, I could tell many of the participants were more comfortable discussing their expectations for the spring advising session. I attributed their confident approach to the experience they gained during their first semester at SU. During the spring interviews students appeared to easily identify and verbalize expectations they had entering their second college advising session.

Eighteen of the 25 students that participated in spring interviews acknowledged part of their expectations consisted of a specific academic facet. Eleven participants mentioned class selection, six addressed majors, and one expected to discuss grades. Additionally, three students presumed the advisor would give them “direction,” while only one student admitted to not having any expectations for the second session.

Josh was one of the students who expected to receive information about classes he needed. He figured the advisors “would show me what classes to take, and which ones [classes] were open,” Josh (personal communication, March 31, 2011) said. Josh remembered the advisor giving him several options during fall advising, but also pointed out some of the classes he could take were already closed. His past advising experience allowed him to include those details in his future advising expectations. Another participant, Walt also expected the advisor to discuss required classes with him. When asked about his spring advising expectations, Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) acknowledged, “I expected my advisor to be really helpful. They [the advisor] tell me what classes to take each semester. The classes to take together, and what classes not to take together.” Walt’s prior advising experience clearly set the tone for his expectations as he was able to recall identifiable characteristics from the previous sessions that molded his future expectations. Clearly course selection is one of the major aspects of an advisor meeting. However, the additional guidance that surrounds the intricacies of course selection appeared to be appreciated by the participants.

Entering the second semester of the freshman year, one would imagine participants would fully expect to discuss majors of interest. Conversely, only six students conceded to expecting a discussion about their major occurring in the spring advising session. Fadra was one of the six that expected to talk about a possible major while talking with her advisor. When asked

about her spring advising expectations, Fadra (personal communication, March 11, 2011) “figured they would talk to me about what I was interested in, and what majors would help me.” Fadra had trimmed her possible majors from three in the fall to only one in the spring. Therefore, she expected the advisor to address her preferred major, but was also open to any additional major the advisor had in mind. Like Fadra, Sue had a desire to confer with her advisor on various majors of interest. Unlike Fadra she envisioned getting the information in a different fashion. “I wanted the advisor to print me out the papers [curriculum]s that tell me exactly what I need to take for this major or that major,” Sue (personal communication, April 6, 2011) exclaimed. Sue appeared to be open to the advisors advice, but one could easily tell her primary goal for the advising session was to leave the session with documents detailing all current and future courses she would need for several different majors. Because the university has a policy that all students must declare a major once they have earned 45 hours, it would have seemed like more participants would have expected to discuss academic majors with their advisor.

As a slight surprise only one student divulged discussing grades with the advisor was an initial expectation for the second advising session. Second semester of freshman year is when many students begin to feel the pressure of their grade point average (GPA). This pressure can range from improving academic standing to keeping a high enough GPA to be competitive for post-graduate schools/programs. Of the 25 spring participants in my study, only Jackie expected the advisor to address grades with her. Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) thought the advisor would “ask me how I’m doing and make sure my grades are where they need to be. To make sure whatever I chose to do is something I can do with my GPA.” Since entering SU, Jackie has thought about majoring in Exercise Science then possibly going into Sports Rehab or Physical Therapy. Applicants for a graduate program such as Physical Therapy would

need a high GPA. It was good to see Jackie thinking ahead about how her current work can affect her future aspirations.

Spring advising expectations brought about a vague response from three of the participants. These participants conveyed in their interview they expected to receive “guidance” and/or “direction.” Because the students did not elaborate on the specific type of guidance they were looking for, one could assume they wanted guidance on classes, majors, or academic support. However, their definition of guidance could be about non-academic issues which I should have explored further. Paul (personal communication, March 8, 2011) was one of the students who gave this type of response. “The only expectation I had was for guidance. That is all I really use it for,” he boldly stated. Similar to Paul, Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) expected the advisor to “point me in the right direction.” He followed that statement up with “they [the advisor] gave me everything I needed.” I assumed his expectations were met based on his follow-up response. Both Paul and Wesley’s responses should have been probed further to gain specific details on the type of “guidance” and “direction” they were looking for.

Because this study provided documented cases of students experiencing two advising sessions throughout their first year of college, it was important to explore how their expectations changed from session one to session two. Although the students did not go into great detail about specific changes, many did admit to some noticeable changes which occurred. Five of the students expected the second session to be better than the first, six said they knew what to expect going into the second session, five acknowledged session one to session two did not change at all.

It was interesting to hear that some of the students expected their second session to be even better than the first. Tamara (March 23, 2011) was one student that fell into this category. “I

was expecting session two to go better,” she said. “I knew what to ask. I actually got all the classes I wanted.” Because she gained experience with advising during the fall semester, Tamara’s expectations increased in the spring due her going in with a plan. A second student, Karl, also noted his increased expectations for session two. “I went into session one with my expectations being similar to high school where there was little input,” Karl (personal communication, March 9, 2011) explained. “For session two I definitely had a positive increase in my expectations.” His increased expectations could be attributed to the fact that session one went so well, his low expectations coming out of high school, or a combination of both.

Ralph was a member of the second group that disclosed they knew what to expect during the second session. Ralph (personal communication, March 31, 2011) explained, “Before I really had no idea. This time I knew what the process would be about, and what would take place.” He seemed more relaxed with session two because of his prior experience during the fall. Other students such as Wesley agreed with Ralph. The first session was a learning experience, which allowed them to enter the second session with more confidence. Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) noted, “The first session I really did not know what to expect. This time I knew what to expect. I knew they [the advisor] were going to point me in the right direction.” Students appeared to find academic advising easier and approached it with more confidence the second time. You could replace the term advising in the prior sentence with other aspects of higher education such as taking finals, filling out financial aid applications, or buying parking stickers and the outcomes would still be the same. Gaining experience built confidence in students, thus attempts at a tasks after the first tend to get easier each additional time they are encountered.

Specialized advising was an expectation that was not uncommon to hear from second semester freshmen. These participants had almost a full year of college under their belts, so naturally they looked more seriously into specific majors during their second advising session. Walt entered his second session thinking about Accounting as a major. Because Walt had a specific major in mind, he entered the advising session seeking specialized advising. “I expected the advice to go toward my future major,” Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) said while smiling. “I now have classes I’m going to take toward Accounting.” Entering the second session with a specific major in mind also helped Roxanne develop specialized advising expectations. When asked about the difference in session one and session two, she confessed “Session two I talked to my advisor about Nursing. It helped knowing what classes to take” (Roxanne, personal communication, March 10, 2011). For several students session one seemed to be more general, while session two allowed students to get into more detail about majors of interest.

A handful of students disclosed they had no change in their expectations from session one to session two. Students such as Mike, Thad, and Fadra all used phrases such as “didn’t change” and “no change in expectations” to describe the comparison of their two sessions. It is difficult to fully understand how certain students could not experience any change in their advising expectations after going through a prior session. Perhaps these students could not think of an adequate way to describe the differences, or maybe they need more time to digest the second experience before an explanation could be given. These particular students may just need more time, and could possibly see a change between the second and third sessions.

Overall students did not verbalize many specific issues that made their expectations change from session one to session two. However, it was evident from tone of their voices and

body language that their confidence had increased during their spring interview. Students that were able to acknowledge some type of change in expectation did so in a confident manner. One would expect this confidence in advising expectations to continue to increase as they proceed on their journey through higher education.

Actual Advising Session

Students in the study provided good information regarding their actual advising sessions. One key aspect of an advising session is to know where the advisor is located and how available they were to the student. Most students had positive things to say about both the location and availability of their fall semester academic advisor. Eighty percent (24 of 30) of students made positive comments regarding the location. When asked about the location, the students who viewed it in a positive manner used words such as “good, great, convenient, and easy to get there.” Lucy (personal communication, October 29, 2010) said, “I just came from next door, so it was very close.” Mike was pleased with the location even though he initially did not know where his advisor was located. “It [the location] was good. I didn’t know where they were, but I found them online,” Mike (personal communication, November 10, 2010) said. Two students did not comment on the location and four students had a negative impression with the location. Paul (personal communication, November 10, 2010) appeared a little frustrated because he “had a hard time finding it.” He “asked people where it was located” and “finally got there.” Sue (personal communication, October 28, 2010) was also unhappy, but for a different reason. “I hope I’m not getting a parking ticket because there is not really any parking.” Even though the location was good for most, some students did not feel the same.

As a continued theme from this study, having experienced academic advising once, allowed students to gain familiarity with the process. The familiarity gained with advising during

the fall attributed to an increased level of satisfaction regarding location and availability for students during the spring semester. Ninety-six percent (24 of 25) of students made positive remarks about the location of their spring advising session. Although the total number, i.e., 24 of students making positive comments remained the same both semesters, I am confident the spring number would have increased if more participants would have been available. I believe this because two students who gave negative answers in the fall provided an opposite response in the spring. When asked about the advising location in the spring, Paul (personal communication, March 8, 2011) replied, “the location is fantastic.” Sue (personal communication, April 6, 2011) also sang a different tune in the spring. She noted the location was “fine” during her spring interview. The other 22 students who found the location acceptable used descriptors such as “convenient, close, great, and very good.” Only one student did not comment on the location because she was advised in a different location. Spring advising was at least the second time students had to visit the AC in order to meet with their academic advisor. As with most experiences, the second time around is usually easier than the first, thus students appeared to be more positive during the spring.

Although most students found the location good or did not comment, every student who commented on the availability was pleased. Ninety percent (27 of 30) found the advisors’ availability to be good during the fall semester. Three students did not comment on the availability of the advisor. It must be noted that all students came during walk-in advising. Walk-in advising does not require an appointment be made ahead of time. Therefore, some students may have had to wait longer than others due to walk-in traffic during the time they chose to come for advising. Several of the students commented on the convenience of walking in without an appointment. Thad (personal communication, November 9, 2010) said, “I didn’t have an

appointment and got right in; so that was good.” Karl (personal communication, October 29, 2010) was also pleased with his short wait time. “I’m really surprised I got in as quick as I did with the windows opening so soon for registration.” Overall it seemed most students were pleased with the availability of the advisor. Not having to make an appointment and low wait times were the most consistent participant answers recorded that contributed to a positive outlook regarding advisor availability in the fall. The students’ fall views of advisor availability were positive in regards to perceived future advisor availability as well.

Similar to the fall semester, almost all students found the advisors’ availability to be very good during the spring. Ninety-two percent (23 of 25) were pleased with the advisors’ availability. Only one student was displeased, and one student did not comment. Participants in the spring were called by the AC secretary who informed them that advising had begun and asked if she could make them an appointment. Almost all participants took advantage of the appointment system, but a few insisted on coming in during walk-in advising. Those who came in during appointments were pleased because they “walked right in” and “didn’t have to wait” to see their advisor. The one student who found the availability unsatisfactory came in during walk-in advising. She was unhappy because the AC was very busy, so she had to wait longer than expected. The AC encouraged students to make an appointment to get advised early so they can spend more time with the advisor and not have to wait as one would during walk-in advising. This student chose to come in during walk-in advising, thus had to wait behind other students to see her advisor.

It was interesting to talk to students after the first session. Most admitted to having a positive advising experience. Below in Table 9 are key words or brief phrases from each student regarding their initial feelings about the recent advising interaction.

Table 9

Words and brief phrases used to describe the first advising experience

Pseudonym	Thoughts
Jason	Helpful; explained everything
Carla	Hesitant and anxious; just wanted to get advice
Tamara	They were there to support me
Chad	Helped with guidance; unsure
Monique	Helpful; felt confused; at ease after
Roxanne	Good; not wasting time taking classes
Fadra	Advisor was willing to help; advisor got to know me
Bernard	Good; helpful; supportive
Rick	Nice to have someone there; feeling of comfort
Keisha	Nervous going in; unsure what classes to take; not nervous anymore
Jackie	Nervous; not know what to expect
Sara	I would have no options
Walt	Overwhelmed; just sign up for basic classes
Chuck	Good job; helpful
Sue	Get hold lifted; unsure which classes to take; very good
Karl	Got in quickly; advisor was prepared for me
Ralph	Pretty good; quick and smooth
Lucy	Better than last advising meeting
Heather	Scared; helped me out
Wesley	Helpful; advisor explained everything
Cathy	Nervous; there are so many classes
Clay	Helped; excited now about classes
Karen	Nervous; good now
Josh	Unsure; good now
Zairia	Advisor showed me how to make my schedule
Alex	Advisor knows what they are talking about
Thad	Good job; answered all my questions
Chris	Unsure; it was a new experience
Paul	Worried I wouldn't get along with the advisor; receive bad advice
Mike	Find out what to take; fun; advisor was nice

Twenty-five of the thirty participants admitted a positive feeling about their first advising experience. Jason (personal communication, October 21, 2010) nicely summed up his positive advising meeting. “They [the advisor] are very helpful. My academic advisor really explained

everything I needed them to explain. It was great.” Fadra was also pleased with her advising meeting. She was surprised the advisor seemed to care so much. When asked about her initial feelings, Fadra (personal communication, October 25, 2010) responded “I feel my advisor was actually willing to help me. Instead of just saying these are the required course to take, the advisor actually broke it down and asked me how I felt about it. The advisor got to know me as well.” The advisor allowed Fadra to provide input while getting to know each other contributed to a positive experience for her. Similar to Jason and Fadra, Chuck was eager to share his upbeat thoughts. “I thought they [the advisor] did a very good job in helping me choose courses. I thought they were very helpful. They did a really good job” (Chuck, personal communication, October 28, 2010). It is encouraging to know that 83% (25 of 30) of participants described their initial feelings using positive descriptors. The other 17% may have also had a good experience, but did not orally express it when asked.

Ten participants admitted to being nervous or anxious about the first advising session. They verbalized these feelings after the session was over, so apparently these feelings made quite an impression if they were still discussing them. Carla (personal communication, October 22, 2010) was one of the anxious students. “I was really hesitant and anxious. I didn’t know what I was going into, so I just wanted to get some advice.” Jackie also acknowledged some apprehension regarding her first session. “I was kind of nervous that I would get there and not know what to expect. I did not know what I was going to be asked. I’m not sure what I want to major in so I was kind of nervous. Keisha and Karen found advising to be a nerve-racking experience at first, but those feelings gave way to satisfaction once the session was over. “I was nervous going in. I did not know what classes I actually wanted to take, but I got help. I’m not nervous anymore,” Keisha (personal communication, October 28, 2010) said. Karen felt similar

to Keisha. “I was nervous I was not going to get a spot and get my classes scheduled. I got it done so it’s good” (Karen, personal communication, November 5, 2010). The study identified 33% (10 of 30) of students interviewed admitted to some apprehension regarding academic advising. If advisors realize this they can ease students’ fears early in the meeting with comforting verbal and non-verbal cues.

Students’ initial feelings about their advising session changed slightly from fall to spring. Almost all spring participants acknowledged having a good second advising session with their academic advisor. Only one student, Paul, was not pleased with his second session. Paul (personal communication, March 8, 2011) said “I feel like I am being pushed in a direction.” He continued to point out that the advisor “sort of pushed me in the Business area and the Psychology area instead of primary courses that would count for everything.” In the fall Paul was advised for all general education courses, but during spring was advised for more specific courses. Paul did not feel the entire advising process was terrible, as he described the process as “fantastic.” He appeared to be frustrated with the spring experience, but realized this may have been an isolated incident.

The other 24 spring participants had a good second experience. Several mentioned enjoying discussing their classes/schedule with the advisor. “I thought they [the advisor] did a good job,” Josh (personal communication, March 31, 2011) declared. “They showed me what classes I need to take for next semester.” Like Josh, Karl discussed classes with his academic advisor. “The advisor was definitely helpful in guiding me in a more specific set of courses,” Karl (personal communication, March 9, 2011) noted. Because Karl had a specific major in mind during his second session, he was able to receive guidance on certain courses required for his

major of interest. Other students displayed an appreciation for the advice they received regarding classes during their spring session. See Table 10 for spring advising descriptions.

Table 10

Words and brief phrases used to describe the second advising experience

Pseudonym	Thoughts
Jason	NA
Carla	Happy; Scared at first but it was good
Tamara	Pleased with schedule
Chad	Relieved; Confident
Monique	Happy; Satisfied; Not lost
Roxanne	Good; Got classes for next semester
Fadra	Relieved; Advisor helped a lot
Bernard	Really helpful
Rick	NA
Keisha	NA
Jackie	Good; Quick; Knew what I wanted
Sara	NA
Walt	Good; Good advisor
Chuck	NA
Sue	Good classes
Karl	Helpful advisor; Guided in specific courses
Ralph	Quick; Good
Lucy	Helpful; More helpful than 1st time
Heather	Glad to get it out of the way
Wesley	Comfortable; Advisor advised down right track
Cathy	Not worried about next semester
Clay	Easy to get advised; Hard schedule
Karen	Relieved; Happy
Josh	Went well; Got classes I need
Zairia	Okay; Need summer school
Alex	Got my classes
Thad	Impressed with session
Chris	Know what I'm doing
Paul	Pushed in a direction
Mike	Great; Like the advisor

The primary similarity from fall to spring was the positive descriptors used to describe both sessions by the participants. The only glaring difference between the two sessions were the students who acknowledged being nervous and anxious during their fall session. Spring advising did not have any students who admitted to being nervous during their second session. Carla (personal communication, October 22, 2010) was “hesitant and anxious.” She was still a little “scared at first” (Carla, personal communication, March 9, 2011) during her second session, but I believed that was because she was meeting with a new advisor within the major she just declared. Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) was not nervous at all during her second session. She “went in and knew exactly what I wanted to do.” Jackie seemed confident and being nervous this time did not seem like a possibility. Unlike the fall, Karen (personal communication, March 7, 2011) did not appear to be nervous during her second advising session. She “was relieved” her advisor was able to help her get good classes. The lack of students being nervous during their second experience with advising indicated that they became more confident and knew what to expect the second time around.

Participants were given an opportunity to explain specific issues that were discussed during the one-on-one advising sessions. Several items that were discussed during the fall advising session aligned nicely with the students’ initial expectations. However, others participants’ conversations went in directions students had not originally planned. Twenty-six of the thirty fall participants acknowledged discussing specific classes during their initial advising session. Thad (personal communication, November 9, 2010) expected the topic of class selection to come about during the advising session, so he planned ahead. “I told the advisor what classes I thought I would need to take. The advisor corrected me on a few and let me know the correct classes I needed to take. They did a really good job.” Similar to Thad, Lucy primarily talked with

her academic advisor regarding college classes. Lucy (personal communication, October 29, 2010) stated, “We [she and the advisor] talked about what majors I was thinking about, what classes I was taking, and what classes I might want to take.” Her current and future classes dominated the discussion. When Chris (personal communication, November 9, 2010) was asked about what occurred during his advising session, he also mentioned class selection. “They [the advisor] pointed out some classes I could possibly take. They asked what I’ve taken before. It helped me a lot. I picked out four or five classes I needed.” Chris was pleased to have a voice in his course selection. Like Chris, other students such as Sara (personal communication, October 28, 2010) mentioned the advisor giving them choices rather than enrolling them in specific classes. Sara said she listed two majors she was considering at the time of her first advising session. She and the advisor compared curriculums, and according to Sara, “the advisor gave me options on which sections I should take. I had a whole bunch of classes to choose from.” Students in my study seemed to light up when they recalled having the ability to make their own decisions regarding course selection. Many students entered the advising session planning to talk about classes. Based on student responses, it appeared this expectation was met.

I was pleased to hear that 18 of the 30 students discussed possible majors with their academic advisor. As mentioned in a previous section in this chapter, only five students admitted to expecting to discuss academic majors. Therefore, it was good to know that the discussion of possible majors was more often addressed than not. Even though these students were undecided in their academic major, it is important to begin thinking about possible majors as early as the first advising session. Monique (personal communication, October 25, 2010) recalled her advisor discussing various majors during their session. “Me and my advisor went over a sheet and crossed off things I was not interested in. It helped me zone in on some majors that peak my

interests.” Monique found it helpful to explore possible majors based on the process of elimination. Southeastern University has over 160 majors, minors, and emphasis areas. It is not uncommon for undecided students to trim down their lists by crossing off areas they know do not interest them. Clay entered the advising session with a particular major in mind even though he was listed as undecided. The advisor was willing to talk with him about his major of interest. Clay (personal communication, November 5, 2010) described the advising interaction as, “the advisor asked me what major I was leaning toward. I told them Business. Right there we knew where to go with it. That helped a lot being able to talk about a specific major, but not having to declare it yet.” Clay found it comforting that he could be classified as undecided, yet still receive advice on a specific major. Many undecided students have specific majors in mind, but choose to stay undecided for extended semesters as a safety net in case they change their minds. Keisha (personal communication, October 28, 2010) admitted to being “nervous” before she entered her first advising session. However, after it was over she stated, “I’m not confused anymore.” Keisha and her advisor talked about which classes to take, but more importantly about potential majors. “With me still being undecided, we talked about some majors I was thinking about.” Furthermore, she was relieved as the “advisor got straight to the point on what I need to take, and was specific on what I need to do for this major.” When thinking about possible majors, and courses needed for certain degrees, Keisha admitted some uncertainty. Fortunately, the advisor put most of her fears at ease by addressing those topics with care and compassion.

The only other items mentioned by students that caught my attention from the fall were the three students who admitted to get to know the advisor, and one student who discussed graduation with his advisor. Chad (personal communication, October 22, 2010) was pleased that his advisor took some time to discuss things other than academics. “They [the advisor] took time

to get to know me. They had a good idea of what I could actually do and what I would be good at. That helped a lot.” The advisor wanted to know about Chad as a person, as well as a student. By the advisor getting to know a little about Chad, he/she made major and career recommendations based on Chad’s interests and strengths. Jackie had a similar experience with Chad. “I came in and the advisor asked me to tell them a little about myself. I told them what I like to do and what interests me” (Jackie, personal communication, October 28, 2010). Because the advisor had additional background information on Jackie, he/she could direct the conversation down a more personable path. Jackie was able to receive academic and non-academic information relative to her initial conversation with the advisor. A primary method to become an effective advisor is to get to know other attributes about the student that are non-academic. This can lead to open-dialogue which will enhance the entire advisor/advisee relationship.

Out of 30 students in the study, only one student claimed to discuss graduation with the academic advisor during their first meeting. This may surprise some readers, as these students were undecided. The scenario of an undecided student already talking about graduation during their first advising session of their freshman year was not very common in the AC. Ralph (personal communication, October 29, 2010) enjoyed his advising experience and appeared to accomplish most of his advising goals. “The advisor talked to me about which classes to take with being undecided. The advisor guided me on what I needed to take to graduate on time.” I’m confident the advisor explained general classes that count toward most majors. The aspect of discussing graduation plans with an undecided student may not have been concrete, but could have helped the student envision his long-term goals. The session did satisfy Ralph, and that should be the ultimate goal.

Students had specific academic issues they admitted to addressing during the spring advising session as well. All 25 spring participants found their advising session to be valuable. However, valued aspects varied among students. Many students appreciated the discussion they had with the advisor regarding courses, while a significant number of others valued talking about majors. Other students admitted to more specific facets that made their spring advising session worthwhile.

Chad was very impressed with the content covered in his second advising session. Chad (personal communication, March 9, 2011) acknowledged to “knowing what I wanted” when he entered the meeting. The advisor then showed him “a better prospective for what I was thinking about.” According to Chad the advisor “showed exact classes and hours you need.” He was grateful for the advice and found it meaningful that the advisor expanded on his initial ideas. Lucy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) also noted assistance with classes as a valuable outcome from her advising session. She was prepared to declare a major during advising, so she was searching for explicit course guidance for her new major of choice. “This session was really valuable,” Lucy declared. “I declared a major and will take classes I will need. I’m not taking just random classes.” Lucy left the session feeling confident she was on the right track to pursue her new degree in a timely fashion. Clay (personal communication, April 7, 2011) was pleased with the very specific guidance he received during his spring advising session. “I asked the advisor 10 questions or so about certain classes,” he explained. “I mentioned maybe taking Accounting during August Intersession, but the advisor enlightened me how difficult that course can be during a two-week period.” Because Clay was able to address specific concerns and questions, the advice he received was applicable to help guide his upcoming course selections.

Discussing a specific major was another common occurrence during students' spring advising meetings. Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) talked with his advisor about a specific major he was considering. "This session was more in-depth because I had a specific major in mind," he made known. "It [second session] was more valuable because everyone is taking the same thing freshmen year, but now I know what to take for the major I want." Receiving advice on general education requirements seemed to satisfy Walt as a freshman. However, having the ability to discuss a specific major before entering his sophomore year was important to him. Bernard was one of the most undecided students during the spring interviews. He was still considering a handful of majors. He was thankful for the advisor being open to his indecision, yet continued to offer advice on a variety of subjects. According to Bernard (personal communication, March 25, 2011) the advisor "helped me look at picking a major from different ways. I'm trying to figure out what kind of degree to get, and the advisor showed me the best steps to get there." Because most of the majors Bernard was considering had a common core of required classes, the advisor was able to ensure him that everything would work out and not feel rushed to make a decision regarding his major. Bernard will have more time to think about his future major while knowing he is still on track to graduate no matter which major he eventually chooses.

A few unique items of discussion were brought to my attention during spring interviews. Ralph talked with the advisor to make sure everything he looked up on line was accurate. It is possible for information on line to be outdated. Ralph did some research on his own, then had the advisor double check to ensure for accuracy. Sue (personal communication, April 6, 2011) conceded to using the advising session "to get information that I couldn't find elsewhere." Sue said, "they [the advisors] have good resources that I would have to come in to get." The AC

advisors have curriculums for every major on campus. Sue could look at the first two years of most programs in a one-stop-shop location. Many students often acknowledge how convenient it is to see all campus curriculums in one location. Monique (personal communication, March 10, 2011) told me how she tried to come to the advising session prepared. She was extremely happy when she left because according to her “what I looked up was completely different.” She found information that was not totally accurate, so the advising meeting allowed her to access the correct information. “I didn’t think I needed all these classes,” she noted. It was good for her to find out precise information early on in her academic career in order to avoid possible mistakes down the road.

Both fall and spring advising sessions went well from the students’ perspective. Although the conversations changed slightly from session one to session two, the guidance the students received was still top notch. Students acknowledged a variety of topics covered during the sessions. Topics often overlapped from session to session and student to student. This is not uncommon as many undecided first year students often have similar concerns and objectives which professional advisors in the AC have become accustomed to over time.

Preparation for the Next Session

Almost all students left the first session with a positive attitude about academic advising at SU. One would be inclined to believe this positive attitude would carry over to expectations for future advising sessions. In addition to higher expectations, it is reasonable to believe students would approach future sessions with additional preparation now that they are experienced advisees.

When students were asked after their fall advising session how they would prepare for the next session, four answers were commonly given. The most frequent response given by

participants was to research possible majors before the next advising session. This is a very logical goal, as these students attained information on a variety of degrees offered at SU during their first advising session. Fadra (personal communication, October 25, 2010) realized she could be more active in her second advising session. "Next time I come to an advising session, I would know what to talk about instead of just sitting there. I will be more prepared to look into my major. By that time I should have more of an idea about what I want to do." Fadra was confident she will be more prepared to discuss a possible major during her next session. Fadra did in fact prepare more for her spring session. During her spring advising session, Fadra talked with the advisor about her future major, Nutrition. She entered the session with questions regarding classes she would need for her newly announced major.

Like Fadra, Sara learned about some possible majors during her first advising session. The knowledge she acquired will help guide her in future major exploration. Sara (personal communication, October 28, 2010) said, "I'll definitely consider a major, so I will have somewhere to go with it. This time I came in thinking maybe Accounting or Marketing. Next time I will be more set on something before I come in." Sara's plan to explore a possible major before the advising session will help the session's flow and the advisor's guidance can become more specific. Unfortunately, Sara was unable to be contacted for a spring interview.

Clay echoed Fadra and Sara's thoughts in the fall. Next time "I'm going to prepare a little more," Clay (personal communication, November 5, 2010) said. "I'm still undecided so I haven't committed to anything. I'm going to look into a couple of majors. I'm hoping before my next advising meeting to be set on a major." Although Clay was not ready to fully commit to a major during his spring advising session, he was confident in only discussing one with the advisor. "I'm starting to take more classes toward Business," Clay (personal communication, April 7,

2011) said. "I'm not declared yet, but I feel fine and comfortable only looking at Business courses." Clay had narrowed his search down to one possible major from fall to spring.

Exploring possible majors before the next session was a response given by almost half the participants during fall interviews.

The second most frequent response given in the fall to prepare for the next advising session addressed researching class availability before the advising meeting. Several students stated plans to look into possible courses they could take, and even create a sample schedule. This would assist the advisor and allow for additional time in the advising meeting to discuss other student issues. Zairia (personal communication, November 8, 2010) believed her first advising experience gave her the tools to plan her future schedules even before she comes in to be advised. "I now know more information about the classes. Next time will be easier. I can select my classes myself without having someone else do it for me. Then the advisor can offer suggestions on what I picked out." Zairia had a good plan and should be commended for her active learner approach. Rather than sit back and have someone else tell her what to do, she became accountable for her own educational path. Most advisors would be pleased with Zairia's proactive advising approach. Zairia did not appear to have fully followed her fall intentions regarding her preparation for her spring session. During her spring interview she did not mention already knowing what classes she needed to take. She did however say the advisor gave her "information about what classes I would need to take" (Zairia, personal communication, March 9, 2011) Perhaps she did inform the advisor about courses she thought she would need. However, it was not made clear during her spring interview. Future advising sessions may allow her to be more proactive like she had originally planned.

Chris (personal communication, November 9, 2010) acknowledged he was already prepared for classes he will need in the future thanks to his first advising session. “The advisor showed me a curriculum for Secondary Education, and it helped me out. I’m just trying to check them off the list. I’ll probably ask around about which ones to take,” Chris stated confidently. With the curriculum sheet of his possible future major in hand, he will be able to look at the courses offered and plan a mock schedule before meeting with his academic advisor. If everything is correct, the advisor will approve his schedule and possibly offer additional insight. Like Zairia, Chris did not mention following his future advising plan during his spring interview. Chris may have looked at his curriculum sheet before his spring session, but he did not make that clear during our interview. Chris (personal communication, March 8, 2011) noted, “the advisor pulled out the Secondary Education curriculum and we started checking them off.” His description of the spring session did not acknowledge any preparation on his part.

Students who prepare in advance by having courses in mind they wish to take, actively contribute to an effective advising meeting. Course selection should only be a part of an effective advising session. There are numerous other facets of higher education that can be addressed if time allows. Unfortunately, many students come unprepared to an advising session, thus a majority of the advising time focuses solely on course selection.

Three students in the study said they would get advised earlier next time. At least one of the students came in after his registration window had opened. When Mike (personal communication, November 10, 2010) was asked how he would prepare for the next session, he responded “Come earlier! I’m late this time and hope my classes I want to take are not already closed. I’m coming as soon as I’m allowed.” Mike seemed to have learned from his first advising session that courses at SU do not stay open forever. Therefore, it is important to get advised

before your window opens so you can have optimum courses to select from. It is good that Mike realized this as a freshman. If he remembers to get advised in a timely fashion for the duration of his undergraduate career, it should be a piece to the puzzle for academic success. Mike did in fact learn from his fall advising session. Mike was one of the first participants to get advised in the spring. Mike (personal communication, March 7, 2011) believed the session was “effective” and by coming in early, he had ample time to fully evaluate the advice given to him.

Cathy (personal communication, November 5, 2010) also said she would “do it sooner” regarding earlier academic advisement. She did not know who her advisor was so she tried to find a prior advisor from orientation. Cathy spent a few days looking for this person only to realize “that person wasn’t even here.” Once she found out who her advisor was, she had no trouble getting advised. She only regretted not going to her real advisor first instead of wasting time looking for the wrong person. Cathy was able to remember where her advisor was located for her spring advising session. She met with the advisor much earlier in the spring. She was happy with the relaxed atmosphere of the session. “I was really intimidated with my first advising because I did not know what to expect. Now it is nowhere near as bad” (Cathy, personal communication, March 10, 2011). By Cathy knowing where her advisor was located and what to expect from the session, she was able to get advised in a timely fashion and efficiently plan her future schedule.

A small number of fall participants did not know how they would prepare, or admitted to approaching the next session the exact same as they did the first. Perhaps after their first session has set in, or they begin thinking about their next session as it gets closer, they will feel differently. Although some students may approach future sessions the exact same way as they

approached the first, those students who did not know should have a better idea as it gets closer to the next session.

Judging from spring interviews, it appeared some students did in fact prepare for their second session more than they did the first. Of the 25 spring participants, 16 said they would research future classes, 6 acknowledged exploring possible majors, and only one did not know how they would prepare in the future. Additionally, 24 participants said something proactive in how they would prepare for the next session.

Similar to fall semester, spring participants said they would look at needed courses as the primary approach to future advising sessions. Lucy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) noted that she would prepare for future sessions the “same” as her first two sessions. “I will look into other classes I need to take,” she explained. Ralph agreed with Lucy. “I’ll probably do the same as I did before by going online and looking at curriculums,” Ralph (personal communication, March 31, 2011) said. His plan was to “have an idea of what classes I should be expecting to take.” Other students gave similar responses during their spring interviews. Researching future needed classes was the most frequent response given to future preparation for academic advising.

Six spring participants mentioned exploring possible majors before their next advising session. This number was down significantly from the fall semester. This is because many spring participants have narrowed their future choice down to one specific major. For those who have not such as Alex, they plan to enter the next session more prepared to discuss a specific major. “Right now I’m just going in there [advising session] blind,” Alex (personal communication, March 8, 2011) explained. “Next time I will know more about what I want to do.” It was good to see the number of students expecting to talk about majors decline from fall to spring. This

decrease indicated that students are becoming more prepared to make academic decisions on their own.

Only one student during the spring advising session did not know how they would prepare for future sessions. This number was also down from the fall. With two advising experiences under his belt, Paul should be able to proactively think about his preparation for his next session when it gets closer to time. Other than Paul, 24 students used proactive descriptions of how they will prepare for future sessions. When a student plans ahead for the advising session, both the student and the advisor will benefit. The students in this study have now had two college advising sessions. They will continue to grow as students in both their abilities and expectations. Therefore, advanced preparation will only make the advising session more efficient and effective for all parties involved.

Thoughts on College Advising

The fourth sub-theme of students' experiences with college academic advising focused on participants' thoughts on the entire academic advising process. Students were able to evaluate the entire process from before making the appointment and/or walking in, to the actual advising session, and concluding with the utilization of the advice in which they received from the advisor. Participants in this study thought very highly of advising in higher education. Perhaps this was due to low expectations coming in, or maybe the advisors were just that good. I have a feeling it is a combination of both, as low or no entering expectations coupled with good academic advisors should make for a good experience. At the conclusion of each student interview during the fall semester, each student was asked to discuss their thoughts on the advising process as a whole. Every student in the study used positive descriptors while answering the question. Table 11 is a brief summary of students' responses.

Table 11

Words and phrases used in the fall to describe the entire academic advising process

Pseudonym	Thoughts
Jason	Good process; got things done
Carla	Easy; it's a no brainer
Tamara	Happy with everything
Chad	Worried at first; you get comfortable; guidance where you want to go
Monique	Wouldn't know what to do without it; essential for college
Roxanne	Good; people need it; advising is positive
Fadra	Quicker than I thought; helped me
Bernard	Thinking it was not going to help but it did
Rick	Good; what I expected it to be
Keisha	Went real well; won't be confused about major
Jackie	Advisors help each student
Sara	Very good process; guide students where they need to go
Walt	Good; not difficult
Chuck	Very good process; like how available they were; gave me options
Sue	Pretty good; easy
Karl	Convenient; better than high school
Ralph	Good process; time was used efficiently; went smooth
Lucy	Helped, feel a lot better
Heather	Helped me figure out what I want to be when I grow up
Wesley	Very helpful; students need it; freshmen don't know what to take
Cathy	Helps a lot; helps having someone to explain everything
Clay	Helped me; having someone to have one-on-one conversations helps
Karen	Very organized; glad its offered
Josh	Advisor was really helpful
Zairia	It was easy
Alex	Helps a lot; advising puts kids in place to get the job done
Thad	Wouldn't change anything; answered all my questions; quick
Chris	More help than orientation; cared about what I was thinking
Paul	Advising opens up a new track; great process; freshmen need it
Mike	Good; appreciate the advisors

Students' positive appraisal of the academic advising process was an extremely positive step in ensuring student satisfaction. As documented in the literature review, a satisfied student is

more likely to be retained by the institution. Looking back at students initial expectations for advising and considering the negative experiences some had with high school advisors, having 100% positive feedback on the first college advising session is very remarkable.

Students were pleased with the entire advising process for a variety of reasons. Some enjoyed the quick service and convenience, while others commented on the guidance they received during the session. Mike was pleased with the ease of coming in, and the advice he received. "I appreciate how they saw me on short notice and I didn't have to come in and wait. I appreciate them showing me what I need to take and talked with me about possible majors," Mike (personal communication, November 10, 2010) said. With today's generation of college freshmen expecting instant gratification in their daily lives, it was important to Mike not to have to wait while still receiving accurate information. Chuck echoed Mike's appreciation with the advising process. Chuck (personal communication, October 28, 2010) noted, "As a whole, I thought it was a very good process. I liked how available they were. I needed mine soon and they got me right in. I like how they gave me options on things I need. I thought it was very good." In what seems to be a reoccurring theme throughout this study, Chuck's mention of having options was very important to him. Students appreciate the ability to provide input in their education decisions. The fact that Chuck also cited the advisor's availability leads me back to his generation expecting convenient service in a timely fashion. Fadra also had a positive outlook on the entire advising experience. She valued the speediness and information-gathering aspects most appealing. "It's [getting advised] quicker than I thought. I thought it would take weeks to get in because they have so many students. It was quick and snappy, but it helped as well. I'm no longer guessing. It definitely helped," Fadra (personal communication, October 25, 2010)

responded. Offering students quality guidance in a expedited manner appeared to be what students in this study valued most.

A small sample of the students commented on how they were worried in the beginning and even confused; some mentioned they and/or their peers would be lost without it. These students' first advising session seemed to alleviate some initial concerns, and perhaps shape their expectations for future advising sessions. Chad was one of the students who admitted to being worried about academic advising. "From the start you are sometimes worried because you do not know what to expect. However, when you get there you get comfortable and they start getting to know you," Chad (personal communication, October 22, 2010) said. Chad appreciated the advisor getting to know him. Bernard was also hesitant about academic advising at first, but was grateful for the guidance after it was over. "Going into it I was kind of dreading it," Bernard (personal communication, October 26, 2010) stated. "I thought it was not really going to help me, but it did. It turned out very well." Bernard's initial thoughts were proven to be false after his first advising experience. An initial positive advising experience can lay the foundation for positive expectations during the duration of a student's academic journey.

I was delighted to hear a few students mention that they or their peers truly need advising. Paul (personal communication, November 10, 2010) made the bold statement, "Freshmen would be nothing without advising." He went on to say, "We don't know. It [advising] helps so we don't have to do the guesswork." Wesley agreed with Paul. Wesley (personal communication, October 29, 2010) said, "The freshmen don't know what we are going to take. They [advisors] lead us down the right path." Wesley and Paul's acknowledgement that freshmen need advising and are unsure about academic issues are music to advisors' ears. Advisors realize they help students, but do not always know if students appreciate their efforts.

Participants' second experience with advising in the spring reinforced their positive outlook toward academic advising at SU. Spring participants were pleased with the interaction they had with their advisors as they prepared for sophomore year. Parallel to fall every student in the study used positive descriptors while addressing their thoughts on advising. Table 12 is a brief summary of students' spring responses.

Table 12
Words and phrases used in the spring to describe the entire academic advising process

Pseudonym	Thoughts
Carla	Good; More informed than I thought
Tamara	Advisor helped; Found classes I would be successful in
Chad	First time everything was mixed; Surprised how much easier it got
Monique	Not have made it without it
Roxanne	Helpful; Guide me in what to take
Fadra	Didn't take full advantage at first; This time was more effective
Bernard	Helpful; Wouldn't have gotten as far without it
Jackie	Helps you get prepared; See classes instead of guessing
Walt	Helpful picking out classes; Gave options
Sue	Freshmen don't know advising helps them; So many classes to take
Karl	Pretty well; Got good classes
Ralph	Guided me on what classes to take
Lucy	Very good; Having same advisor both times helped
Heather	Helpful; Every time it was helpful about any major
Wesley	Great; Put me in right direction
Cathy	Shows you what you need and are interested in
Clay	Helped me; No idea what to take; Show me the core stuff
Karen	Good; Sessions were one-on-one
Josh	Helped ; Clueless without it
Zairia	Good; Gave information about classes
Alex	Helpful; Having someone coaching me makes it easier
Thad	Easy; Don't have to worry about it
Chris	Better than I thought; helped a lot
Paul	First one was rocky; More effective now that I know how to utilize it
Mike	Good; Steered me down right path

A 100% positive response rate was a testament to the quality of advisement received and the value students learned to place on advising. Spring responses focused less on specific attributes from the session, and more on the entire advising experience during the first year. The answers were mostly general; with class selection assistance garnering the most notations. Zairia (personal communication, March 9, 2011) acknowledged her appreciation for the guidance she received when choosing appropriate classes. The advisor helped her with “information about what classes I would like to take. They didn’t just give me any old classes to get me out of the way,” she exclaimed. Walt agreed with Zairia. The advisor’s concern with him getting the appropriate courses really stood to him. “If I couldn’t get a class I needed, my advisor would give me other options. They put a lot of effort to make sure I had plenty of options,” Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) said.

A small number of students admitted they grew with the advising process during their first year. Fadra (personal communication, March 11, 2011) pointed out that she “didn’t take full advantage” of her first advising session. “I wasn’t giving input so I wasn’t getting all that I could out of it,” she noted. Because she realized this, she was able to be a more active participant in her second advising session, thus her “second time was more effective than last time.” Paul (personal communication, March 8, 2011) also showed growth from session one to session two. He recalled the first session “being a little rocky, as it should be because you don’t know what you are getting into.” However, thinking back on his second session he commented “the effectiveness is definitely much better now that I know how to utilize it [advising] as a tool. It is definitely a good resource. The earlier students understand how to effectively use academic advising as a resource, the sooner they will become an active participant in the valuable advisor/advisee partnership.

Academic advising is not an exact science. Every advisor and advisee is different. It is important for the advisor and advisee to create an academic advising partnership where ideas are mutually respected and explored. Although the common goal in an advisor/advisee relationship is academic success, the type of guidance delivered to each advisee varies. The students in this study were not all given the same type of advice, yet 100% of participants found advising to be helpful. Advisors who can create a positive academic advising experience during a student's first-year are setting the stage for future positive advising interactions.

If Only I Would Have Known

One of the principal goals of this study was to gain an inside look at academic advising from the students' point-of-view. The longitudinal interview process provided multiple data collection points, which displayed student growth throughout the first year of college. Participants' insight was paramount during the entire study, but none more so than at the conclusion of their spring advising session. The participants' spring interviews concluded with students reflecting on their experiences with advising from when they first entered the university. After reflecting, participants were able to offer insight from their unique perspectives and offer advice to future first-year students and advising administrators. Sub-themes for this final theme include: a look back, advice for future first-year students, and making advising better.

A Look Back

Students participating in this study were not shy about publicizing the change in their advising expectations from when they first entered SU. After their spring advising session, participants were asked how their advising expectations have changed throughout their first year. One could almost see the wheels turning in the students' heads, as if they were mentally kicking themselves for how their perceptions have changed since beginning college. Of the 25 spring

participants, 22 openly admitted their advising expectations have changed throughout their first year. Only three students, Josh, Alex, and Thad acknowledged no change in expectations. Of the 22 participants who admitted change, 13 were able to designate specific reasons that caused their expectations to change. Additionally, six pointed out their expectations changed because they grew as a student and knew what to expect, and what was required of them because of their experiences with college advising.

Several students were able to identify specific facets of advising that caused a change in their expectations during the first year. Carla (personal communication, March 9, 2011) pointed out that she now expected advising to “take place in a one-on-one setting.” Before she entered the university she was unsure of the advising format utilized at SU. Because of her experience with advising, her expectations now include meeting with the advisor alone in a comfortable, trusting atmosphere. With the one-on-one time with the advisor, she anticipated “more information on how to help me, and what I can do to better myself,” she noted. Advising is a trusting partnership between the advisor and advisee. It appeared Carla understood this as her expectations and appreciation of advising grew during her freshman year.

Chris was also aware of how his advising expectations changed over the past year. Chris (personal communication, March 8, 2011) admitted to “not expecting anything to now expecting to get a lot of help.” Chris appreciated that the advisor was there to help with any issues he may encounter as a student at SU. Chris pointed out “the advisors are there for me in a variety of ways, and not just because they have to.” Because Chris had good experiences with his academic advisor during his first year, his expectations for a positive advising relationship should continue on throughout his academic career.

Similar to other students who understood how their advising expectations have changed, Karl (personal communication, March 9, 2011) revealed “advising was more personalized than I was expecting. It was not just generic--okay this is you major, this is what you have to do.” Karl was pleased the advisor took time to get to know him and offer guidance specific to Karl’s interests. The advising “was more of what do you want to do with your degree, what do you want to get out of college type stuff,” he said. By getting to know Karl, the advisor could offer advice beyond the typical class selection routine. It was clear upon entering the university, Karl was expecting very generic guidance and an advisor that was simply moving him along to get to the next student. Fortunately, Karl’s expectations were incorrect, and he now understands all the positive interaction that can occur from academic advising sessions.

Some of the participants made it known that because they now know what to expect with advising, they can use the process more efficiently. Heather (personal communication, March 9, 2011) said, “when I first came I did not know what to expect. Now going in I know I will not be lost when I leave.” Heather welcomed the advisor’s guidance on course selection, possible majors, and other college aspects. In Heather’s first advising session she was unsure of her future major, but decided to talk about Nursing. Because she gained an understanding of the advising process, she realized before her spring session she did not want Nursing, but rather Dietetics and Nutrition. Based on her prior advising knowledge, she was able to adequately prepare for her second session, which resulted in a “very insightful conversation” about her new major with her advisor.

Another good example of a student learning from their prior experience was Jackie. Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) was one of the students who admitted “when I came to my first advising appointment I was nervous. I didn’t know what to expect.” Like other

students, Jackie gained confidence during her first year. “I’ve been here for a year now and I’m comfortable with advising, the campus, just everything. I know what to expect when I come in [for advising],” she noted. The setting of an advising session is very important in establishing the type of effective advisor/advisee dialogue needed in order to create a successful partnership. Jackie becoming comfortable with her advisor and the entire advising process will allow her to have positive advising experiences in the future.

As a continued theme that occurred frequently through this study, two students recalled how their high school advising lowered their college advising expectations. These two students, and probably others who did not mention it, allowed their poor high school advising experience to dictate their college advising expectations. Auspiciously, these students’ expectations changed once they realized college advising was a different ballgame. Ralph was happy to verbally compare his current thoughts versus his expectations from when he first arrived at SU. “I always thought of advising as something I did on my own based on how it was in high school,” Ralph (personal communication, March 31, 2011) said passionately. “Now it is more one-on-one with someone helping you individually. My expectations have definitely changed from when I first got here.” Ralph is just another example from this study who demonstrated growth as a student during his first year. I believe part of his growth was a natural occurrence, while some could be attributed to his low expectations entering college.

While it was documented earlier in this chapter that high school advising experiences varied among students, those who had a poor experience were willing to speak up about it. Clay was one participant that definitely fell into this category. Clay entered SU with little to no expectations for advising based on what he received in high school. “In high school I had terrible advising,” he made known. They did not help us that much. I figured it [college advising] was

going to be something like that” (Clay, personal communication, April 7, 2011). To Clay’s surprise college advising was not at all like he expected. After a year in college, Clay admitted “my expectations were blown out of the water. These people [advisors] helped me a lot more than I expected, a lot more than high school.” Through Clay’s positive advising experiences, it would appear his entire satisfaction level with the university increased, as he spoke positively about all university facets.

It was pleasing to hear that 88% (22 of 25) spring participants increased their expectations toward academic advising. Even though three participants did not acknowledge any change in their expectations, I am confident that if pressed, these students could name at least one specific nuance of a changed advising expectation. Regardless of which category students fell into, all appeared to grow as students and gain confidence during their first year in college. As long as they continue to learn from their experiences, academic advising will continue to play an important role in the journey through higher education.

Advice For Future First-Year Students

Learning from one’s experiences is a noble concept. However, learning from those who have experienced similar issues before you is genius. Almost every student who completed a spring interview was able to offer advice for future undecided first-year students. Much of the advice given seemed to be heartfelt, and the student giving the advice more than likely could have benefited from it themselves.

Although advice given varied among participants, the guidance could be categorized in four different groups. The categories included going into advising with an open mind, not to worry, advisors will help you, and have an idea about majors. The students who promoted entering the advising session with an open mind, also made it clear that being undecided as a

freshman was a good idea. Walt (personal communication, March 10, 2011) would recommend future first-year students to “go in undecided and test the waters out. Just be undecided, but listen to what people from other majors have to say,” he noted. Future students should feel comfortable with Walt’s advice, as he was recently in their shoes. Thad was one participant who made it clear future students should enter advising with an open mind. Thad’s experience to be open-minded regarding advising was good advice for future students. Thad (personal communication, March 11, 2011) pointed out several positive aspects of having an open mind such as “there are some classes you don’t think you would take, but they turn out to be really interesting. Just keep an open mind about classes, teachers, and majors,” he said. Future students who enter a university undecided in their major and have an open mind, are more likely to try new experiences which could help them progress as a college student.

As noted earlier in this chapter several participants entered their first advising session nervous and unsure what to expect. Although their outlook changed after gaining experience with advising, the fact they were nervous in the beginning was something that was not unique only to them. Future first-year students will also approach their first advising session somewhat apprehensive. The students in this study who recalled being nervous at first, but later realized there is nothing to be nervous about, will hopefully serve as a guide for future students. Heather and Clay gave almost identical advice regarding not to be nervous. Heather (personal communication, March 9, 2011) believed future students should “not be worried if you don’t know what you are doing. They [advisors] will help you,” she explained. Clay (personal communication, April 7, 2011) echoed Heather’s comments as he thought aloud “don’t worry. If you have any idea or no idea, they [advisors] can help you out.” Jackie was a perfect example of a student being overly nervous about her first advising session. During her fall interview she

recalled how she was very nervous, but once she met with the advisor and became comfortable there was nothing to be nervous about. Jackie (personal communication, March 23, 2011) still believed this during her spring interview, as she acknowledged “don’t be nervous. Nobody is going to hurt you. Everybody makes you feel comfortable like you are at home.” Telling someone not to be nervous about an experience which they have yet to encounter is easier said than done. However, the first-hand accounts from these students can serve as beneficial peer-to-peer advice.

Throughout the entire interview process, all students commented on how helpful the advisors were. This was the most documented advice given to future students. Mike (personal communication, March 7, 2011) wanted future students to know that if “you don’t know what you want to do, they [advisors] will help you figure it out.” Sue (personal communication, April 6, 2011) echoed Mike’s comments when she said “just go in and ask for help, because they [advisors] will help you. They will help you create your schedule, talk about majors, just anything. They are good at it.” Having students vouch for the helpfulness of the advisors can only lead to the credibility of advisors’ willingness to assist students. Chad’s advice for future students followed suit with most of his first-year peers. Although he did mention how helpful the advisors were, he also pointed out that students should “come in more confident that I did the first time.” Chad (personal communication, March 9, 2011) acknowledged how much easier advising became because of the combination of his confident approach and the helpfulness of the advisors in the AC.

The last category of advice came about due to the timing of the spring interviews. The interviews occurred shortly after their second advising session. During the spring advising session, most students were ready to declare their major or had their future major narrowed down

to a very small list. Some participants advised future students to have an idea about their major. This is much easier for a second semester undecided student as opposed to a new entering freshman. Fadra (personal communication, March 11, 2011) believed future students should “have something in mind about what you want to do for your major. It will help you a lot. You don’t want to be behind,” she declared. Fadra had a couple of choices in mind for her major in the fall, but was ready to fully commit by the end of her spring advising session. Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) also acknowledged students should “have a little bit of an idea about what you want to do before going in.” Additionally, he pointed out it is important to “listen to the advisor.” Students who have a few majors in mind may find the advising sessions very beneficial because they can gain specific desired information rather than general guidance. No matter if future students enter their first advising session with a list of possible majors or no idea at all, the advisor will be able to guide them on their educational journey.

Advice directly from students was helpful to future students in a variety of ways. Future students can hear directly from their peers who previously experienced a facet of higher education which they will soon encounter. The advice given was very good and often repeated, which demonstrated multiple perspectives. Lucy (personal communication, March 10, 2011) said it best, as she touched on three of the four categories with her response. “If they [future students] don’t know what they want to do that is fine, don’t worry. Be undecided and take general classes. They can ask their advisor about majors and classes. They [advisors] will be extremely helpful,” she said confidently. Lucy’s response to future students was practical advice from a student who just spent her first year as an undecided college freshman. Student-to-student advice is well

received among college students, and the messages from students in this study regarding advising for first-year students were right on target.

Making Advising Better

Like most facets of higher education there is always room for improvements. Changes should not be made in haste. They should be strongly considered after an efficient metric is used to determine the most effective way to implement and assess innovations to determine if improvement actually occurred. This study allowed for student voice to be the metric in which possible improvements could be determined based solely on the population served. Participants in this study had the opportunity to reflect back on their first year experiences with academic advising and make recommendations for advisors and administrators to consider. Some advice seemed logical, while other suggestions may not be feasible.

Depending on how one viewed student responses, the most common answer given could be considered good or bad. The most frequent response to improvements in advising was the current system in place is good and no changes are needed. One can appreciate the job the advisors in the AC are doing that would lead to excellent customer satisfaction rates. However, advisors and the AC as a whole, cannot progress without critical evaluation and feedback. I am sure the positive praise would be welcomed by the advisors, but feedback directly from students regarding possible innovations would have been very beneficial.

The students that were able to point out specific improvements varied. One student noted the AC should look into an online appointment scheduling system. Tamara (personal communication, March 23, 2011) pointed out “if you are undecided you can’t really make an appointment through your student account online, so you have to stay on top of it. It would be nice to be notified when advising is, and make an appointment online in one place.” Other

departments at SU utilize an online appointment scheduling system. With today's students being more technologically advanced than ever before, perhaps this idea deserves to be further explored.

Another idea revealed by a student participant would allow advisors to recommend professors. The AC currently has a policy of not recommending professors. Although it is common for students to openly discuss the pros and cons of certain professors with each other, the AC feels it would be unprofessional for advisors to recommend specific professors over others. With the policy noted, Monique (personal communication, March 10, 2011) did bring an interesting prospective on the benefits of advisors recommending certain professors based on student learning style and course expectations. Monique said:

If people [students] knew more about teachers beforehand it would be easier to select classes. You could have better expectations about what you are getting into before the first class. I had to drop so many classes. Advice ahead of time would have saved me. Monique believed that had an advisor discussed an instructor's teaching style with her, she would have made more informed decisions regarding her class schedule. She could have selected professors that utilized a teaching strategy that would have been more conducive to Monique's learning style.

Two participants, Bernard and Wesley, mentioned the idea of having the AC open later in the evening. When Bernard (personal communication, March 25, 2011) asked what could make advising better he responded, "open a little later. I had to try and make it [advising] fit around my hectic schedule." Wesley (personal communication, March 11, 2011) first said "I really don't think you can make it that much better." However, when pressed a little he responded "maybe more open times, but besides that it is good." The idea of opening additional hours has

previously been discussed in the AC. This initiative could benefit non-traditional students with families, students who work during the day, and very busy students like athletes. However, at this time there are no plans to open additional hours due to perceived low demand by the population being served.

Two students provided examples that may not be feasible in the AC. According to Sue, advising could be better if students did not have to wait to be advised. “The only way to make it [advising] better was if I didn’t have to wait. Everybody comes at one time and rushes in here” (Sue, personal communication, April 6, 2011). It should be noted that Sue came to the AC during walk-in advising just before registration windows opened. Had Sue made an appointment there was an excellent chance she would have walked right in to meet with her advisor without having to wait. The AC schedules individual appointments for students well in advance of registration windows opening. One week prior to windows opening, the AC utilizes a walk-in advising system, in which no appointment is necessary.

Chris had an idea that may not seem so far-fetched on initial review. Chris (personal communication, March 8, 2011) stated, “other than having a computer in front of me to show me what to register for, advising is good.” A computer in the advising session for student use could be a novel idea that would allow the advisor to assist with on-site class registration. However, further consideration would reveal how much time it would take for advising if advisors helped each student design their course schedule. Additionally, during the time frame when registration windows open, the AC is very busy. The increased time spent with individual students who are building schedules would create a backlog of students waiting to see an advisor after their windows had opened. Even though Chris and Sue’s ideas were not feasible, at least they reflected on ways in which advising could be improved.

With 19 of the 25 students stating the advising at the AC was good in the current form, and no improvements could be pointed out, the number of improvements listed by participants was minimal. Fortunately, most of the proposed improvements by students can be taken into consideration by advisors and administrators. Assessing the experience by students, and asking for ways to improve had the potential to offer guidance directly from those who benefit from the service. Unfortunately, students in this study were unable to provide the breadth of responses needed to fully evaluate possible improvements in the AC. It was nice to hear students are very satisfied with advising in the AC as is, but these students had the opportunity to acknowledge ways of improvement that could benefit future students for years to come.

Conclusion

Five themes emerged from participant responses which were collected throughout an entire academic year. Themes included: prior experience with academic advising, being an undecided college freshman, majors under consideration, college advising, and reflection of first year. To summarize, students recalled their academic advisement prior to enrolling at college. Students discussed the pros and cons of their individual experiences, while also addressing who assisted them with advising. Students addressed being undecided during their first year which included their concerns and messages they received from others. Because these students were undecided in their major, students acknowledged possible majors under consideration and the appeal of certain majors over others. This study allowed first-year undecided students to explain in detail their thoughts on college academic advising. Students addressed facets such as their initial expectations, the actual advising session, how they will prepare in the future, and thoughts on the entire advising process. The chapter closed with students' reflections on advising throughout their first year in college. Students were able to take a critical look back and offer

advice to future students, and share their thoughts on what could make academic advising better. Chapter Five will address the data in terms of making recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore academic advising experiences of first-year students who are undecided in a major at a public high research activity institution, and how academic advisors could better serve them relative to these experiences. This study utilized a phenomenological approach to capture first-hand academic advising accounts from students at multiple data collection points during their first year of college. Participants in this study were first-year Southeastern University (SU) students undecided in their major, and were advised at the institution's Advising Center (AC). Purposeful sampling was used to select the original 30 participants. Of the 30 students that participated in the fall one-on-one interviews, only 25 were available for winter phone interviews and spring one-on-one interviews with the researcher. This chapter addresses the research questions posed in chapter one and offers discussion on the research findings in chapter four. The chapter concludes with implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Overview of the Study

The principal objective of this study was to capture student insight regarding personal experiences with academic advising as a first-year student undecided in an academic major. This qualitative study gave students a voice in the quality of academic advising received, thus provided meaningful, rich data directly from participants' perspectives. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students being advised by the AC describe their experiences and perspectives on academic advising during their first year of college?
2. How can the AC and the academic advisors better serve these first-year students relative to their experiences and perspectives of the advising process?

Data collected from participants at three different points (fall, winter break, and spring) during the first year was used to answer these questions. Collecting data at multiple points throughout the year offered key insight into how student perspectives changed and evolved over the first year. Information obtained during these interviews provided rich, thick descriptions about their advising experiences. Five themes emerged from the data. These themes highlighted (a) students' experiences with academic advising before college, (b) being undecided in a major, (c) majors under consideration, (d) college academic advising, and (e) reflecting back.

The first theme titled, *High School Advising: A Mixed Bag* explored students' advising experiences prior to their arrival at college, and who offered them guidance along the way. The second theme, *No Major, No Problem, Or Is It* focused on first-year students' concerns with being undecided, and what messages they were hearing from other people. The third theme, *So Many Choices, So Little Time* focused on specific majors under consideration during the first year, and the appeal of certain majors. The fourth theme, *Learning To Crawl Before You Walk* addressed students' college advising experiences upon entering the university to the end of their freshmen year. Items of interest included: students' initial expectations, what occurred during the advising sessions, preparation for future sessions, and thoughts on college advising. The fifth theme, *If Only I Would Have Known* allowed participants to reflect back. Their reflections provided advice for future students and thoughts on how to make advising better. These themes are presented in detail in Chapter IV.

Discussion of the Research Findings

Advising Satisfaction: A Tale of Two Situations

When thinking back to the original research question in this study regarding how students describe their first-year advising experiences, it is important to gain a holistic perspective on factors that contribute to their viewpoint. Hunter and Kendall (2008) addressed the ample amount of academic support millennial students receive. All students in this study could be identified as millennial students. These students typically have parents, peers, high school personnel, and other key people assisting them throughout their K-12 education. Every student in this study acknowledged having at least one person provide academic guidance prior to enrolling in college. Did students find college advising satisfactory? What made the experience satisfactory or unsatisfactory? What past experiences guided students' expectations regarding college advising? These questions and others will assist in the exploration on students' view of advising during the first year of college.

I believe through my work experience and students' responses in this study that advising experiences prior to college enrollment do affect students' expectations for college advising. This notion can be further supported by Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) described Kolb's Theory as knowledge is created by experiences. Kolb's first two stages of learning can be directly applied to students experiencing high school advising and creating expectations for college advising based on the past experiences. Kolb's first two stages can be described as the "concrete experience (CE) forms the basis of observation and reflection (RO). These observations are in turn used to develop one's ideas, including generalizations" (p. 209).

The researcher found students in this study to have varying satisfaction levels with high school advising. This is very important because most students have limited choices in where they can attend high school. Additionally, unless students attend a private high school there is no direct cost for the student to attend. It would be difficult for a high school student to transfer or not persist due to not being satisfied with his/her experience. On the other side of the coin regarding higher education, there are numerous institutions of higher learning and there is a direct cost of attendance for the student. Therefore, student satisfaction with college academic advising as it relates to overall student satisfaction and retention is paramount (Corts, et al., 2000; McCalla-Wriggins, 2000; Tinto, 2004). Almost one-third of students in the study described their high school advising experiences as bad. The largest number of students identified themselves as having neutral high school advising experiences. In higher education where most of an institution's operating budget comes from student tuition, 70% (21 of 30) of students rating advising as bad or neutral would not be tolerated. However, based on these students' descriptions of high school advising there was no liability in not meeting student expectations.

It was interesting to hear the students recall their high school advising experiences and pass judgment on specific facets of the encounter. For example, some students liked the high school counselors telling them exactly what courses they needed to take. However, other participants in the study did not enjoy having an advisor or counselor tell them exactly what they needed to take and restrict their choices. Some students conveyed they were merely given a sheet of courses needed to graduate, but were given little assistance thereafter. Additionally, students admitted to never seeing an advisor or counselor during high school, or not getting along with the advisor.

Not all experiences were bad. In contrast to the students that had a negative high school experience, there were an equal number who had a positive experience. Several students discussed how their advisor or counselor would help them with college preparation, allow them to be actively involved in the decision making process, and noted the fondness for professionals who seemed to genuinely care about the students' well-being. One would believe that students who had a positive experience in high school would have high expectations for college advisors. The positive experience these students had prior to enrolling in college should lay the foundation for future optimistic advising interaction.

As noted earlier in this chapter every student was able to identify at least one person that helped guide them on their academic journey prior to college. Additionally, over half the participants in the study were able to name multiple people that assisted them. Assistance ranged from advisors, teachers, counselors, coaches, parents, siblings, and other authoritative figures. This net of assistance could be viewed both positively and negatively. It is positive because students are receiving ample support from a variety of areas. It is harder to fail when you are strongly supported by people you trust. On the other end of the spectrum if the support was more of a "do everything for you" nature, students may not be prepared to make decisions for themselves once they leave the comfort of this safety net.

Students accepting this abundant support can be viewed as experiencing Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development. Perry's Theory noted students moving through different stages such as duality, multiplicity, and relativism (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Students who were over-supported in high school may have never moved out of dualism. Dualism can be defined as "learning is essentially information exchange and authorities are seen as having and dispensing the right answers" (p. 131). Students who have never had to think for

themselves will continue to rely on authority figures to tell them what to do. In this case the students may expect the advisor to provide all information, and accept everything as absolute truth. Students who had support, yet were an active participant in the decision-making process should have moved out of dualism and into multiplicity and perhaps even relativism. Multiplicity was known as “honoring diverse views” and “learns to think more independently” (p. 131). Relativism was defined as “recognition of the need to support opinions. All opinions no longer appear to be equally valid” (p. 132). Students in this study could be viewed as scattered across all three of Perry’s stages. Just because all students admitted to receiving academic support prior to enrolling at SU, did not mean that all support was equal.

Keeping in mind how students prior advising and support went before college, it was a surprise when a significant number of participants reported having positive advising experiences during their first year of college. In the fall semester 83% (25 of 30) admitted to feeling positive about their first advising session in the AC. In the spring semester 96% (24 of 25) acknowledged a positive second experience. Before one places too much emphasis on the percentages alone, as with any qualitative study it is important to examine the how and why students felt the way they did.

Academic advising expectations varied by student for the first session. Some students specifically mentioned they expected the session to be like high school. These expectations could have gone either way. If students had prior positive experiences they may have been expecting the same from the college advisor. However, if the students had negative connotations associated with academic advising, they may have already convinced themselves the session would be bad. Other students admitted to feeling nervous or anxious entering the session. These students may or may not have based their expectations on prior experiences. It was positive to see a large

number of the students expected to have a good first session. Many expected the advisor to help them with class selection, discussion of possible majors, and other advisor/advisee facets.

Students who participated in the spring semester were able to list very specific advising expectations for their second session. No students admitted to being nervous, and almost all expected the advisor to be helpful. The specific expectations were interesting to hear. Students wanted to discuss specific majors, classes, future plans, and other areas that were very individualized by student. I attribute these specific expectations to students gaining experience during the fall and knowing what to expect in the spring. Students could spend less time worrying about the advising process and the interaction with the advisor, and focus on actual issues that would help them succeed.

With entering advising expectations following a positive and helpful pattern, it was good to see the initial expectations lived up to the actual advising experience in most cases. After each session participants were able to describe in detail what occurred during their session and how the session was positive, negative, or neutral. In the fall the positive feelings seemed to stem from a sense of relief. These students had now successfully experienced and conquered their first round with academic advising. Many of the students appeared to be authentic when they discussed their satisfaction with the first session. The primary aspect mentioned in a positive nature was the ability to discuss courses for the following semester. Even though course selection is only a small part of quality academic advising, if that made the experience positive to them it could positively contribute to the ripple effect of future sessions. Although students may not realize it, the first session may have been strictly about course scheduling on face value. However, other impacts could be viewed as making a connection to a campus professional, learning where your advisor's office is located, and acquiring additional resources such as

curriculum and policy sheets. The aforementioned components may not have been easily visible to the student during the first session, but they will contribute to the positive outlook on future advising interaction.

Spring interviews heard students mention how their expectations changed slightly due to already experiencing advising once during freshmen year. All but six spring participants admitted to having a change in advising expectations. Some expected the session to be better or more items addressed, others entered knowing what to expect, and several admitted to seeking specialized advising on specific topics and issues. Because spring participants appeared to be more involved in the partnership that makes advising special, I was not surprised when all but one student declared the spring advising session to be a success. The one student who did paint his spring experience in a negative manner made it known that he felt pressured during the advising session. The student acknowledged that the advisor was pushing him to declare a major and take classes that were more in line with a specific major; rather than general education courses like the ones he took during his first year in college. Proactive students taking the initiative to address the advisor with specific issues makes advising easier and more effective for all parties involved. The confidence students gained during the first session played a role in the increased expectations and overall satisfaction with the spring advising session.

A Sprint Versus a Marathon: Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

Research question two regarding how can advisors better serve this population should be considered in the context of the advisor understanding the expectations of the individual student and how to address accordingly. Additionally, if the advisor is aware of an advising facet missing from the student's expectations, the advisor can act in a proactive nature to assist the student. Students in this study expressed varying degrees of goals and expectations to be

addressed in an advising setting. Each student was a first-year student undecided in his or her major, but that did not deter them from already making graduation plans. On the other hand, certain students were only seeking short-term gains by making course selection the primary aspect of advising. These students did not give much if any regard to the big picture of obtaining a college degree that will help them become successful throughout life. Even though the participants in this study had many higher education similarities, the way they prioritized academic advising components fluctuated.

In my opinion the participants in this study fell into three categories regarding their beliefs for advising and the journey through higher education. On one end of the spectrum you have the marathon runners. These students are looking long-term toward graduation and beyond. They do appreciate the advice received that assists them with immediate issues, but are primarily focused on the finish line without enjoying the race. The second group is the sprinters. They want immediate help such as course selection for the next semester, or addressing an issue that has recently transpired. They give little to no regard about when they will graduate and what they will be doing following college. Finally, there are those students that fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum. These students could be compared to runners in a relay race. Short bursts are an essential part of the race, similar to students' short-term goals. However, the entire race is much longer than a brief sprint, so the longer duration must be considered just as long-term goals are valuable to students. Relay racers value the advice that will help them currently, but also are able to discuss future plans and objectives with their academic advisor.

Of the three groups, the marathon runners were the smallest group. Although they were small in numbers, they definitely left an impression. I found it ironic that some of these first-year students who are undecided in their major were already discussing graduating on time, getting a

high-paying job, and other long term goals. However, most of the students in this category were not set on a certain major, and had minimal ideas about what type of career they would pursue. This group could be identified in both a positive and negative nature. It was positive to see freshmen with long-term goals and aspirations to become successful. Additionally, one would believe students with long-term visions are more likely to keep their eye on the prize and persist until that goal is reached. All universities strive for their students to persist year-to-year and graduate in a timely manner. The marathon runners should be commended for their lofty goals and foresight in their desire to obtain a good life.

Unfortunately, this group may be viewed in a negative fashion by some. As a graduate student myself getting ready to finish my Ph.D, I appreciate their graduation plans. However, graduation is merely a ceremony in which one receives a piece of paper. The real education experience occurs during the journey to graduation. One must realize that the obtainment of a higher education degree is a process where knowledge, skills, experience, and other important facets are acquired over the duration of the college experience. Receiving the diploma after the educational experience is a nice photo opportunity and will provide something to decorate the wall, but students must value the journey that brought them to the graduation stage. The marathon runners in this study displayed little interest in the journey; only the finish line. Perhaps this will change and some of these students will stop and smell the roses. Otherwise, graduation may come and the students will look back and think about what they would have done differently if only they had slowed down and appreciated the entire process.

The sprinters were typical of most first-year students in that everything about the university setting was new to them including college academics. The sprinters in my study enjoyed each new experience for what it was worth and took things day-by-day with no real

expressed concern for plans after graduation. These students were chiefly concerned about registering for the appropriate classes. Even though these students did not have a declared major, they wanted the advisor to guide them on general courses that would count toward most majors. They expressed their class registration desire in three different aspects of the interviews: (a) when asked about advising expectations; (b) when asked about what occurred during the session; and (c) when asked about how they would prepare for future advising sessions. Reaching that short-term goal of registering for the upcoming semester with the appropriate courses was priority number one for this group.

Similar to the marathon runners, the sprinters could be viewed as having both positive and negative qualities. I found it delightful that these students were not stressing out about what they will do four years from now. They were gaining countless new experiences while in college and were living for the moment. These students could tell you about possible majors under consideration and even career plans that may have been an interest at some point. However, the overarching theme during their interviews was the instant fix they received when talking about classes for the current or upcoming semester only.

The fact that these students did not seem stressed and were enjoying the academic journey a little more than their marathon runner counterparts also could be argued as having negative aspects. Merely looking at short-term gains without appreciation of the big picture such as graduation and getting a job should be taken into consideration. As undecided students these participants were encouraged to explore possible majors offered at SU. Unfortunately, giving serious consideration to future majors was a significantly lower priority for this group when compared to pure class selection. Just as the marathon runners could be viewed positively for

their long-term goals, the sprinters' approach may be seen as negative due to their lack of long-term planning.

The relay racers landed in the middle of the marathon runner/sprinter continuum. I believed this group had the best approach to the advising process. They took the positive aspects of both the marathon runners and the sprinters and applied them to their academic outlooks. When asked about their expectations for advising, this group consistently mentioned exploring future majors and selecting courses. They provided a variety of answers when asked about the actual advising sessions. Answers ranged from selecting appropriate courses to plans after graduation and everything in between. Similar responses were given when asked about how they would prepare for future sessions. Class selection research along with major exploration was noted numerous times throughout the interviews. These students had their eye on the long-term goal of graduation, but were taking advantage of short-term opportunities that were afforded to them.

Although the participants were similar in several ways; their priorities with academic advising and attitudes toward short-term and long-term academic aspirations varied. Multiple student development theories can be used to describe these students' aspirations as freshmen. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) addressed Schlossberg's Transition Theory, which could be applied to these students' academic views. The transition theory described how students experienced transitions. The marathon runners may have jumped ahead to the "moving out" phase, while the sprinters cannot seem to get past the "moving in" phase. Each phase is valuable and needs to be appreciated for what it is. Advisors who understand which phase students belong are more likely to offer advice sought by the student, and able to offer additional advice the student was unaware they even needed. Advisor's knowledge of development theory will assist

them in working with students who are in different vectors, phases, and any other term used as holding tank in developmental theory.

Gordon's (2007) six tasks would also be useful to advisors who work with the undecided students who have varying degrees of academic expectations and aspirations. Gordon lists her six tasks as follows (p. 141-149):

1. Help the student determine why he or she is undecided.
2. Help the student organize a plan for exploring.
3. Help the student integrate all information that has been collected.
4. Support the student while he or she makes decisions.
5. Help the student initiate an action plan.
6. Encourage follow-up contact.

For students who fell in the middle of the continuum these six tasks seem easy enough to be accomplished. The tasks are supportive of both short-term and long-term gains from academic advising. The first-year students who primarily have long-term ambitions and pay little regard to the process to reach the goal will be a little more challenging to implement the six tasks.

Advisors will need to practice patience and work with students on breaking down the long-term plans into smaller manageable increments so students will appreciate the entire journey. For students who are only focused on short-term gains such as registering for the next courses and having the advisor hold removed, the advisor must encourage, and possibly even require, more long-term planning and exploring. Advisors who are able to offer the advice students are seeking, yet incorporate additional guidance the students may not even know they need, will be the most effective and efficient academic advisors.

It is No Coincidence, It is Confidence

This study revealed several interesting outcomes from first-year undecided students at a large high research activity institution. Some results were expected while others came as a surprise. Nothing was more surprising to me as a researcher than the amount of confidence the participants seemed to gain from the first advising session to the second. Several students appeared timid at the first session. Most of those students used words such as “nervous, anxious, and afraid” to describe their initial advising expectations. In the fall students verbally stated how they did not know what to expect from a college advising session and this caused some apprehension on their part. Even after the advising session had ended, I could tell during the interviews that some students were still a little unsure about the entire process. There is naturally a feeling of uncertainty when entering any new situation. Therefore, why should academic advising for a first-year freshman be any different? These students are experiencing new things every day while in college. Advising was just another experience that they would need to fully explore before moving forward.

Most, but not all students in the fall, admitted to being nervous before the session or seemed a little unsure about the session after it was over. However, almost every student in the spring exhibited this strange beam of confidence. I only use the word strange because it caught me off guard. No students admitted to being nervous or anxious. Each student was able to describe their advising session using more specific criteria regarding what occurred. The confidence was not only displayed in their answers, it could be seen in their body language and tone of conversation. This same group of students, who only one semester prior seemed to be deer in headlights, could now be compared to an eagle flying high over the world. It was interesting that even students, who admitted having issues with grades, professors, or other

academic components, were not experiencing stress over the issues at hand. They were able to fully acknowledge problems with their advisor, but were confident everything would work out. As noted in Chapter IV every student had at least one possible major in mind during the spring interview. However, even those students that were not 100% sure about their future major or still had multiple majors under consideration, continued to demonstrate a high level of confidence I was not expecting.

What caused this newfound confidence? Could it be the researcher's perspective only, and others may have viewed it differently? Possibly, but I believe there are several explanations that could enlighten one on the increased confidence during spring semester. Most would agree that gaining experiences leads to increased intelligence, skills, and confidence. Numerous student development theories on psychosocial, identity, and cognitive development could be used to describe the transition students experience during the first year of college and how their confidence increases as they move through various stages, vectors, or positions depending on the theory used.

One student development theory that is easily applicable is Chickering's Theory of Identity Development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted seven vectors of development students experience during their time in college. Students may move through the vectors at varying speeds and vectors can even overlap. In the first vector, developing competence, Chickering and Reisser noted that "competence stems from the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully" (p. 53). The students in this study gained a valuable advising experience in the fall and most believed they successfully completed the task; thus becoming competent in that area. Meeting this competency allowed the students to enter their second advising session, knowing they were successful in a prior advising situation.

The second vector, managing emotions, could be used to explain how students did not appear to let perceived problems sway their confidence during their spring advising session. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) described Chickering's second vector as "students develop the ability to recognize and accept emotions, as well as to appropriately express and control them" (p. 38). Participants in this study may have experienced prior problems in the fall. The fall incidents provided students with an understanding that the problem will be resolved; thus no reason to put undue stress on themselves. Developing competence and managing emotions are just the first two vectors one could use to demonstrate how students gained visible confidence from fall to spring advising. Additional vectors such as moving through autonomy toward interdependence and developing mature interpersonal relationships could also be attributed to an increase in student confidence. Students mentioned not feeling pressure about being undecided and interacting and becoming comfortable with the advisor during the fall are examples from these two vectors.

Gordon (2007) noted several studies regarding students' confidence while attending college. She specifically focused on aspects regarding undecided students, which would contribute to the students in this study displaying increased confidence from advising session one to two. Gordon described the Career Barriers Inventory (CBI) from Swanson, Daniels, and Tokar and how it related to undecided students. One barrier used was known as lack of confidence. Students' lack of confidence could be perceived as an obstacle in their ability to declare a major. After experiencing college for two semesters, taking several courses, meeting with an advisor, and talking with peers and university professionals, students could be more informed on possible majors of interest. This new information could contribute in the removal of the lack of

confidence barrier. As the saying goes, knowledge is power, and students most definitely had more knowledge in the spring as opposed to the fall.

Gordon also referenced the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) from Gati, Krausz, and Osipow as it pertained to undecided students. Similar to the CBI, undecided students have obstacles that prevent them from confidently declaring their major. The CDDQ highlighted three categories students fall into: Lack of readiness, Lack of information, and Inconsistent information. In the fall several examples directly from students allowed me to classify them into one or more of the three categories. However, with almost a full year of college under their belts, most participants were able to overcome all three obstacles. The growth the students displayed from fall to spring contributed to their confident approach during the spring advising session.

As human beings we understand how important it is to enter tasks confident in our abilities to succeed. Whether the task is large such as climbing a mountain, or small like renting a post office box, it is important to have confidence. The more one experiences a task will only contribute to the amount of confidence one has in all future occurrences. These students may have had some initial apprehension before and during their first advising session. However, the practical experience gained, allowed them to enter their second session more confident than ever. Whether one attributes the increased confidence to their own personal experience or applies the increase to student development theories, the result will be the same. These students were more confident in the spring, and should continue to increase their self-assurance as they grow as students and gain more experiences in higher education.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Unlike prior studies on academic advising, this study goes above and beyond the basic measurement of student satisfaction. This dissertation research opens the door for the nexus between advising efficiency and student development to be further explored. The connection between the two can have a significant impact on institutions of higher education. Although the findings of this study showed that participants were satisfied with their first-year advising experiences at SU, the additional data collected from students will allow practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to further explore how efficient academic advising impacts student development and vice-versa.

There are various metrics for accountability in higher education. Institutions feel pressure on both the state and national levels to produce acceptable standards of student persistence and graduation rates. It is paramount for all facets of institutions to be as efficient as possible. Academic advising is no exception; especially for students without declared majors. According to past research, students without declared majors persist and graduate at lower levels than their peers with decided majors (Anderson, 1997; Leppel, 2001; Noel 1985). Furthermore, according to retention statistics regarding SU's freshmen cohorts between 2005-2007, students without a declared major had a lower retention rate than the overall freshmen cohort average two out of three years. Issues these students face, including barriers from successful persistence, must be further explored. The implications of this study afford the opportunity for significant action to be taken in order to ensure this population has a successful higher education experience.

Implications of this study can be categorized in several ways. This study revealed numerous key stakeholders in the quality of a students' academic advising experience. Participants conveyed their first-hand accounts of advising interaction with various people

throughout their educational career. High school personnel, parents/guardians, future students, college advisors, and college administrators are all groups that can benefit from this study. How these groups choose to utilize findings will vary, but one cannot argue the usefulness gained directly from student insight regarding different facets of academic advising. The sections below contain seven recommendations made for the aforementioned groups of stakeholders. The initial findings from students in this study will help promote future studies that will guide efficient policy and practice, thus contribute to the overall goal of student retention and timely graduation.

High School Personnel

Many students in this study acknowledged their initial college academic advising expectations were based on prior experiences they had with advising during high school. High school advisors/counselors, teachers, and administrators play both a direct and indirect role in the type of advising experience students receive prior to enrolling in college. This study revealed an even split of students who viewed their high school advising as positive and negative, with nine each. Additionally, the largest group (12 students) gave neutral comments regarding their prior advising experience.

High school is a critical time when many important decisions are made. Decisions include following a college track and choosing the appropriate route for higher education. A proactive approach in working with students in college preparation would be to allow high school students to be active participants in the decision-making process. This study revealed that few students were actually allowed to make their own decisions regarding their high school education. However, once they enter college they are expected to be an active participant in the decision-making process. If high school students are allowed to be more involved in making

decisions concerning their academics, I believe these students would be better prepared for advising interaction in college.

College advisors will be able to have open dialogue with students regarding the students' best interests if students enter the session understanding advising is an equal partnership. The first recommendation for high school advisors/counselors is to prepare future college students for the type of advising interaction they will receive in college. The conversation will not be dominated by the authority figure (i.e. the advisor); the open sharing of ideas and questions will be a mutual effort from both the student and the college advisor. This type of advising interaction is more advantageous than the advisor making all the decisions for the student. The college advisor is a resource to assist the student in their journey through higher education. The student is the primary stakeholder in his/her education, and must therefore be able to make decisions and use resources such as academic advising to the fullest potential. High school advisors/counselors have the potential to help prepare students for what is expected of them while in college.

The second recommendation is for high school teachers to play a role in preparing students for the next level in their education. Some students in this study mentioned a specific teacher, coach, or band director that helped them with academic guidance. Just because a teacher is viewed as an expert in one or more specific fields, does not mean they cannot incorporate learning opportunities for the students which will help them be successful as free-thinking college students. Teachers can discuss their college experiences with the students. They can conduct exercises they know will help students succeed once they leave home. For example, a math lesson can be about money management or credit card finance charges; a social studies lesson can be about map reading while using maps of local universities; an English lesson can have students write about and research colleges of interest. There are numerous ways high school

teachers can play an integral role in helping these students prepare for college. Exercises and activities aside, the most important thing I believe high school teachers can do is to listen and address questions and concerns students have when they begin to think about various facets of college.

The third recommendation is for high school administrators. High school administrators may not interact with students as much as advisors/counselors or teachers, but they can play a significant role in these students' lives. They have the power to change and create policy that will affect student success. Because a significant number of students in this study could not rate their high school advising experience in a positive manner, administrators should address this in schools. For example, they could ask the students to share their thoughts on working with their high school advisors/counselors and make changes accordingly. Additionally, administrators could assess how involved advisors/counselors and teachers are with helping students prepare for college. New policies and additional training could be implemented to ensure student success. High school administrators have the power to make change happen if needed. Administrators should take the advice of Malone, as cited in Schanfield (2010); "high school students need diverse support to gain the many skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college including academic content competencies, college application guidance, cognitive and critical thinking skills, civic awareness, time management and teamwork strategies, and healthy social-emotional coping abilities" (¶ 4). The ultimate goal of high school personnel should be student success. The more people working together to ensure efficient policies and practices, the greater the benefit to everyone involved.

Students' Families

When students were asked who the primary people were giving them academic guidance prior to enrolling in college, the most popular answer was their family members. Parents, siblings, aunts and uncles were all noted responses. This group of trusted individuals has the potential to significantly impact students' educational journeys. The primary implication for practice is to educate this group of people on key issues their students will face when they arrive at college. Parents, aunts, uncles, and to a lesser degree siblings may have attended college some time ago and aspects could have changed. It is important to allow this group to be active in information dissemination, as students trust close family members. However, the information must be correct and have merit. Per illustration, just because a parent has car insurance does not mean they are an expert in picking out the best car insurance package for their child. The same principle applies here. Students' parents may have great careers and performed well in college during their undergraduate and/or graduate degree attainment. Unfortunately, what may have been current practice at the time for their parents, may not hold true to new students entering higher education today.

Policies and procedures are vastly different than they were 30-40 years ago at most institutions of higher learning (Menezes, 2005). For example, technological advances are vastly different today. From the moment high school students demonstrate interest in a particular institution they are inundated with technological communication that their parents would have never experienced if they attended college some time ago. Students are asked to go to a website for more information, attend virtual presentations to learn more about various topics, like and/or follow the institution on social media networks, and text their admission counselors with specific questions. Furthermore, almost all significant required procedures related to higher education are

online. These specific procedures include admission applications, financial aid requirements, obtaining parking permits, and course registration just to name a few. Some institutions and/or departments such as the School of Business at SU offer online academic advising and online appointment systems for students to setup appointments with their academic advisor. Unless students' family members are recent graduates, these multi-mediated messages and processes would not have been available while they were in college. Students' families should definitely be involved and ideally also offer a strong support system. However, they must be knowledgeable and up-to-date on policies and procedures in which they are offering guidance.

The fourth recommendation relates to students' family members being up-to-date on current higher education practice. Participants' acknowledgement of these select people as those who helped them in their educational endeavors should inspire them to actively obtain accurate information. Relatives can work side-by-side with their students to explore college life. This can be done online, through print brochures, or taking campus visits together. Institutions can become more proactive by offering more information to family members. Parent orientation to college sessions or parent newsletters are good ideas to implement that will better inform family members of current practice in higher education. Much like the students' ability to be active in the decision-making process with high school advisors/counselors, family members should encourage students to be active in the decision-making process at home.

The research suggests that requiring students to be active participants in the fall academic advising session contributed to their increased confidence entering their second session in the spring. Therefore, relatives who understand the importance of allowing the student to make decisions on their own will be assisting the student's development more than they realize. This is not to say relatives should take a hands-off approach. Students and their relatives should work

together to gain accurate information and then make the most logical decision that is in the students' best interest. Students who work in an equal partnership with their trusted relatives may gain first-hand experience of the type of shared responsibility their college academic advisor will expect of them when they arrive at college as new freshmen.

Future Students

Implications for future students from this study are very significant. New students who are undecided in their college major will find accounts from other first-year undecided students to be very beneficial. If students appreciate advice from their peers, they should be more prepared to fully participate in their academic advising sessions. It is my belief from the findings in this study; participants who took an active approach to their advising experiences demonstrated a stronger sense of ownership toward their educational aspirations. These aspirations should support students' persistence toward graduation, thus benefiting the student and the university at the same time. The primary question is how will future students use this valuable information?

Students in this study openly admitted to being nervous before their first advising session. However, after the first session and entering their second session, participants in this study realized that there was nothing to be nervous about. New students may take comfort in knowing that past students similar to them were equally nervous at first, but the end results were satisfying to the students. Perhaps this knowledge will give new students confidence when entering their first session.

The fifth recommendation is to make students aware early in their college experience about what is expected of them in an advising session. This can be accomplished through a first-year experience course that provides an educational component on academic advising. SU offers

such a component in their first-year experience course. Students can have an open discussion with their instructor and classmates regarding college academic advising. This should occur before the actual advising session. Instructors and students can be assessed to measure the value an academic advising lesson played on their experience with the assigned college advisor.

Students must realize that advising is a partnership between the advisor and advisee. Therefore, students should enter each advising session prepared to discuss their individual academic journey. Participants described that their spring advising session focused on specific issues which they came prepared to discuss. Why could they not utilize their fall session to address specific questions and concerns? I believe they could have if they knew what to expect entering the session. If students are proactive and begin to explore majors and other academic facets regarding their college education before their first advising session, I believe the session will be much more effective for them. It was easy to see how this approach was utilized from the fall session to the spring. I can only imagine the potential impact if this could occur before the first advising meeting. Students who realize that academic advising is a very individualized process seemed to benefit more than those who only wanted very general information. Advisors are unable to cast a wide net of information and expect it to be applicable to all undecided first-year students. Students in this study noted specific majors, policies, and other issues that were individualized to them. The advisor can speak about the general education requirements that apply to most majors. However, other information shared in a one-on-one session is directed toward individual students. Students who enter their session with specific outcomes in mind, like most spring students in this study, will find their advising session very beneficial.

The most common advice participants in this study gave to future students was: (a) Go in with an open mind; (b) Do not stress about the session; and (c) The advisor will help you. These

participants had a year of college experience before offering this advice, so it may be a challenge for new entering freshmen. However, new freshmen who utilize these participants' advice will benefit. Advisors want to help students succeed in the first year and beyond.

Noel (1985) noted the importance of advisors' displaying a caring attitude toward their students. This caring attitude often allows students to gain a sense of belonging to the institution. By students feeling connected to the institution and having a positive, caring relationship with their advisor, they are likely to progress to degree completion in an efficient manner (Tinto, 2004). Students must realize that the caring attitude is required on their part as well. Students who demonstrate a sincere interest in what the advisor has to offer will create a more affirmative advising relationship. Students in this study made comments regarding how satisfied they were with their academic advisors. Many noted how the advisor cared and helped them as individuals. New students should realize this early and feel confident knowing their advisor is there to help them. Nutt (2000) stated, "Often the one-to-one relationship between the student and the advisor is the only opportunity a student has to build a personal link with the institution" (p. 220). Students found their advisors to be a trusted source of information and were able to utilize them in an efficient manner. As enrollment, retention, and graduation play a significant role in measurements of success, freshmen who develop satisfactory levels of confidence and satisfaction with their advising experiences during the first year at college will contribute to the measures of excellence in which all institutions strive to attain.

Academic Advisors

Higher education academic advisors must be aware of the type of guidance students are seeking and offer advice in a satisfactory manner. The implications from this study for advisors can enhance a multitude of advising components. Most advisors realize they are the front line

professionals who work with students on an individual basis. Noel-Levitz, Inc. (2006) noted that academic advising was the second most important area of the college experience, behind quality of instruction. Additionally, Gardner (1995) acknowledged the important role academic advisors play in first-year students' success and satisfaction with an institution. The responsibilities to students, the institution, and themselves should inspire advisors to be as efficient and effective as possible.

Advisors should expect students to enter their first advising session a little nervous and unsure. The initial interaction with the advisor will set the tone for that session and future advising interaction. It is important to get off to a good start with each advisee. The advisee must be made to feel welcomed and comfortable with the advisor and the advising setting. This sense of comfort will ensure that the student is able to have open dialogue with the advisor on a variety of issues. The advising relationship must be a trusting partnership between the two parties. Students' responses from this study suggest that if advisors are able to make the students feel comfortable during the first few minutes of the session, they will have an effective advising relationship. Steele and McDonald (2008) noted advisors should "spend time getting to know our students not only in terms of their academic and career interests, but also in terms of their backgrounds and personal experiences is a key component to working with students as they move through college" (p. 157). Students in this study noted how the advisor made them feel comfortable and thought the advising atmosphere was conducive to a positive advising environment. Furthermore, the high percentage of students satisfied with their first year advising experiences is evidence of a positive relationship with their academic advisor.

Students noted that they had various expectations when entering the advising session. Advisors must ask questions and get to know the student in order to accurately assess the

individual student's needs and expectations. Some students may want general advising and feel pressured if the advisor attempts to get too specific with them. However, other students may want to address specific majors or policies, and will be unsatisfied with advising if the advisors are not able to follow through with the students' specific needs.

The sixth recommendation relates to academic advisors and their expertise in student development theory. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, first-year students are transitioning through different levels of development. They have different needs and expectations based on what stage or position they are in developmentally. It is good practice for advisors to be educated on various theories of student development. An advisor who is knowledgeable in student development theory can meet students' expectations for their current level of development, but also offer guidance that the student may be unaware he/she needs at that specific point of their educational journey. Advisors should participate in continuing education or professional development opportunities regarding college student development. Student development savvy advisors are not only increasing their value as a professional in the field of academic advising, they are also demonstrating their commitment to student success. A strong commitment to student success by individual campus professionals displays an equally strong commitment from the university as a whole. An institution committed to student success should be well received in major achievement metrics such as student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

Advisors have a great deal of responsibility and power in regards to first-year student academic advising. The more cognizant advisors are of their responsibilities, the more effective they can be. As Light (2001) stated, "good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81). Advisors must meet students in a satisfactory and efficient manner while assisting the students on a successful journey through

higher education experience. The advisors' contributions will not only benefit the student, but also the various metrics in which institutions are measured for success.

Academic Advising Administrators

It is very important for advising administrators to stay abreast of the academic advising climate on their campuses. Administrators have the potential to create and revise academic advising policies to ensure they are beneficial for all parties involved. Findings from this study provide advising policy makers with information directly from students regarding how academic advising can impact student satisfaction of first-year undecided freshmen. Administrators should be made aware of the need for additional support of academic advisors. Whether this support is financial, professional development opportunities, or additional resources, advisors must be put in a position to succeed. Students in this study claimed to have had a successful experience with academic advising as a freshman. Perhaps their success was in part due to SU advisors having a manageable advising load, continued professional development, and satisfaction with their current position as an advisor. It is important for administrators to continue to support advisors and address their concerns. It would have been easy for this study to reveal a problem with advising in the AC at SU had advisors not been satisfied with their jobs or lacked professional qualities that caused advisors to have poor interactions with the study's participants.

The seventh recommendation from this study focuses on advising administrators. Administrators need to be advocates for regular assessment of academic advising on both the secondary and post-secondary levels. The participants in this study were more than willing to discuss aspects of high school advising. Some participants considered their secondary advising experiences to be less than satisfactory. If high school administrators formulate policies concerning regular assessments on advising, I believe more students will admit a greater

appreciation for advising while in high school. Regular assessment will allow for concerns to be identified and rectified. Another attribute of regular assessments includes identifying personnel who display substantial commitment to student guidance. These individuals may be recognized and possibly rewarded for their dedication to student success.

Higher education administrators can also ensure policies regarding regular assessment in order to find areas of excellence and those that need to be reviewed further. Assessments can lead to changes in structure and policy. Cuseo (2008) said it best:

Assessing the effectiveness of academic advisors delivers a strong and explicit message to all members of the college community that advising is an important professional responsibility; conversely, failure to do sends the tacit signal that academic advisement is not valued by the institution and that the work of the academic advisors is not worthy of evaluation, improvement, and recognition. (p. 369)

One could view this study as an assessment of an advising center that utilizes professional advisors and serves a specific population. Although a high percentage of students were satisfied with their advising experiences, new insights were highlighted which should prompt policymakers to explore this issue further. Policymakers must find the appropriate formula for achieving student satisfaction and meeting federal, state, and institutional guidelines and benchmarks.

The final implication for administrators is the role they can play in enhancing entering students' expectations and levels of preparedness. Administrators can be instrumental in providing prospective students, their relatives, and high school personnel with appropriate information on what to expect in college. They can offer specific guidance on interacting with campus professionals including students' academic advisor. Additionally, administrators should

look at other institutions to see how they are addressing the transition from high school to college academic advising experiences. When administrators are proactive on the front end, campus advisors and students will benefit when the time comes for their advising interaction.

Implications for Future Research

Student views were instrumental in creating the themes that developed from this study. Additionally, these views afforded the opportunity to consider new and exciting research possibilities related to this field of study. My future research implications can be categorized by quantitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative studies. The utilization of different research techniques regarding various facets of this study will tremendously impact advising. Advising studies can advance the field which in turn will contribute to both student and institution success.

Quantitative Research

Because this study was qualitative and focused on a small population over an extended period of time, a quantitative study using a large number of participants could further illuminate the research questions. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) defined quantitative research as “the collection and analysis of numerical data in order to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena of interest” (p. 9). A high percentage of undecided first-year students in this study found their advising experiences to be very good during their freshman year of college. This was in contrast to Low’s (2000) findings on advising services being one of the areas where students voiced high levels of dissatisfaction. A future quantitative study should include more first-year undecided students. The same study could also consider freshmen with declared majors. This would allow two key benefits: the researcher would have a large number of first-year students, and comparisons could be made between students who have declared major and those that do not.

Undecided students at SU utilize professional advisors in the AC. Advising at SU is a split model in which some departments seek faculty members to serve as academic advisors to students majoring in their field. A future quantitative study examining the differences or nuances in experiences of students who are advised by faculty in contrast to professional advisors may be advantageous. The ability to identify a large sample of both students who use professional advisors and those that use faculty advisors would provide key information on how students view different type of advisors at the same institution. A future quantitative environmental study at SU would allow for findings to be generalized to comparable populations in similar environments.

Qualitative Research

Because I value the deep and rich findings in research studies, I primarily classify myself as a qualitative researcher. Therefore, a significant amount of my future recommendations engage qualitative methods and the benefits from meaningful exploration. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) defined qualitative research as “the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest” (p. 9). Specific data uncovered in this study could be used to guide future qualitative studies.

A future qualitative study that primarily focuses on students’ self-development and relationships with others in correlation with advisors’ roles and responsibilities over an extended period of time would provide substantial exploration in the field of academic advising. These two central themes could allow a researcher to focus his/her guiding research questions on student development and relationships with others in the context of student growth and confidence, major/career exploration, and developmental theories. My study has demonstrated specific findings in the aforementioned fields. Future research can capitalize on my initial

conclusions and create a stronger link to student experiences with advising and the greater student, institutional, state, and federal goals of persistence and graduation.

The future study should begin with further exploration of students' experiences before they arrive at college. My study revealed that only 1/3 of participants noted a positive experience with high school advising personnel. Additionally, all students acknowledged specific people in their lives who offered them academic assistance. A component of a future study on advising experiences before entering college and how various forms of guidance help or hinder academic preparedness would be useful. The qualitative study should utilize interviews and focus groups that address prior advising experiences and the roles and relationships influential people play in student development. Students' first-hand accounts will provide thick and rich data directly from students.

The second component would build on the first, as prior experiences would be factored into how students shape their initial college advising expectations, and how those expectations change with experience. Following students through their college advising experiences while focusing on their development and relationships with others would be beneficial. The way students grow and gain confidence, view majors and careers, and transition through different levels of student development theories throughout the first year would be significant facets for further exploration.

As noted throughout my study, participants confidence increased as the year progressed. A component of a future study on aspects that attribute to student confidence would be worthwhile. College freshmen gain new experiences almost every day during their first year of college. Additionally, they meet new people who have influence over them. Understanding how these new experiences and people in their lives affect their growth and confidence during the

first year will be helpful for those with a vested interest in student success as it relates to retention and graduation measurements. My study primarily focused on academic components that contributed to student confidence, but there are numerous facets that could be explored further.

Participants listed several majors under consideration during the duration of this study. They gave basic responses on why they were interested in various fields. A career-exploration piece expanding on basic information found here would be useful for academic advisors, as well as career counselors. Students' responses provided valuable first-hand accounts of various aspects of their lives as college freshmen. Future research could capitalize on specific major and career exploration areas that would make a valuable contribution to the fields of academic and career advising.

One area where additional research would be valuable is further examination of how students segregate into different stages according to various developmental theorists. Research in this field could be viewed through the lens of academic advising expectations and the relationship to student success. In the fall most students had limited expectations. Their expectations increased before the spring advising session. Perry's Theory on Intellectual and Ethical Development, Chickering's Theory of Identity Development, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and others could be analyzed to determine how students develop throughout the first year of college and how that is relevant to efficient academic advising (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Furthermore, research on advising and the relationship to student development theory could impact the way advisors work with these students. The developmental theory component of the future study would explore how advisors can streamline their guidance based on different stages of student development. Students in different stages of development could be

advised in the most efficient manner possible. This efficient advising should lead to increased student success, which in turn leads to greater retention and graduation rates for institutions.

In this study, participants' advising experiences were explored over an entire academic year. Excellent information was obtained using an extended data collection approach, as opposed to a one-time collection. However, a future study in which a longer data collection could occur would be an excellent tool to investigate advising over time at a specific institution. For example, a four-year documentation process for students entering as freshmen and continuing through their senior year would provide meaningful data over an extended period of time. Students in this study evaluated their experiences while working with a professional academic advisor in the AC. Once students declare a major and begin working with faculty in their specific field, the students' expectations and outcomes may change. A future research component that collects data on a specific sample for a longer period would allow for critical evaluation on how students experience growth, major/career exploration, and developmental theories over time. Additionally, by having the same sample experience different types of advising, multiple facets of advising across the institution will be able to be evaluated. Implications from future research can capitalize on significant innovations to improve retention and graduation; thus students, institutions, state and federal agencies, and other key stakeholders can view the students' journeys through higher education as successful.

Mixed-Methods Research

This study met the intention of the design to explore a selected population at one specific institution in the Southeast. A future mixed-methods study on the same population at several institutions would allow for multiple perspectives from different locations. "Mixed methods research designs combine quantitative and qualitative approaches by essentially mixing both

quantitative and qualitative data in a single study” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 490). A researcher could have a quantitative component to gauge a larger number of the population and generalize findings. The measurement could include a survey regarding different aspects of first year student academic advising. In relating to findings from this study, a survey could capture study input on advising before college, being undecided in a major, majors under consideration, and the actual advising experience. By using a quantitative metric such as a survey, a significant amount of student responses can be gathered.

The second component consisting of a qualitative study could follow-up on the quantitative data in order to fully explain the phenomenon the selected population was experiencing. A study such as this would take quite some time and significant collaboration from key administrators, advisors, and students from a variety of institutions selected. Although this would be a monumental undertaking the benefits would be very significant in the field of academic advising research.

Further research opportunities are abundant from initial findings and recommendations from this study. Future quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies will enhance current findings from my original study. Because research in the field of academic advising is not as plentiful as other key elements of higher education, the more research conducted will help ensure the most effective and efficient advising practices are utilized for student success. These effective and efficient advising practices will contribute to the overall higher education goal of student retention and graduation.

Conclusion

This phenomenological qualitative case study sought to explore academic advising experiences of first-year undecided students at a high research activity institution. This research

identified participants to share their first-hand accounts with academic advising over the course of their first year in college. Thirty students participated in the initial fall interviews which occurred after their first college advising session. Twenty-five students participated in the mid-year telephone interviews which occurred over winter break. And twenty-five students participated in the spring interviews which occurred after their second experience with advising during their freshman year. Five themes emerged from the information collected during student interviews. Those themes included: experience with academic advising before college, being undecided in a major, majors under consideration, the college advising experience, and student reflection after a full academic year. Virginia Gordon's research on undecided students, as well as other student development theorists' research and theories were applied to the interpretation of the data.

Student responses provided a mixed bag of information. Several academic advising facets were in complete agreement among participants, while other areas saw responses range all over the response continuum. Participants' responses could be grouped into three categories regarding their satisfaction levels with academic advising prior to enrolling at the university. Some students found their experiences to be good while an equal number were not satisfied. The highest percentage was neutral when describing their high school advising. All students were able to acknowledge trusted individuals in their lives who assisted them with academic guidance prior to enrolling in college. Students gave a variety of responses ranging from very worried to not concerned at all when addressing their thoughts on being undecided in the fall. However, almost all students were not worried about the undecided tag in the spring. In the fall not all students were able to list specific majors of interest, and the students who could list majors from all across campus. In the spring majors of interest still fell all across the university's academic disciplines.

However, every spring participant were able to list at least one major of interest. Almost, but not all students acknowledged having a great experience with college advising. This was true with both fall and spring sessions. The spring session saw students enter more confident, and expect more specific advising directed toward students' interests. It was interesting to hear students reflect over their first year in college. Students addressed their thoughts and feelings from when they first entered college to the completion of their spring advising session. Their reflections primarily focused on academic advising, but other aspects of higher education were noted as well. The first-hand accounts acquired directly from students provided in-depth information from the students perspective which will be very useful for future students, advisors, and administrators.

Participants were willing to share details about their lives before and while attending college. Data collected directly from students' voices can be used to help guide policy, practice, and future research in the field of academic advising. Implications from first-year undecided students advised in the AC at SU were guided by data on academic advising satisfaction, student's short-term and long-term goals, and students' increased confidence. Implications for policy and practice were divided into five groups of stakeholders in this study. These stakeholders included: high school personnel, students' families, students, academic advisors, and higher education administrators. Future research opportunities are plentiful. Opportunities ranged from quantitative studies with a large population to analyzing students' progression through various developmental theories in conjunction with their academic advising experiences. Finally, this study revealed that although first-year undecided students have a lot in common, they still have individual needs and expectations. Therefore, academic advising for this population must be specific to the individual student and be developmentally appropriate and

satisfying to ensure efficiency. The opportunities for further exploration of efficient academic advising and the correlation to the impact of student and institutional success with regards to student persistence and graduation leaves me excited for what the future holds.

EPILOGUE

My Dissertation Research Experience

Numerous professionals have completed at least one dissertation in their academic career. I believe it is important to reflect on my experience as a first-time dissertation author. Writing a dissertation is a process that has ups and downs. I cannot count the number of times I wanted to throw my computer out the window in frustration over this dissertation. However, I cannot count the number of times I felt a sense of accomplishment when I completed a research related task, uncovered a significant component from the data, or wrote just enough to feel satisfied on my progress for the day. The rewards far outweigh the frustrations, but it is important to acknowledge both aspects of the dissertation process.

There were several learning opportunities for me during the dissertation process. I view this as a very positive experience, as I feel more confident as a researcher because of this procedure. As I reflect back I can acknowledge my growth as an interviewer from fall to spring data collection. In the fall I was worried I was a burden to the students and wanted to be judicious of their time and cooperation. This often caused me to talk faster than normal or not probe further with follow-up questions when opportunities arose. Additionally, as I listened to the recorded interviews while transcribing them, I noticed myself asking the questions with a little uncertainty in my voice. The students during the interviews and other listeners of the recordings may not have noticed, but I was able to hear the hesitancy at times.

Similar to the students feeling more confident in the spring, I did as well regarding the interviews. I was cognizant of students' time parameters, but I did not let that force me to rush

the interview. I made a conscience effort to ask follow-up questions when appropriate. I am able to admit that I can still use some improvement in that area, but it did get better from fall to spring. Because I had gotten to know these students through two prior discussions, I did not notice much, if any hesitation in my voice when asking the questions. I believe this is because of the relationship I had with the participants, and due to this being the third time asking questions related to academic advising. There are other aspects of the interview/data collection process that I will continue to improve on, but am pleased with the learning experience I gained during my dissertation experience.

One significant aspect of writing a dissertation I gained an appreciation for was to set small goals and celebrate when reaching a milestone. When a writer views a dissertation in its entirety, the body of work can seem like a daunting task. However, when each chapter is broken down into sections, and each section is broken down into subsections, the work becomes very manageable. A writer can see actual progress being made by accomplishing smaller subsections which later become sections, then ultimately chapters. Dissertation writers will approach each task in a different manner based on their needs and preferences. For me, focusing on smaller tasks and never working more than two hours at a time helped me accomplish my goals. Additionally, it is important to place rewards on meeting goals when achievement is met. Perhaps the reward is going out to eat, taking a day or two off from writing/research, or anything else big or small that provides a researcher with affirmation that the process is moving along.

I sought advice from other professionals who have completed their dissertation. One frequent piece of advice given was to do your best not to have assumptions. This was very difficult because of my experience and education directly related to the population being studied. I noted my professional position and assumptions in Ch. III, so the reader will be aware as he/she

reviews my work. I strived to enter the interviews and data reporting section as a blank slate. This was a difficult task, and was pleased with the amount of success I had in this area. Although I believe I did an excellent job, there was a time or two when a student response would trigger a reaction in my head. To my knowledge I never verbalized any of my reactions, or changed my tone or body language during an interview due to a student's response. I feel it is important for myself and future researchers to be prepared that one's assumptions and beliefs are difficult to completely pretend they do not exist.

Overall this was good learning experience. I obtained solid information from my population under study, and was able to enhance my expertise as a higher education researcher. The bilateral benefit of exploring students' perspectives of academic advising through students' direct accounts, and taking my research skills and graduate education out of a classroom and into the field of practice was a life-changing experience. Although I have no plans to write another dissertation, I am confident in my ability and skills should the need arise.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

References

- Albecker, A. (2005). *The history of intrusive advising in the general college*. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CRDEUL/enews/archive/fa05/intrusiveAdvising.htm>
- Alexitch, L. R. (2002). The role of help-seeking attitudes and tendencies in students' preferences for academic advising. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(1), 5-18.
- Allen, J. M., & Smith, C. L. (2008, November/December). Faculty and student perspectives on advising: Implications for student dissatisfaction. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(6), 609-624.
- Anderson, E. (1997). *Academic advising for student success and retention*. Iowa City, IA: Noel-Levitz.
- Appleby, D. (2001, March 19). The teaching-advising connection. *The Mentor*. Retrieved September 26, 2008 from <http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor>
- Appreciative Advising. (n.d.). *Does appreciative advising work? The answer is yes!* Retrieved September 22, 2010 from http://appreciativeadvising.net/index_files/Page430.htm
- Astin, A. W. (1977). *Four critical years*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college?* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Astin, A. W. (1994). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 298-307.

- Banta, T. W., Hansen, M. J., Black, K. E., & Jackson, J. E. (2002). Assessing advising outcomes. *NACADA Journal*, 22(1), 5-14.
- Bean, J., & Hossler, D. (1990). *The strategic management of college enrollments*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Berdahl, R. M. (1995). Educating the whole person. In A.G. Reinharz and E.R. White (Eds.), *Teaching through academic advising: A Faculty Perspective* (pp. 210-218). San Francisco: Josey Bass.
- Bloom, J. (2008). Moving on from college. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, T. J. Grites, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). (pp. 178-188). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bloom, J. L., & Martin, N. A. (2002, August 29). Incorporating appreciative inquiry into academic advising. *The Mentor*, 4(3). Retrieved April 2, 2010 from <http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor>
- Chickering, A. W. (1994). Empowering lifelong self-development. *NACADA Journal*, 14(2), 50-53.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Clark, M. R. (2005, May/June). Negotiating the freshman year: Challenges and strategies among first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 296-316.
- Coffey, A. (2002). Ethnography and self: Reflections and representations. In T. May (Ed.), *Qualitative research in action* (pp. 313-331). London: Sage.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (1999). *Appreciative inquiry*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Communications, Inc.

- Corts, D. P., Lounsbury, J. W., Saudargas, R. A., & Tatum, H. E. (2000). Assessing undergraduate satisfaction with an academic department: A method and case study. *College Student Journal*, 34(3), 399-409.
- Creamer, D. G., & Creamer, E. G. (1994). Practicing developmental advising: Theoretical contexts and functional applications. *NACADA Journal*, 14(2), 17-24.
- Creamer, E. G., & Scott, D. W. (2000). Assessing individual advisor effectiveness. In V.N. Gordon, W.R. Habley, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 339-348). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crookston, B. B. (1972). A developmental view of academic advising as teaching. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 13, 12-17.
- Cuseo, J. (2003). *Academic advising and student retention: Empirical connections and systematic interventions*. Retrieved September 24, 2008 from:
<http://www.Brevard.edu/fcy/listserv/remarks/cuseorientation.htm>
- Cuseo, J. (2008). Assessing advisor effectiveness. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, T. J. Grites, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). (pp. 369-384). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- DeBerard, M. S., Spielmans, G. I., & Julka, D. L. (2004). Predictors of academic achievement and retention among college freshmen: a longitudinal study. *College Student Journal*, 38(1), 66-72.

- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Earl, W. R. (n.d.). *Intrusive advising for freshmen*. Retrieved September 22, 2010 from:
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Intrusive-Freshmen.htm>
- Earl, W. R. (1988). Intrusive advising for freshmen in academic difficulty. *NACADA Journal*, 8(2), 27-33.
- Ender, S. C., Winston, Jr. R. B., & Miller, T. K. (1984). Academic advising as student development. In R.B. Winston, Jr., S. C. Ender, & T.K. Miller (Eds.), *New directions for student services: No 17. Developmental approaches to academic advising* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Farrell, E. F., & Hoover, E. (2007, April 27). 10 admission deans who are shaping their field. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(34), B4.
- Fenske, R. H. (1980). Historical foundations. In U. Delworth, G. R. Hanson, & Associates (Eds.), *Student Services* (pp. 3-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fielstein, L. L. (1987). Student preferences for personal contact in a student-faculty advising relationship. *NACADA Journal*, 7(2), 34-40.
- Fielstein, L. L. (1989). Student priorities for academic advising: Do they want a personal relationship? *NACADA Journal*, 9(1), 33-38.
- Fielstein, L. L. (1994). Developmental versus prescriptive advising: Must it be one or the

- other? *NACADA Journal* 14(2), 76-78.
- Frost, S. H. (1991). *Academic advising for student success: A system of shared Responsibility*. ASHE: ERIC Higher Education Report No. 3. Washington, DC: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.
- Frost, S. H. (2000). Historical and philosophical foundations for academic advising. In V.N. Gordon, W.R. Habley, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 3-17). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.
- Gallagher, D. J., & Allen, N. (2000). First-year initiatives and results of a year-long advising pilot study: A proposed advising model. *Journal of The First-Year Experience*, 12(2), 107-128.
- Gardner, J. N. (1986). The freshmen-year experience. *The Journal of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*, 61(4), 261-274.
- Gardner, J. N. (1995). Perspectives on academic advising for first-year students: Present and future. In M. L. Upcraft and G. L. Kramer (Eds.), *First-Year Academic Advising: Patterns in the Present, Pathways to the Future*. (NRCFYE Monograph No. 18). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2006). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2007). Analyzing qualitative data. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage qualitative research kit*. London: Sage.

- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). New York: Logman.
- Glennen, R. E. (1995). Obtaining presidential support for advising. In R. E. Glennen, & F. N. Vowell (Eds.), *Academic Advising as a Comprehensive Campus Process*. (NACADA Monograph No. 2). Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, National Academic Advising Association.
- Gordon, V. N. (1998). Career decidedness types: A literature review. *Career Development Quarterly*, 46(4), 386-403.
- Gordon, V. N. (2007). *The undecided college student: An academic and career advising challenge* (3rd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Gordon, V. N., & Steele, G. E. (2003). Undecided first-year students: A 25-year longitudinal study. *Journal of The First-Year Experience*, 15(1), 19-38.
- Grites, T., & Gordon, V. (2000). Developmental academic advising revisited. *NACADA Journal*, 20(1), 12-15.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 29(1), 75-91.
- Habley, W. (1983). Organizational structures for academic advising: Models and implications. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 24(6), 35-40.
- Habley, W. R. (1995). Advisor training in the context of a teaching enhancement center. In R. E. Glennen, & F. N. Vowell (Eds.), *Academic Advising as a Comprehensive Campus Process*. (NACADA Monograph No. 2). Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, National Academic Advising Association.
- Habley, W. R. (1997). Organizational models and institutional advising practices. *NACADA Journal*, 17(2), 39-44.

- Habley, W. R. & Morales, R. H. (1998). Advising models: Goal achievement and program effectiveness. *NACADA Journal* 18(1), 35-41.
- Habley, W. R. (Ed.). (2004). The status of academic advising: Findings from the ACT sixth national survey. *Monograph of the National Academic Advising Association, 10*.
- Hall, L. (2008, July 23). Appreciative advising: How the academic centers for excellence at the University of South Carolina are using this breakthrough concept. *The Mentor*. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/080723lh.htm>
- Harrison, N. (2006). The impact of negative experiences, dissatisfaction and attachment on first year undergraduate withdrawal. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 30*(4), 377-391.
- Harrison, R. C. (2009, Fall). Jon M. Huntsman School of Business transitions from prescriptive advising to mentor advising. *Retention and Student Success, (4)*. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://www.usu.edu/orss/newsletter/2009fall/huntsman.cfm>
- Hess, F. M., Schneider, M., Carey, K., & Kelly, A. P. (2009, June). *Diplomas and dropouts: Which colleges actually graduate their students (and which don't)*. Seattle, WA: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Horowitz, H. L. (1987). *Campus life: Undergraduate cultures from the end of the eighteenth century to the present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hunter, M. S., & Harwood, D. (1994). Exemplary advising programs for undecided students. In V. N. Gordon (Ed.) *Issues in advising the undecided college student* (pp. 123-129). Monograph Series, no. 15. Columbia: National Resource Center for the Freshmen Year Experience, University of South Carolina.

- Hunter, M. S., & Kendall, L. (2008). Moving into college. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, T. J. Grites, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). (pp. 267-278). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- King, M. C. (1998). Academic delivery systems. In W.R. Habley (Ed.), *The status and future of academic advising* (pp. 107-118). Iowa City: Iowa: American College testing program.
- King, M. C., & Kerr, T. J. (1995). Organizing and delivering academic programs for first-year students. In M. L. Upcraft and G. L. Kramer (Eds.), *First year academic patterns: Patterns in the present, pathways to the future* (pp. 35-45). Monograph Series, no. 18. Columbia: National Resource Center for the Freshmen Year Experiences and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina.
- King, M. C., & Kerr T. J. (2005). Academic advising. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, B. O. Barefoot, & Associates (Eds.), *Challenging & supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 320-338). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuhn, T. L. (2008). Historical foundations of academic advising. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, T. J. Grites, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). (pp. 3-16). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lagowski, J. M., & Vick, J. W. (1995). Faculty as mentors. In A. G. Reinartz and E. R. White (Eds.), *Teaching through academic advising: A faculty perspective*. New Directions for teaching and Learning, no.62 (pp. 78-85). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Leppel, K. (2001). The impact of major on college persistence among freshmen. *Higher Education*, 41, 327-342.

- Lewallen, W. C. (1994). A profile of undecided students. In V. N. (Ed.), *Issues in advising the undecided college student* (pp. 5-16). Monograph Series, no. 15. Columbia: National Resource Center for the Freshmen Year Experiences and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina.
- Light, R. J. (2001). *Making the most of college: Students speak their minds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lipka, S. (2005, December 16). State legislators as co-pilots: Some “helicopter parents” play politics to protect their children’s interests on campus. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57(17), A22.
- Low, L. (2000). Are college students satisfied? A national analysis of changing expectation. Indianapolis: USA Group (now Lumina Foundation).
- Lumina Foundation for Education. (2009, November). *Four steps to finishing first in higher education*. Retrieved August 24, 2010, from http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/Four_Steps_to_Finishing_First_in_Higher_Education.pdf
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1989). *Designing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Martin, P. M., & Glesne, C. (2002). From the global village to the pluriverse? ‘Other’ ethics for cross-cultural qualitative research. *Ethics, Place, and Environment*, 5(3), 205-221.
- McCalla-Wriggins, B. (2000). Integrating academic advising and career and life planning. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 162-179). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Menezes, M. D. (2005). Advisors and parents: Together building stronger advising relationships. Retrieved August 17, 2011 from the National Academic Advising Association Web site: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Advisors-Parents.htm>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Metzner, B. (1989). Perceived quality of academic advising: The effect on freshman attrition. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26, 422-442.
- Mottarella, K. E., Fritzsche, B. A., & Cerabino, K. C. (2004). What do students want in advising? A policy advising study. *NACADA Journal*, 24(1), 48-61.
- Noel, L. (Ed.). (1978). *Reducing the dropout rate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Noel, L. (1985). Increasing student retention: New challenges and potential. In L. Noel, R. Levitz, & D. Salari (Eds.), *Increasing student retention: Effective programs and practices for reducing the drop out rate* (pp. 1-27). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Noel-Levitz, Inc. (2006). *Five-year trend study: National student satisfaction report*. Iowa City, IA.
- Noldon, D. F., Kim, S. H., & Sedlacek, W. E. (2000). The best and the worst: College seniors' experiences with academics and services. *Journal of The First-Year Experience*, 12(2), 89-106.
- Nutt, C. L. (2000). One-to-one advising. In V.N. Gordon, W.R. Habley, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 220-227). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Banion, T. (1972). An academic advising model. *Junior College Journal*, 42(6), 62-69. Reprinted (1994). *NACADA Journal*, 14(2), 10-16.

- Pardee, C. F. (2000). Organizational models for academic advising. In V.N. Gordon, W.R. Habley, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 192-209). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pardee, C. F. (2004). Organizational structures for advising. Retrieved September 25, 2008 from the National Academic Advising Association Web site:
http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/org_models.htm
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Perry, W. G., Jr. (1999). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- PreDESCleaux, D. S. (2008). Transforming learning: Academic advising at Spelman College. *PeerReview*, 10(1), 24-26.
- Punch, K. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: Sage.
- Reinarz, A. G. (2000). Delivering Academic Advising: Advisor types. In V.N. Gordon, W.R. Habley, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 210-219). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Roderick, C., & Carusetta, E. (2006). Experiencing first-year university in a problem-based learning context. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 18(1), 9-27.
- Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Schanfield, M. (2010). *Practical approaches to advising: High school programs create support systems for students transitioning from high school to college*. Retrieved August 17, 2011 from the National Academic Advising Association Web site:
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/high-school-advisory.htm>
- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Self, C. (2008). Advising delivery: Professional advisors, counselors, and other staff. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, T. J. Grites, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). (pp. 267-278). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Shapiro, N., & Levine, J. (1999). *Creating learning communities: A practical guide to winning support, organizing for change, and implementing programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, R. B., & Fleming, D. L. (2007, Spring). Educational malpractice? *The Journal of the New England Board of Higher Education*, 21(5), 22-23.
- Stake, R. (2000). Case studies. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). (pp. 435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Steele, G. E., & McDonald, M. L. (2008). Moving through college. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, T. J. Grites, & Associates (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). (pp. 157-177). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Steingass, S. J. (2008). Centralizing advising to improve student outcomes. *Peer Review*, 10(1), 30-31.
- Theelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Theelin, J. R. (2009, October 15). *State universities' tradition of attrition*. Retrieved October 16, 2009, from <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/views/2009/10/15/thelin>
- Thompson, B. (2008, January). How college freshmen communicate student academic support: A grounded theory study. *Communication Education*, 57(1), 123-144.
- Thompson, D. E., Orr, B., Thompson, C., & Grover, K. (2007). Examining students' perceptions of their first-semester experience at a major land-grant institution. *College Student Journal*, 41(3), 640-649.
- Thurmond, K. C., & Miller, M. A. (2006). *The history of national academic advising association: A 2006 update*. Retrieved July 21, 2010 from National Academic Advising Association Web site:
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/NACADA-History.htm>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures for student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (1999). Taking retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *NACADA Journal*, 19(2), 5-9.

- Tinto, V. (2004, July). *Student retention and graduation: Facing the truth, living with the consequences*. Retrieved August 17, 2010 from the Pell Institute Web site:
<http://www.pellinstitute.org/tinto/TintoOccasionalPaperRetention.pdf>
- University of Memphis. (n.d.). *A developmental academic advising model*. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://www.memphis.edu/advising/developmental.php>
- Upcraft, M. L., Gardner, J. N., & Associates (1989). *The freshman year experience: Helping students survive and succeed in college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Kramer, G. (1995). *Intrusive advising as discussed in the first year academic advising: Patterns in the present, pathways to the future*. Retrieved September 23, 2008 from <http://barton.cc.ks.us/academicadvising/advisementhandbook/intrusiveadvising.htm>
- Walsey, P. (2007). A secret support network. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(23), A27.
- Weisbrod, B. A., Ballou, J. P., & Asch, E. D. (2008). *Mission and money: Understanding the university*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wyman, F. J. (1997). A predictive model of retention rate at regional two-year colleges. *Community College Review*, 25(1), 29-58.
- Yarbrough, D. (2002). The engagement model for effective academic advising with undergraduate college students and student organizations. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 41(1), 61-68.

List of Appendices

Appendix: A

Appendix A

Fall 2010

1. How are things going at the University?
2. Discuss your academic advising experience in high school.
3. Who were the primary people giving you academic guidance prior to enrolling at the University?
4. What concerns did you have about being undecided in your major?
5. What messages are you receiving from others about being undecided?
6. Since you have been on campus, what have you learned about majors that suit your strengths and interests?
7. Describe the majors you are considering. What about them appeals to you? What have you heard from others about these majors?
8. How do these majors relate to your ideas about what you want to do after college?
9. Now think about your recent experience with academic advising at the University of Mississippi. What were some of your initial feelings?
10. What were your thoughts on the advisor's location and availability?
11. What were your expectations going into the academic advising session?
12. What occurred during the advising session?
13. What were your immediate impressions after your session? To what extent are the impressions still holding true?
14. Now that you have had your first advising session, how will you prepare for the next?
15. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your advising experience?
16. Discuss your thoughts on the advising process as a whole.

Appendix: B

Appendix B

Spring 2011

1. How is the spring semester treating you?
2. What concerns do you have about being undecided in your major in the second semester of your first year?
3. What messages are you receiving from others about being undecided?
4. Now that you have experienced college life for a semester and a half, what have you learned about majors that suit your strengths and interests?
5. Describe the majors you are considering now. To what extent have the majors changed from fall to spring?
6. What were your thoughts on the advisor's location and availability?
7. What were your expectations going into the second advising session? How did expectations change from session one to session two?
8. What were your immediate impressions after your second session? What are some of your thoughts now about the value of your second session?
9. Now that you have had two advising sessions, how will you prepare for the next?
10. How would you describe the overall effectiveness of your advising experiences during your first year of college?
11. After a year in college and two advising sessions, how have your advising expectations changed from entering the university to present?
12. What advice would you give to future first-year students regarding academic advising?
13. What could make the advising process as a whole better?

Appendix: C

Appendix C

September 6, 2010

Director, Academic Support Center (ASC)
350 Martindale
University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677

Dear ASC Director,

I am writing to seek permission to conduct a qualitative case study of first-year undecided students' perspectives of the academic advising experience at the University of Mississippi. This study will assist me in fulfilling my dissertation requirements in order to receive my Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Mississippi. If permission is granted I will seek out 25 first-year undecided students and engage them through personal interviews on their academic advising experiences during the first year. Flyers will be placed in the ASC soliciting volunteers. Interested students will give their first name and phone number to the department secretary following their first advising session. The secretary will give me the information to follow up with the students. All interviews will occur away from the ASC. Ethical steps taken will make it impossible for me to indicate which advisor a student met with. Findings from this study may potentially help the ASC better serve the undecided student population. Student confidentiality will be maintained throughout, and minimal risks are involved in this IRB approved study. I look forward to further conversation with you regarding this study. If I can answer any questions, please contact me at 662-915-5970. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kyle Ellis
Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education

Appendix: D

FIRST-YEAR **UNDECIDED STUDENTS**

Are you interested in sharing your experiences with academic advising?

A doctoral student is seeking volunteers to participate in an academic advising study. Students will participate in three short interviews during their first year in college. A face-to-face interview lasting approximately twenty minutes will occur after your advising session each semester. A brief mid-year phone interview will occur during winter break. Students who participate will be entered in a drawing for four \$50 University Bookstore gift cards. Two gift cards will be awarded each semester.

Please give your first name and cell phone number to the secretary. Ph.D. Candidate, Kyle Ellis, will contact you with specific details.

Thank you.

Appendix: E

Appendix E

Phone Script

Hello _____ student's name _____

This is Kyle Ellis calling from The University of Mississippi. You and I met on _____ date _____ and discussed your first experience with academic advising while in college. If you do not mind I have a few questions now that final grades for fall have been released and you are making plans for your spring semester. The questions will only take a few minutes of your time.

1. How did the fall semester go academically?
2. What were some non-academic issues you encountered last fall?
3. Now that the semester is over, what was some advice your advisor gave you that helped?
4. What had you wished you had known?
5. Thinking about the upcoming spring semester, what did you and your advisor discuss?
Did your fall grades allow you to stick to your plans?
6. What are some issues you would like to address with your advisor at the next meeting, now that you are half-way finished with your first year?
7. If you and your advisor were talking right now while looking over your fall grades and plans for the spring, how would that conversation play out?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you again in the spring following your academic advising meeting for summer/fall.

Appendix: F

Appendix F

Expert in the field:

Dr. Kathleen Shea Smith, Florida State University

Kathleen Shea Smith, Ph.D. is the Assistant Director of Advising First at Florida State University and Director of the Advising First Center for Exploratory Students. She has worked in the field of academic advising since 1989. Kathleen completed her doctoral studies in Higher Education, and in 2005 received the NACADA Student Research Award for her dissertation on academic advising and freshman student retention. Upon graduating, Kathleen was appointed to develop a new center for undecided students at The Florida State University. Five years later, the Advising First Center for Exploratory students is a thriving program where students are encouraged to place purpose and passion at the center of their academic decision making.

Kathleen has been an active member of NACADA for over a decade and currently serves as the Chair for the Commission for Undecided and Exploratory Students. She is also a member of the NACADA Research Committee, the current Florida State Representative, and the Pre-conference Chair for the 2010 annual conference in Orlando. Kathleen has presented at several regional and national conferences and received the Best of Region Award. In 2009 Kathleen was invited to co-facilitate the Pre-Conference session; *Undecided/Exploratory Student Advising: Creating an Action Plan for Your Campus* at the national NACADA conference and delivered NACADA webinar entitled, *Reaching and Retaining Students: Advising Undecided/Undeclared Students for Success*.

Peer debriefer:

Ms. Macey Edmondson, University of Mississippi

Macey Edmondson is currently a doctoral student at The University of Mississippi in the Higher Education program. She will begin writing her qualitative dissertation in Fall 2010. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in Banking and Finance. In 2001, Mrs. Edmondson completed her juris doctor at The University of Mississippi School of Law. She practiced with the firm Dunbar Davis & Associates in Oxford and is now a Law Librarian and Director of Stewardship at The University of Mississippi School of Law. Mrs. Edmondson has published *Remote Sensing, Air, and Space Law International Bibliography 1930-2007: A Special Publication of the Journal of Space Law* in 2007 and presented at the 2009 Education Law Association conference.

Appendix: G

Appendix G

INFORMATION FORM

Information for Participates in an Experimental Study

Title: Academic Advising Experiences of First-Year Undecided Students at a Public
Southeastern High Research Activity Institution

Investigator

Kyle C. Ellis
Department of Leadership & Counselor Ed.
School of Education
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-1468

Sponsor

Amy Wells-Dolan, Ph.D.
Department of Leadership & Counselor Ed.
137 Guyton
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-5710

Description

We want to explore academic advising expectations and experiences of first-year students who are undecided in a major and advised by a central advising center at a public high research activity Carnegie classification institution, and how academic advisors could better serve them relative to these expectations and experiences. Data for this study will be gained through personal one-on-one interviews between the student and the researcher. The first interview will occur after the fall academic advising session, the second will take place after the spring advising session, and a third interview will take place over the telephone, at no cost to students, during winter break. Please do not say the advisor's name or personal characteristics of the advisor during the interviews.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with this study. A potential benefit from participating in this

study is the ability to help the university better serve students who are being advised by the Academic Support Center.

Cost and Payments

The one-on-one interviews will take no longer than 30 minutes each, and we will talk to you for about five more minutes. The telephone interview will last approximately 10-15 minutes. There are no other costs for helping us with this study. Students who participate in interviews will be included in drawings to receive four \$50 Ole Miss Bookstore gift cards. Two gift cards will be awarded each semester. Odds of winning each semester: 2 in 25.

Confidentiality

We will not list your name anywhere in the study. Your responses will be listed as Student 1, Student 2,...Student 25. Therefore, we do not believe that you can be identified from any of your interviews.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this study. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell in person, by email, or by telephone Kyle Ellis at 662-915-1468, kyleelli@olemiss.edu. Whether or not you choose to participate or to withdraw will not affect your standing with the Academic Support Center, or with the University, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

The researchers may terminate your participation in the study without regard to your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety and protecting the integrity of the research data.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

Thank you for your participation.

Kyle Ellis
Ph.D. Candidate
Higher Education Administration

VITA

Kyle Ellis

HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS

- * Excellent communication skills with the ability to collaborate with all students, colleagues, and administration.
- * Extremely dedicated to professional development and continuing education in order to better serve the higher education community in today's rapidly changing world.
- * Demonstrated involvement and devotion to national organization, NACADA, with hopes of increasing service, notoriety, and professionalism on the state, regional, and national levels.
- * Highly energetic and enthusiastic academic administrator who utilizes traditional and innovative initiatives to promote academic advising and student support services in multiple facets of higher education.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi

Assistant Director, Academic Support Center October 2007-Present

***Academic Administration** - Provide managerial level support and supervision to office personnel. Oversee daily operations of the ASC which include academic advising for undecided students, health professions advising, freshmen Applied Sciences' majors, and various support programs. Assist the Associate Provost with the planning, execution, and evaluation of new and existing programs. Assist with the production of professional development materials, resources, and activities for advisors. Maintain data on various programs. Hire, supervise, train, and evaluate all Academic Support Center staff. Prepare and monitor the annual budgets for staffing and ASC expenses. Coordinate publicity for the ASC. Plan regular staff meetings to facilitate professional development and communication. Participate on university committees. Assist with special projects as assigned.

***Recruitment/Orientation** – Assist Admissions with approximately 20 new and transfer student recruitment events per year. Meet one-on-one with students and parents regarding University programs. Communicate with prospective students through phone calls, letters, email, and social media. Coordinate academic advising and class registration component for freshmen orientation sessions. Hire, train, and supervise approximately 25 undergraduate and graduate student lab assistants. Oversee class registration in the primary orientation computer lab. Create documents related to course registration to assist faculty advisors. Communicate across campus regarding freshmen orientation issues.

***Retention** – Serve on the University’s Retention Task Force. Implement and oversee initiatives that involve academic advisors. Initiatives include advisor contact with students who: have not pre-assigned, have low mid-term grades, and/or registered for too many/too few hours. Make referrals as needed based on information gathered from student contacts. 2008-11 coordinated EDHE 101 “Academic Skills for College” which became mandatory for freshmen on academic probation in 2009. Hire, train, and supervise instructors and graduate assistants for EDHE 101. EDHE 101 had 19 sections and approximately 325 students in Spring 2011. Oversee ASC advisor who coordinates the Freshmen Attendance Based Initiative (FABI). Oversee advisor who coordinates the Annual Majors Fair and EDHE 201 “Career Decision-Making.” Served on the team that created the FASTrack program for “at-risk” freshmen. Serve on the EDHE 105 Steering Committee and teach one section of the course.

***New Initiatives** – Implemented the Ole Miss Academic Advising Network (AAN). Created a steering committee with representation from every school/college on campus. Established the AAN Excellence in Advising Awards for faculty and staff advisors. Assist campus award winners with nomination packets for national awards. Support AAN communication coordinator with program planning and advisor communication. Chaired the 2010 Mississippi Advisor Meeting, which brought over 100 academic advisors to Ole Miss for professional development. Created and implemented a proposal that allowed ASC advisors to advise all School of Applied Sciences freshmen beginning with the 2011 freshman class. Worked with the Applied Sciences’ Dean’s Office on the creation of the faculty mentor program. Managed the revision of the FABI program to include more effective and efficient communication with students, faculty, and staff.

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi

Senior Academic Counselor, Student Athlete Academic Support Center August 2006-October 2007

***Academic Advising** – Managed all academic affairs of the men’s basketball and baseball teams. Provided counseling on selection of majors with regard to NCAA, SEC, and institution policies. Assisted with the selection of courses each semester. Inform student-athletes on all University and department policies and procedures. Discussed possible careers and help prepare for a life after sports. Consulted weekly with coaches and other campus personnel on matters relating to student-athlete academic progress and performance. Evaluated transcripts on all student-athletes that transferred to Ole Miss. Kept coaches and athletic administrators apprised of critical issues, policies, procedures, and academic deadlines related to the student-athlete population.

***Support** – Assigned tutors and mentors to our most at-risk student-athletes. Coordinated tutors for all other student-athletes making a request. Proactively monitored student-athlete academic progress through class checks, progress reports, and instructor feedback. Planned and implemented strategic study for student-athletes. Worked closely with Student Disability Services to assist all student-athletes with learning disabilities. Utilized learning specialist to form academic plans for at-risk students. Implemented learning strategies for student-athletes to be successful in all courses.

***Recruitment** – Followed all NCAA, SEC, and university policies and procedures regarding prospective student-athlete contact. Discussed all aspects of academics to the most highly sought after recruits to the future walk-ons, while showing equal importance to both. Ensured both the parents and prospective student-athlete were aware of all university majors, programs, and services. Worked nights and weekends for recruiting events or one-on-one visits.

***Administration** – Calculated and monitored all aspects of Academic Progress Rate (APR). Tracked degree completion percentages and grade point averages for all of my student-athletes, as it pertained to NCAA eligibility rules. Performed daily tasks on academic monitoring software, Grades First. Utilized a team of six student workers, one administrative assistant, and one academic intern. Assisted with training of academic interns. Planned workshops on life/college skills in order to help students achieve success. Assisted the director in developing short-term goals for the unit in accordance with the University mission.

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi

Academic Advisor, Academic Support Center January 2004-August 2006

***Undecided Counseling** – Academic advisement for over 400 Undecided freshman, sophomore, and transfer students every semester. Discussed possible majors, curriculums, University and department policies, and any other issue that Undecided students might encounter. Counseled wide range of students from the highly prepared to very under prepared, or those with learning disabilities. Advised athletes from every sport. Designed 4-year academic plans for students. On-spot advisement during registration at freshman orientations. Spoke to campus groups regarding the importance of academic advising. Active in assisting new student development programs i.e. Academic Success Training (AST) and Freshmen Absence Intervention (FABI).

***Pre-Health Counseling** – Academic advisement for Pre-Health Profession track students i.e. Pre-Medical, Pre-Dental, Pre-Physical Therapy, and Pre-Nursing among others. Discussed pre-requisite requirements to gain admittance into health profession school of choice. Explained all requirements and policies of both the University and professional school. Assisted in selection of a major, as Pre-Health Professions are tracks, not majors. Kept records on prospective students as well as current students. Assisted Health Professions Coordinator in various duties and programs regarding our students.

***Recruitment** – Represented department on College Days, Scholar/Honor Days, Senior Preview Days, and any other recruitment function. Met privately with prospective Pre-Health Profession students and parents regarding the benefits of our programs, success rates, pre-requisites, student support services, and many other issues.

***Teaching** – Taught various sections of EDLD 101 “Academic Skills for College,” for students on academic probation. Addressed issues such as: time management, goal setting, study skills, personal development, and many others. Designed and taught EDLD 201 “Career Decision-Making.” The course explored students’ strengths, interests, and abilities to determine possible majors and future careers.

***Administration** – Calculated running totals of advisee numbers throughout the semester for accurate assessment. Assisted with the design of department brochure and compiled materials for advisor orientation every June. Kept department program sheets and knowledge of policies up to date with every academic program offered at the University. Operated SAP, administrative record keeping software, for daily advising and registration tasks. Advised students on academic issues through E-Advisor (On-line university advising tool). Utilized a team of two administrative assistants, two graduate assistants, and four student workers to perform department functions. Served on various committees outside of the ASC including Office of Admissions, Office of Orientation, and Career Center. Forged effective relationships

with faculty and administrators, and worked closely in enlisting their support of and involvement in the ASC support services and programs.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

Regional Division Representative on the NACADA Council, October 2008-October 2010

Region Chair, Region IV Southeast Region, October 2006-October 2008

***Budget** – As Division Rep: Assisted with creation and approved all regions' budgets, goals, and annual reports. As Region Chair: Responsible for \$35,000 region budget. Authorized all travel and spending by region leadership. Approved overall budget for annual Region IV Conference. Analyzed and approved all hotel, meeting location, food, and entertainment contracts for region conferences. Supervised the disbursement of funds to award and scholarship winners from the region.

***Supervision** – As Division Rep: Served as liaison between 10 region chairs and the NACADA Board of Directors. Attended mid-year leadership meetings and various conference calls with NACADA Board and Council to address needs of the 11,000+ member organization.

As Region Chair: Responsible for 1,000+ members of NACADA Region IV, which includes the states of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and the Caribbean. Supervised the Region IV steering committee, which consisted of state representatives, conference chairs, and other leaders in all region business. Conducted region meetings at all regional and national conferences. Served on graduate student scholarship selection committee.

***New Initiatives** – As Division Rep: Proposed an increase in region carry-forward funds from profitable region conferences (approved 2009). Assisted with the creation of the National Graduate Student Scholarship Program. Aided region chairs in creating their own networking receptions and award programs.

As Region Chair: Developed the NACADA Region IV Graduate Student Scholarships. Assisted in development of Region IV annual awards. Formulated Region IV Networking Reception at national conferences. Implemented a graduate student networking reception at region conferences.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, Tennessee

Adjunct Instructor, Department of Health and Human Performance 2003

Graduate Assistant Academic Advisor, College of Education 2002-2003

Academic Counseling – Counseled freshman, sophomore, and transfer Education majors. Discussed curriculum, policies, requirements, schedule review, and other issues Education majors face. Designed 4-year academic plans for students. Advised students and parents during Parent/Student Orientation and Freshman Experience Week. Utilized BANNER record keeping software for daily advising and registration tasks.

***Teaching** – Taught two physical activity courses for the Department of Health and Human Performance. Designed and implemented curriculum and assessment scale for course. Demonstrated proper techniques and offered assistance when needed. Tutored Education students to help them meet the required 2.5 GPA for Education majors.

***Recruitment** – Actively recruited prospective students through Senior Days, Campus Visits, and College Fairs. Represented the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at Career Days, Regional College Nights, and other functions. Maintained database of prospective students and conducted phone calls and mailings to prospects.

***Student Services** – Tutored for Praxis test (National teacher licensing exam). Created department brochure and event flyers. Record keeping on all Education majors. Assisted faculty when needed. Gave presentations to groups regarding our department and opportunities in education.

Summer Discovery, UCLA, Los Angeles, California
Resident Counselor/Transportation Coordinator, Summer 2001 & 2002

***Counseling/Coordination** – Responsible for 15 high school students taking college credit courses at UCLA. Tutored and assisted students on college level work. Maintained current records of students' class progress. Chaperoned all trips. Mentored students on life issues, some were thousands of miles from home. Assigned all vans and buses for camp trips. Kept accurate records on gas, mileage, and other vehicle issues. Responsible for all issues regarding vans.

PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT

National Academic Advising Association 2004-Present

***Accolades** – Awarded Certificate of Merit as the 2006 Outstanding National New Advisor of the Year. Awarded the 2006 NACADA Graduate Student Scholarship. Awarded 2006 Region IV Outstanding Leader Award. Awarded Certificate of Merit as the Region IV 2005 Outstanding New Advisor of the Year.

***Service** – Presented at National and Regional Conferences. Currently serve on two NACADA commissions: Advising Administration and Undecided/Exploratory Students. Assisted in the planning and coordination for the 2004 NACADA Region IV conference in Oxford, MS. Served as State Representative for Mississippi 2005-2006. Volunteered at the numerous NACADA Region IV conferences. 2008-2010 served on National Awards and Graduate Student Scholarship Committees. 2010-2012 selected as a mentor in the Emerging Leader Program.

Mississippi Advisor Meeting 2007-Present

Active member and conference attendee. Presented individual session and featured lunch speaker in 2009. Chaired the 2010 Mississippi Advisors Meeting in Oxford, MS.

National Athletic Academic Advising Association 2006-2008

Active member and conference attendee.

Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange 2008-Present

Active member and conference attendee.

PRESENTATIONS

Ellis, K., and Moore, M. "The Next Generation of Student Support Systems: Technology for Student Success," NACADA Regional Conference, Birmingham, AL March 14, 2011.

Ellis, K., Boggs, R., Hughey, K., and Nutt, C. "Kansas State University Distance Education," NACADA National Conference, San Antonio, TX, October 2, 2009.

Ellis, K., and Waddell, D. "From Learner to Leader: Leadership Opportunities in Advising," NACADA National Conference, San Antonio, TX, October 1, 2009.

Ellis, K., "How Can NACADA Help You? Introduction to NACADA," Mississippi Advisors Meeting, Hattiesburg, MS, August 10, 2009.

Ellis, K., and Waddell, D. "From Learner to Leader: Leadership Opportunities in Advising," (Adapted Version for Region 4), NACADA Regional Conference, Starkville, MS March 16, 2009.

Ellis, K., "Down, Set, Advise," NACADA National Conference, Baltimore, MD, October 19, 2007.

Ellis, K., "A Winner Every Time: Experiences in the Graduate Certificate in Academic Advising" (Adapted Version for Region 4), NACADA Regional Conference, Atlanta, GA, March 6, 2006.

Ellis, K., "A Winner Every Time: Experiences in the Graduate Certificate in Academic Advising," NACADA National Conference, Las Vegas, NV, October 7, 2005.

Ellis, K., "Beginning an Exercise Program," Presentation to West Tennessee Health Fair, University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN, November 19, 2003.

Ellis, K., and Gullede, B. "Opportunities in Education," Presentation to University of Tennessee 4-H Roundup, University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN, June 16, 2003.

Ellis, K., and Blair, P.F. "Multiple Intelligences," Presentation to Phi Delta Kappa Teacher In-Service, University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN, April 5, 2003.

PUBLICATIONS

Ellis, K., (2007). Academic Support Center at The University of Mississippi. In V.N. Gordon, *The Undecided College Student* (pp.201). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Ellis. K., (2006). Voices from the field: My experience as a new academic advisor. In P.Folsom & B.Chamberlain (Eds.), *The New Advisor Guidebook: Mastering the Art of Advising Through the First Year and Beyond* (pp.126-127). Manhattan, KS: NACADA

EDUCATION

The University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi
Ph.D. in Higher Education and Administration (2011)

Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas
NACADA Graduate Certificate in Academic Advising (2005)

University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, Tennessee
Master of Science in Education
Concentration: Health and Human Performance (2003)

University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, Tennessee
Bachelor of Science in Health and Human Performance
Concentration: Teacher Licensure K-12 (2002)