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Academic Advising for Students' Success at the Community College Level in the West Indies

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College of Education

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Delores Harris

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Walden University
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Abstract
Academic Advising for Students' Success at the Community College Level
in the West Indies
by
Delores Harris

Project submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education
Higher Education Leadership

Walden University

January 2021

Abstract

Community colleges expect their employees to promote academic success and propel students to graduation by providing a range of services, including academic advising. Increasingly, advising professionals continue to extoll the benefits of effective academic advising. The problem of the lack of enough trained advisers and information about the effects of academic advising on students' success at a college in the West Indies was addressed in this study. Schlossberg's transition theory and Bloom et al.'s appreciative advising theory were used in this basic qualitative study to explore the perceptions of 8 former students who graduated up to 3 years prior to this study, 3 faculty advisers, and 3 academic advisers. The research questions focused on the perceptions of graduates and academic advisors regarding the relationship between advising and student success and potential ways to improve the academic advising structure at the target institution. Interview transcripts were deductively analyzed and then synthesized in themes. The findings indicated an apparent gap in teachers' professional advising practices and training, and the negative effects that poor advising practices have on students' ability to succeed academically and to graduate in the expected program timeline. The resulting project consisted of a white paper describing strategies to improve the academic advising process with more powerful students' college experiences. The white paper evaluation was designed to provide both formative and summative feedback from the administrators and other stakeholders. The project contributes to social change through the suggestions derived from the findings of this research by helping the administrators develop the necessary mechanisms, policy guidelines, or frameworks for a more suitable advising model from the project policy paper to improve students' experiences.

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Section 1: The Local Problem

Community colleges expect their employees to promote academic success and propel students to graduation by providing academic advising services. Increasingly, professionals comprising the highly reputed National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) continue to extoll the benefits of academic advising. NACADA researchers have also advanced their position that student academic success is synonymous with academic achievement, which is fostered through academic advisers.

This study's purpose is to gain a better understanding of the academic advising system at City Community College (CCC), a pseudonym chosen to represent a 2- to 4-year community college located on an island in the West Indies, which offers associate and baccalaureate degrees. The institution has been experiencing significant challenges surrounding academic advising, on the part of both students and advisers. To understand the implications that this system has for students' academic success and graduation rates, I explored how students and academic advisers perceive the advising system at CCC. Academic advising is one of the valuable service components of the postsecondary college education system, which consists of nearly half of undergraduate students nationwide (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013). Advising forges a foundation for successful academic outcomes critical for students at the community college level.

The Local Problem

CCC students have complained of an inadequate amount of academic advising and advisers who blatantly refuse to keep scheduled advising appointments. According to a CCC advising report memo, students also have expressed grave concerns regarding a

fear of failure and the adverse effects that a lack of academic advising may have on them, and despite repeated appeals by the administrators of CCC to advisers to submit forms after each advising contact, the response from some advisers had been minimal (the chief counselor, personal communication, April 14, 2017). In an email to staff, a top leader of the college expressed concern regarding the lack of advising documentation and follow-up interventions that could have been executed by the student affairs department to mitigate various student-related negative situations (the president of CCC, personal communication, November 13, 2017). That email communication to faculty also mentioned data showing a significant reduction in both advising (30%) and graduation rates (20%) from 2015 to 2017. The administrators of the college became seriously concerned because the statistical data were not in alignment with the goals of CCC as a community-learning institution.

As a former CCC faculty member and student adviser, I am aware firsthand of the significant challenges surrounding academic advising at CCC. I am also cognizant of the high levels of reluctance and resistance on the part of advisers to engage in advising at CCC, a situation that has resulted in significant discordance and disharmony. Subsequent to the release of the advising and graduation statistical data in 2018, the chief academic officer of CCC informed all teaching faculty that they were expected to engage in no less than 16 to 18 hours of lecture on a weekly basis, along with a mandatory 2 hours weekly for academic advising without added remuneration. The directive from the officer was met with considerable resistance from faculty, as reflected in an email response (faculty representative to the board of trustees, personal communication, February 8, 2018).

Faculty claimed that (a) they did not feel sufficiently trained to advise students

adequately and (b) faculty members who were unprepared to advise were also required to engage in academic advising (faculty members, personal communication, January 7, 2018). Moreover, a disparity appears to exist currently between faculty advisers who possess expertise in academic advising and those who do not possess advising skills. Kim and Sax (2014) found that negligent and unsupportive advising leads to colleges and universities being more susceptible to student attrition, which results in a lower graduation rate. Mehaffy (2018) concluded that student success is not only something for students to be concerned with but should be a material concern for all organizational constituents. The issues surrounding academic advising and students' success at CCC thus provide the context and direction for this research study.

For the purposes of this study, I focused on (a) practices related to the reasons for the lack of systematic information regarding why students at CCC do not receive the required amount of quality academic advising, which is at least two sessions per semester, and (b) the effects of the lack of advising on students' ability to succeed academically and graduate in a specific program timeline.

Rationale

The administrators of CCC initiated an informal system of academic advisement in September 2011. Later in 2013, when the CCC established a student services department, the staff advanced a more formal system of academic advising that involved faculty assignments to create an enhanced and more learner-centered environment. However, 40% of the advising staff at CCC do not possess the formal training and skillsets necessary for advising students (student services adviser, personal communication from the Office of Student Services, September 14, 2014). It is

conceivable (i.e., reasonable to expect) that the difference in the advising skillsets among CCC faculty adversely affects one of the fundamental support structures that has been initiated to promote students' success at the community level.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Counsellors at CCC disseminated several annual evaluative reports for several years to faculty regarding the poor state of academic advisement at the institution. The counsellors highlighted several challenges associated with CCC's academic advising system in the reports (counsellors of CCC, personal communications, June 15, 2015; May 5, 2016; & April 10, 2017). The counselors disclosed in their reports that certain faculty members who were required to engage in academic advising were reluctant to perform the role, and many of the designated advisers seemed to lack the necessary advising requisites and skills. As stated in a 2016 CCC Advisement Department report, fewer than 50% of students on average interacted with an adviser from 2013 to 2016 (director of student services, personal communication from the Office of Student Services, September 14, 2016). Overall advising activities ranged from 16% to 58% among students, and only 66% of assigned faculty participated in academic advising. Through email communication to staff and faculty, the leaders at CCC expressed their concern regarding the statistical findings (the vice president, personal communication, May 3, 2017).

Evidence of the Problem From Professional Literature

Community colleges are significant to the building of communities. Moreover, community colleges are crucial components of education systems and structures globally. According to the AACC (2013), approximately 50% of college students attend community colleges; thus, community institutions need to have support systems,

programs, and infrastructure to facilitate successful outcomes for students. Proponents of academic advising, such as Barefoot et al. (2005), have strongly asserted that a structured advising program is one of the supportive cornerstones of an excellent higher education institution. Other advocates of academic advising include Strayhorn (2015), who considered student success to be an important goal of higher education. Ambrose and Williamson (2013) and Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) asserted that student retention and student success are associated with supportive structures such as meaningful academic advising. However, it appears that despite recognizing the benefits such academic advising programs offer, some community colleges have not been able to create effective advising systems and programs.

Definitions

Academic advising: A decision-making process whereby students “realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges” with an academic adviser (Braxton et al., 2013, p. 5).

Bloom’s appreciative advising: An academic advising concept, based on an organizational development theory surrounding appreciative inquiry and positive psychology literature, that provides a flexible framework for institutions to optimize their students’ success (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008).

City Community College (CCC): The chosen pseudonym and corresponding acronym I used in this study to refer to the target local institution in the West Indies.

Integrative theory of advising: A fundamental learning activity allowing students to “intentionally and reflectively integrate their academic learning into an education that is a coherent whole” (Lowenstein, 2014, para. 1).

Intrusive advising: A proactive advising approach that leads advisers to perform deliberate personal outreach to their students to provide better information or support. Through proactive intervention, using this approach could build relationships and enhance student motivation (Varney, 2013).

Schlossberg's transition theory: An adult development theory focusing on "the transitions that adults experience throughout life and the means by which individuals cope and adjust" (Bailey-Taylor, 2009, p. 1).

Transition: "An event or nonevent resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27).

Academic success: Student success is usually defined as a combination of academic achievement and experiences in which "students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance" to reach their goals and complete their college experience (NACADA, 2003, 2014).

Academic advisers: Designated administrative staff or faculty members who (a) help students clarify personal and career goals and develop consistent educational goals and (b) are responsible for evaluating student progress toward individualized established goals (Grites, 2013).

Faculty advisers: Professors, teaching faculty, department chairs, or deans that in addition to their research and/or teaching responsibilities carry a caseload of students they advise (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 602).

Intentional engagement/programming: An intentional, student-centered activity that is deliberately designed to facilitate student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Significance of the Study

In 2017, CCC data from relevant reports indicated that between 2014 and 2017, academic advising decreased by 30% at CCC. In contrast, many proponents of academic advising have claimed that students deem academic advising to be an important fundamental activity of learning institutions (Noel-Levitz, 2014a, 2014b). Thus, college students consider academic advising to be an important aspect of their education. Vianden and Barlow (2014, 2015) asserted that the services students receive from their learning institution, such as academic advising, often influence students' views and perceptions of their college experience.

Several academic advising scholars have noted that students' satisfaction levels with advising interactions often are influenced by the unrealistic or uninformed expectations of their advisers. Other scholars, however, have posited that evaluations regarding student satisfaction at college do not provide adequate and usable data regarding how academic advising affects student outcomes such as graduation and overall academic success (Powers, Carlstrom, & Hughey, 2014; White & Schulenberg, 2012). Likewise, Elliott and Healy (2001) suggested that many critics of academic advising and student satisfaction surveys fail to realize the strong intricate linkages associated with student satisfaction, strong student outcomes, and overall academic success. Furthermore, student satisfaction with their college experiences, including academic advising, has been deemed as one of the most important predictors of students graduating within a designated period and achieving overall academic success (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). Thus, it can be assumed that unsatisfactory academic advising is associated with poor academic success outcomes.

The administrators of CCC are cognizant of the fact that the academic advising structure and student retention rates at their institution need to be improved (administrator, personal communication, October 13, 2016). However, despite their cognizance, they are unsure how to link student satisfaction and academic advising. Jaggars and Karp (2016) explained that despite their best efforts, community colleges continue to see low rates of students who graduate, particularly among academically vulnerable students, whose rates are associated with poor academic advising. Exploring the issues surrounding CCC's academic advising system may culminate in a new framework of strategies that will increase not only the effectiveness of academic advising but also student retention and better overall outcomes for community colleges in general.

In today's world, community colleges and other learning institutions are required to meet the learning needs of a diverse group of students. Students from varying backgrounds and minority groups may be significantly influenced by cultural norms and traditions, socioeconomic status, and (a lack of) educational preparation. Academic advising, as a supportive mechanism, provides students with the opportunity to overcome the challenges that they encounter while moving through the transitional period at the community college level. Advising thus minimizes the possibility of attrition, particularly as it relates to the student who is at risk for dropping out of college. The administrators at CCC want nothing more than to help all their students achieve success (Academic Affairs vice president, personal communication, October 13, 2016). Therefore, CCC's administrators recognize that several fundamental changes may be required to achieve their goal of assisting students, including changes particularly related to their current academic advising efforts.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do CCC graduates perceive the relationship between academic advising and student success?
2. How do CCC advisers perceive the relationship between academic advising and student success?
3. What do graduates think would contribute to a more beneficial CCC academic advising structure for student success?
4. What do advisers think would contribute to a more beneficial CCC academic advising structure for student success?

Review of Literature

The review of the literature consists of two sections. In the first section, I address the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study, along with the justification and underpinnings for using this framework in analyzing the local problem at CCC. The second section consists of research materials from primary research sources that address academic advising and graduation rates from a broader perspective.

Search Strategy

During the review of the literature, I focused on topics relating to academic advising and student success. Because it is important to use the most current literature for a study, this review consists of mostly current research materials that have addressed academic advising during the past 5 years. I also used several relevant and significant secondary sources sparingly to provide a richer consideration of the problem.

I reached a level of saturation in the literature by using several databases such as

Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and the Sage and Walden Academic Center's library and research center. The search terms I used included, but were not limited to, *academic advising, faculty advising, students' success, students' outcomes, academic achievement, students' engagement, academic success, transition, Schlossberg's transition theory, Bloom's appreciative advising, students' support, integrative theory of advising, intrusive advising, and intentional engagement.*

A significant challenge during the search was selecting relevant content judiciously from the materials that surfaced. However, the information surrounding academic advising has provided evidence for both the saturation of the search and the quality of the reviewed literature within the context of my chosen research focus, thus strengthening the related content of this project. Much of the literature centered on the need for colleges to ensure that students receive a positive experience when they engage in academic advising processes, which often increase student retention and graduation, thus setting students up for future success.

Researchers have revealed that advising is most crucial for first-year and high-risk students because it aids in a student's ability to adjust to their new academic environment (Winfield, 2018; Woods, 2016). Currently, many community colleges are dealing with declines in enrollment and funding while trying to meet government demands to improve graduation rates (Crisis in Enrollment, 2019). Smith (2018) posited that community colleges are accustomed to fluctuating enrollments. However, it is imperative that institutions focus on strategies to not only broaden their recruiting practices, but also to focus on retaining the students who do enroll. Putman and Rathburn (2018) recommended two broad strategies to mitigate the enrolment challenges for institutions,

which are (a) to guide faculty to engage with students through advising and (b) to give them the tools and the training to help connect those students with high-impact experiences that interest them.

According to Hutson (2013) and Winfield (2018), advising is most effective when advising staff are consistently and adequately trained to coach and guide students. However, lack of adviser training, along with obligations toward research and teaching makes advising a lower priority for faculty advisors (Vespia, Freis, & Arrowood, 2018). Thus, the role of faculty advisers has become increasingly significant at community colleges. Grites (2013) posited several actions and tasks that advisers need to take with their students, such as assisting students in creating a campus experience that will encourage them to set and reach individual goals and applying learning-outcome-focused approaches while also integrating strength-based theories into actual academic advising strategies. Because advising has a key role in higher education programs, when faculty members act as advisers, they play a critical role in achieving the main purposes of these advising programs, which are supporting student engagement, increasing retention, and facilitating long-term academic success.

Many learning institutions depend on authoritative sources for information about academic advising. Member educators of the NACADA have consistently promoted the benefits of advising programs to students, higher education institutions, and the global community. Zhang (2016) affirmed the advantages of academic advising after investigating how academic advising validates or invalidates a community college student's academic and social experiences. Arteaga (2015) and Battin (2014) argued that the benefits of academic advising are integral to the higher education process and include

positive student connections at learning institutions. Arteaga and Battin also noted the importance of academic advising both on broad and local levels. In a 2017 CCC information guide, the administrators of CCC referred to academic advising as a vital educational activity that provides accurate information about program requirements and available opportunities. By using their academic advisers' guidance, students may successfully complete their degrees in accordance with their abilities, aptitudes, and career goals despite challenges that they may encounter.

Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory focuses on how adults cope and adjust to the changes they experience throughout life. Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined *transition* as "any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles" (p. 27). During the past decade, efforts have increased at national, state, and local levels to develop and implement strategies designed to help students make the transition from adult education programs into college (Lazarowicz, 2015). As these efforts expand, a growing need exists to research specific transition strategies to identify the most effective practices for helping adult students transition into postsecondary education.

In their theory, Schlossberg et al. (1995) highlighted an interesting observation that an effective academic advising system utilized by college students, particularly during the first semester, may significantly increase students' retention and promote success. Schlossberg's theory is an appropriate theoretical base to use in this study, as helping adult students to continue their college work to graduation is the focus of this project. Lazarowicz (2015) explained that Schlossberg's theory lends credibility to the

transitional strategy of using academic advising as a way to introduce new students to the college environment, especially given how significantly different both the learning and social environments can be between high school and college.

The 4S system of transition theory outlines how individuals deal with changes to their situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Within the situation aspect of the 4S system, advisers examine the real-world features and effects of an individual's transition from one life stage to another. The second aspect of the theory, the self, includes a person's disposition and demeanor regarding life. The support aspect of the 4S system is associated with the amount and type of resources available to someone during a transition, whereas the strategies aspect of the 4S system is connected to how a person behaves in relation to transitional experiences. Schlossberg et al. (1989, 1995) contended that when all the aspects of the 4S system are intentionally integrated into the advising process by the adviser, the students are better engaged and empowered to take advantage of the transition process and to be more successful in college. Students in transition have an opportunity to move forward, start a new chapter, and expand their opportunities (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009). Advisers can apply transition theory as an adult development theory while they work with traditionally aged college students; starting college is typically one of the first adult transitional events that students experience.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) believed that structure is necessary to promote a better understanding of adults who are undergoing change so that advisers can provide guidance to help them cope with the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Evans et al., 2009, p. 213). Such structure can be facilitated through academic advising between the

adviser and the advisee. Goodman et al. (2006) explained that it is essential for advisers to understand the meaning of a transition for an individual—it is only through academic advising the type, context, and the effects of the transition that advisers can evaluate and understand student transitions. Schlossberg et al. expanded on the 4S system of his transition theory by further classifying the theory into three different types of transitions, namely anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevents that embrace both obvious and subtle contextual changes in life. Schlossberg explained that transitions exist only if the changes are defined and explored by an individual, such as changes in a student's experiences or relationship with the actual transition—as in the case of a student who has just entered college.

The degree to which a student is affected by a transition depends on his or her experience. Goodman et al. (2006) proposed that the process of transition can produce added stress that makes coping difficult. However, gradually, individuals are able to separate themselves from past encounters and reengage in new roles and dispositions with a new outlook on life. Goodman et al. further submitted that transitions provide opportunities equally for both growth and decline. From that idea, Goodman et al. proposed three transition phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out. During the moving in phase, individuals need to familiarize themselves with the associated norms and rules that apply when they are embarking on a new mission, such as when a new student learns more about the advising system during college orientation. Goodman et al. further claimed that once a person is in a new situation or environment, he or she begins to interact with the environment and finds equilibrium while moving on through the transition.

The concept of moving on is synonymous with someone who needs to think about what comes next when moving from one phase of life to another, such as when a student who has successfully completed all courses and assessments is preparing for graduation. Goodman et al. (2006) stated that one's effectiveness in confronting changes is associated with the availability and amount of resources available to the individual. In addition, according to Goodman et al., all transitional events consist of both assets and liabilities, and when assets outweigh liabilities, the individual experiences a relatively easy adjustment. Conversely, when liabilities outweigh assets, the transition may be more challenging for the person to manage.

Furthermore, a person's appraisal of a transition (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral) also affects how the person feels about and copes with the transition. For example, individuals respond differently based on the trigger stimulus of a transition. The variables influencing an individual's response include the timing of the stimulus, the amount of control the individual exerts over the transition, new roles being assumed by the individual, and the length and magnitude of the transition. Additional variables include the person's previous experience with a similar occurrence, the way the person assesses the change, and other areas of stress in the person's life.

The second aspect of the 4S system—self—consists mainly of personal and sociodemographic factors, including psychological resources. An individual's personal and demographic characteristics such as gender, age, health, and culture may affect how he or she views life. In addition, attributes such as ego development, disposition and resilience, personal values, and religious beliefs constitute an individual's psychological repository of resources. The third aspect of the 4S system—support—embraces a

person's strength and coping mechanism. Individuals can adapt to transitional change because of the support they receive from family, loved ones, and peers. The support of institutions and community engagement can also provide affection, affirmation, and assistance. The fourth aspect of the 4S system—strategies—addresses the differences in how people manage or cope with transitional situations. Reactions include attempts to modify situations and efforts to control the meaning and management of problems (Evans et al., 2009). Goodman et al. (2006) submitted the view that people who remain flexible and use multiple strategies are better able to cope with and manage transitional experiences. As such, Bloom et al.'s (2008) appreciative advising model is considered a useful strategy for advisers to adopt by embracing and promoting students' strengths in the process of academic advising. The next section describes the appreciative advising concept.

Bloom's Appreciative Advising

Bloom et al.'s (2008) appreciative advising model is based on the organizational development theory of appreciative inquiry but also takes into account other related positive psychology research. Professionals in college apply this model, which enables them to use a type of advising that provides a flexible framework for optimizing student success at their learning institutions. Bloom et al.'s process of appreciative advising consists of the following six phases: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and do not settle. These phases are aimed at enhancing interactions between students and advisers, thus promoting more positive outcomes. Advisers who apply this theory embrace the tenets of student retention, the concept of one student at a time, and the adviser-advisee partnership, which, under this model, serves as an intentional collaborative effort to

optimize a student's learning experiences and success to help the student achieve his or her potential.

Appreciative advising is a strategy that allows advisers to nurture a student's strengths and abilities. Bloom et al. (2008) purported that when this strategy is adopted at a learning institution, it allows academic advisers to use deliberate and intentional methodologies to promote better interaction with students during the disarming phase. During the discovery phase, advisers uncover a student's strengths and skills based on the student's past successes. During the dream phase, advisers encourage students to relate their stories and pursue their dreams. Advisers who participate in these preparatory phases can foster more effective advising during the design phase, when advisers collaboratively design educational plans with their students to assist them in achieving their goals. As students move from the design phase, advisers provide the necessary support to students to enable them to implement their plans during the deliver phase. The deliver phase serves as a foundation for the do not settle phase and allows for both advisers and students to challenge themselves to become even better engaged (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 11). Such an appreciative approach represents a positive advising style for working with students, which is better suited to helping students optimize their educational opportunities.

Several proponents of advising have advanced the appreciative approach. Lowenstein (2005, 2011, 2014) strongly supported appreciative advising as a model that could be used alongside his own theory of integrative advising, which espouses advising as an intentional fundamental learning activity to assist students to integrate their academic learning into an education that is a coherent whole. Lowenstein (2014) further

advanced the concept that if advisers can integrate the aspects of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory into the phases of the appreciative advising model, they should be able to better maximize adult students' success and have a positive effect on graduation rates and student retention.

The appreciative advising model allows advisers to combine Schlossberg et al.'s (1989, 1995) situation variable to gauge the magnitude of the transitional change that a student is experiencing and also includes design strategies for addressing associated challenges. During the discovery phase, while applying the situation aspect of the appreciative advising model, advisers listen to students' stories to learn more about their students. In this way, an adviser can uncover a student's disposition by using searching questions. Advisers who are cognizant of their advisees' situation can assist students to reframe their individual situations as positive ones. As a result, Schlossberg et al. posited that transitions would be easier for students once they acknowledge and embrace their changed situation. Conversely, students are likely to be unhappy and withdraw from college when they perceive that transitions are being forced upon them. When advisers assist students in identifying the positive aspects of a transition situation, adult students can successfully work through a transition as they boost their own confidence levels, set goals, and achieve academic success.

By adopting the dream phase and the self-aspect component of the 4S system, advisers can focus on understanding students' dreams and hopes for the future. Schlossberg (2011) asserted that when advisers encourage students to communicate their dreams, they positively view the future and become excited about their plans. Such a process, Schlossberg et al. opined, allows advisers to help students have an enhanced

view of themselves in the future. These methods also assist advisers in promoting a positive outlook and increasing students' self-confidence and self-efficacy. The dream phase is relevant to Schlossberg's self-aspect component because during the dream stage, people seek to observe their own characteristics, enhance their view of their lives, and build their self-confidence. Taking time to dream about the future will help adult students to both be mindful of their vision as they experience transitions and be empowered and encouraged to continue their educational journey.

By using the design phase and the support aspect modality of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory, advisers help their students design plans focused on accomplishing the goals that they identified during the dream phase (Bloom et al., 2008). The design phase directly correlates with Schlossberg's support aspect, which indicates how important social support is for handling stress. Evans et al. (2009) described that, in general, adults need four types of support: affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback. Evans et al. stated that these important support modes can help advisers assist their students when constructing individual plans, but only if the modes are kept in mind. Accordingly, advisers can use the strategies from Schlossberg's self and situation aspects to facilitate student-related referrals (Evans et al., 2009) and to assist students in acquiring resources (Bloom et al., 2008).

During the delivery phase, students consider the strategies they previously identified to carry out the plan that they made with their advisers to be more successful. By using Schlossberg's (2011) strategies aspect, advisers can help students more effectively handle the unforeseen challenges that students may experience during their transition experiences. Schlossberg et al. (1995) noted:

Whether individuals want to change their situation or reduce their distress, they can choose from among four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. The first three seem self-explanatory; the last one (intrapsychic) refers to the mind sets individuals employ to resolve problems that arise. These mind sets, which include denial, wishful thinking, and distortion, enable people to carry on. (p. 74)

If advisers emphasize with their students the need for these strategies during the deliver phase, adult students will be better prepared for transition experiences, making it more likely that those students will continue to move forward, achieve academic success, and persevere to graduation.

The do not settle phase, combined with the 4S system, affords students an opportunity to overcome their challenges. During this last phase, advisers provide students with the necessary support to successfully confront challenges. The 4S system (Schlossberg et al., 1989, 1995) remains a beneficial tool to use, even in this phase. For example, the situation, support, and strategies aspects will help adult students evaluate and overcome new challenges, especially when either advisers, students, or both raise their expectations. The do not settle phase provides an opportunity for advisers to build rapport with students, inspire confidence, and reinforce expectations in the quest for achieving successful academic outcomes.

Current Literature Related to the Review of the Broader Problem

Proponents of Academic Advising

Community colleges nationwide are providing high-quality education at more affordable rates than most 4-year institutions (Turk, 2019). The CCC is not an exception,

thus the thrust by the administrators to provide a positive experience at the institution and to gather the needed data to evaluate the quality of academic advising their students receive. Further, although colleges are seeing an overall decline in enrollment, according to Winfield (2018), institutions are experiencing “enrollment peaks of students from various backgrounds with diverse needs . . . this increase in students warrants the necessity for more support” (para. 1). Kimball and Campbell (2013) submitted that defined, academic advising strategies are critical for supporting student success. Kot (2013), however, affirmed advisement should be inclusive and connected to organizational structures and cultures, although Hatch and Garcia (2017) suggested that other external factors determine the goals of students, which in turn determines how they want to be advised.

Operationalizing academic advising allows advisers to foster a student’s ability to make connections between academic experiences and positive learning outcomes, which directly affects an institution’s retention rate. Graduation is a major key indicator of these outcomes, and “students who feel connected to an institution, feel cared about, understand their purpose, and have clear academic and career goals are more apt to persist in their academic endeavors” (Ohrablo, 2017, para. 2).

The local problem at CCC conflicts with the broader position of proponents regarding how advisers participate in the student experience. It seems that the faculty at CCC have not fully embraced their role as faculty advisers despite repeated appeals and directives to better engage in the advising process. This attitude among CCC faculty negatively affects the amount and quality of advising that CCC students receive. Siming, Niamatullah, Xu, and Shaf (2015) asserted that a student’s educational experience could

be detrimentally affected because of infrequent interaction with faculty and academic advisers. Siming et al.'s perspective may reflect the current situation at CCC. According to a 2017 CCC Student Services report, students believe that the relationships advisers and faculty have with students are useless. These CCC students are not alone: although a number of students at community colleges expressed some satisfaction with their academic advisers, other students expressed dissatisfaction with advisers who displayed an uncaring attitude toward their advisees' goals, growth, and success (Noel-Levitz, 2014a, 2014b).

Reason (2009) argued that student success is the single most important concern for higher education administrators and policymakers. Thus, discussions regarding retention and graduation rates at community colleges continue to gain focus and momentum at learning institutions (Habley, Bloom, Robbins, & Robbins, 2012). It was, therefore, no surprise when Colleges Ontario, an association representing 24 colleges in Canada, stated that the main goal of Canadian institutions over the next 5 years was to increase graduation rates significantly (Colleges Ontario, 2014a, 2014b). Decreasing students' attrition at the community level is a complex matter that would require a multimodal approach to address it successfully, particularly as no author has espoused a workable system to improve retention at the college level.

Research on Changes in Academic Advising

Researchers in several previous studies have sought to address academic advising specifically. In a study exploring the influence that academic advising has on student retention and graduation, Wheatley (2018) found that among college-level factors, the percentages of transfer students and students deemed to be at high academic risk, as well

as other student-level variables including contact with an academic adviser, were strong predictors of student graduation rates. Joslin (2018) submitted that leaders in higher education institutions are deemphasizing solo and isolated student support initiatives and focusing instead on identifying and addressing institution-wide movements for improvement such as academic advising. In a qualitative study, Ellis (2014) proposed five recommendations for advisers who work with first-year, undecided students. One of the critical recommendations addressed the important aspect of a student's first advising session, during which advisers should gain an awareness of the student's expectations and goals. The same study also revealed that students arrive at community colleges with perceptions of advising, whether positive or otherwise, because of their previous advising encounters with high school advisers. Consequently, advisers should engage advisees early in the first year of college to reshape any negative thoughts or perceptions of advising that students may entertain.

Ellis (2014) also found that the transitional period into college was much easier for students who reported having good advising experiences at the high school level, thus making the work of the college adviser easier. Accordingly, an adviser must be cognizant of the prior experiences of students to ascertain the type and magnitude of interactive advising that students require. Ellis further expounded on the need for a trusting relationship to be established between adviser and advisee early in the advising process to facilitate more positive engagement. Moreover, Snyder-Duch and Schwartz (2017) noted the critical role advisers play when they acknowledge the significance of students having a good experience at the community college level. This collaborating role supports Alexitch's (2002) and Yarbrough's (2002) submission regarding the importance of a

good relationship between academic advisers and students in promoting student success, satisfaction, and retention.

Increasingly, education administrators and policy crafters are examining how to assess and utilize academic advisement programs so that they can hold institutions accountable for the actions leaders take in relation to advising. According to Zarges, Adams, Higgins, and Muhovich (2018), assessments have been embedded in higher education for decades and are fundamental to any learning institution. Zarges et al. asserted that “as educators have recognized that academic advising is an important component of learning, the assessment of academic advising has become a necessity” (p. 47). Overall, assessing advising could be especially critical to improve success in higher education institutions. Additionally, Allen, Smith, and Muehleck (2014) emphasized that the increased connection between academic advising and student retention indicated the need to explore the problem. Kim and Sax (2014) and O’Keeffe (2013) also submitted that advisers who are negligent and unsupportive make colleges and universities more prone to student attrition. These researchers illustrated that advisers who were negligent and unsupportive were ultimately contributing to a lower graduation rate, which reveals the importance of having a cadre of committed and dedicated advisers at the college level. Interestingly, White (2015) found attrition to be a source of concern for colleges and universities because the cost of recruiting students is higher than the cost of retaining existing students. If administrators were to pay attention to White’s submission and address attrition problems, students would be more likely to qualify for graduation, which would be a major achievement for learning institutions.

Renowned researchers have continued to find an association between academic

advising and student success. For example, Astin (1993) reported the results of a national survey in which academic advising ranked 25th among the 27 different types of services evaluated by students. A significant 60% of those surveyed indicated that they were either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the quality of academic advising that they had received, which may have affected their level of success. This reported dissatisfaction rate in the survey demonstrates that students clearly need the support of an effective academic advising system to negotiate the challenging and sometimes confusing process of educational planning and decision-making.

Student satisfaction has become an important college indicator of success. Allen et al. (2014) and Teasley and Buchanan (2013) found that students are rarely satisfied with advising; a new culture of advising must include a commitment of participation from all members of a college in order to improve student perceptions of academic advising. Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) expressed their concern that to build and maintain an academic advising system that is effective, administrators need to create a new advising culture. However, Kim and Sax (2014) found that students also viewed many advisers as lacking the training and preparation to perform the adviser role. Many proponents of academic advising have concluded that negligent and unsupportive advising results in making colleges and universities more susceptible to student attrition and to withdrawal before graduation.

Colleges and universities have a mandate to help students with their goals. Education is intended to assist maturing youth to the point where they are able to cope with the important questions surrounding their adult careers. Ohrt (2018) conducted a study that found that students who received a more developmental advising approach

came to see their advisers as being more trustworthy. Ultimately, two of the best outcomes associated with academic advising are preparing students to enter the workforce and helping them develop problem-solving skills (Lepper, 2014; Tinto, 2012; Tladi, 2013). Vianden (2015) and Erlich and Russ-Eft (2013) advanced a valuable finding that when there are good academic advising interventions for students, there is also a correlated increase in a student's academic planning and outputs. This increase in academic output gives credence to a further exploration of how academic advising can be improved. Most researchers who have conducted empirical studies on academic advising have traditionally focused on the influence of academic advising on student retention and satisfaction, but few have revealed how academic advising influences student success.

Among these few studies, Young-Jones et al. (2013) and Smith and Allen (2014) found that students who engage in academic advising were more likely to attain a better grade point average (GPA), thus increasing their potential for academic success. They also found that students who design their goals through academic advising programs and who successfully engage with their advisers were more likely to complete college within a prescribed period.

Other studies related to students and academic advising have been conducted, but these studies either require replication or reveal the need to study the problem in greater detail. For example, Christian and Sprinkle (2013) investigated the following: (a) the perceptions of 125 graduate and undergraduate students from one department on the academic advising program used at a mid-sized public university in the United States; (b) the advising style standards of the same group of students, and (c) the relationship between the two variables. Christian and Sprinkle revealed that there was a positive

correlation between participants' perceptions and their advising ideals, whereby "students whose perceptions positively correlate with their ideals of advising viewed the process as beneficial, while students whose perceptions negatively correlate with their ideals of advising doubted its efficacy" (p. 280). Docherty, Gullan, and Phillips (2018) also postulated that the presence of a mentor is one characteristic of a college student's experience that correlates with academic success. These mentors are often, and should be, a professor or adviser who provides a helpful, supportive, and personal relationship and who also serves as a role model for students.

Principles Underlying Academic Advising

Several proponents of academic advising have successfully advanced certain principles underlying the concept of their work. Researchers from NACADA (2014) promoted seven important principles underpinning student success. These principles have been embraced by higher education and are firmly grounded in research and theory; they consist of the following:

- personal validation,
- self-efficacy,
- a sense of purpose,
- active involvement,
- reflective thinking,
- social integration, and
- self-awareness.

I will provide brief details of five of these principles relevant to student support services

and academic success.

Personal validation. Students are more likely to achieve academic success when they feel valued by others. When students experience a sense of personal value and affirmation and perceive that they are valued by the staff of a learning institution, students exert greater effort to excel. In contrast, the opposite may prevail when students perceive they are depersonalized or marginalized through the practices and policies of an institution, causing them to flounder in their pursuit of success or to become disinterested in achieving their education goals (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Offering personal validation in the academic advising process reaffirms that an institution is concerned about its students.

Social integration. There is a greater level of student success when there are better interactions and interpersonal relations among students and their peers, faculty, staff, academic advisers, and administrators (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). Conversely, some students could be more prone to failing if they feel isolated, lonely, or alienated by other students or faculty (Tinto, 2012). In addition, other studies have revealed that students who are “socially integrated” and foster good relationships with advisers and others within the college community environment are much more likely to complete their programs successfully (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2012).

Self-Awareness. The principle of self-awareness has been long established, particularly in reference to a liberal arts education and espousing the “know thyself” mantra (Cross, 1982). Students who practice self-awareness enhance their abilities to succeed because they become more aware of their own thought processes, requirements,

and learning styles and habits. Students usually gain an increased self-awareness when they engage in reflective thinking and personal introspection, ascertain challenges, and self-regulate their own learning strategies to meet the demands of their learning needs (Pintrich, 1995; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991).

Many educators, including Braxton et al. (2013) who empirically tested a relationship between academic advising and student success, have concluded that academic advising promotes self-awareness and can propel students to academic success. Increasingly, administrators in college institutions are seeking to meet diverse student needs. Faculty advisers need to be engaged in advising activities and assessments so that students understand advising is more than just a service (He & Hutson, 2016, 2017). He and Hutson (2017) summarized recent work on academic advising as follows:

Wallace and Wallace (2015) highlighted four basic categories of information, according to Higginson's (2000) framework, necessary for faculty members to know: internal (institutional) environment, external environment, student needs, and adviser self-knowledge. The checklist they created serves as a self-assessment measure, especially for first-year faculty advisers as they explore information content to guide their advising practices. (p. 69)

Intentional engagement. The only advisers who are able to influence student success and retention significantly are those who engage with their assigned students to facilitate student success. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) examined the dimensions of the college experience and indicated that both student behaviors and institutional conditions influence students' college experiences. Institutions have control over engagements such as academic advising, and they should ensure these engagements

are well-designed. The concept of engagement for academic advising and success is significant. Because all institutions have some control over the amount and quality of such learning engagements, “academic advising can serve as a powerful lever in improving the college student experience” and in promoting retention and graduation rates, as well as learning and academic success (Campbell & Nutt, 2008, p. 5).

Many advocates of academic advising have advanced the idea that having students engaged in their learning environment through advising is a necessity for student success. As such, academic advising systems often gradually shift the responsibility of planning and goal setting from the adviser to the advisee (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). Drake (2013) suggested that advisors should recognize and care for their students. For example, a planned meeting with an adviser is an intrusive engagement or a form of intrusive “caring” that may improve the learning and retention of vulnerable students. Abelman and Molina (2002) confirmed that intrusive advising interventions have a significant positive impact on student grades and graduation outcomes and may also protect students who are at risk of dropping out. He and Hutson (2016) posited that multiple approaches (e.g., cognitive, educational, and psychological) to academic advising can be integrated into intentional engagements with students. He and Hutson also referred to the process of academic advising as an ongoing, durable relationship between academic advisers and students that relates to a student’s academic goals. Ultimately, any academic adviser’s intervention that brings about a positive change can also directly affect both the adviser and the student (Kohle & Fitzpatrick, 2015). It therefore appears that advisers can, in fact, play an integral role in college students’ experiences and academic success.

Campbell and Nutt (2008) claimed that “academic advising can and should play a pivotal role in directing student behavior to those activities that will nurture and support their success toward educational, career, and life goal achievement” (p. 5). Hunter and White (2004) opined that “academic advising can be the only structured campus engagement that can guarantee students’ sustained interaction with a caring and concerned adult who can help them shape a meaningful learning experience for themselves” (p. 12). Consequently, engagement activities such as academic advising can strengthen and improve the college experience. However, not all advising engagements are serviceable: Punyanunt-Carter, Nance, and Wrench (2014) believed that faculty advisers need professional development training to be effective academic advisers.

Several surveys have been conducted over the last two decades to examine student college satisfaction. Worthy of mention is the National Survey on Student Engagement (2005). In significant findings related to academic advising, 57% of the students indicated the quality of advising at their institutions was average, and most first-year students cited friends or family as their main source of academic advising. This finding is disconcerting because family and friends may lack the basic requisite skills needed to engage in the advisement process.

Kostovich and Thurn (2013) noted that academic advising programs and engagements could help students’ academics by encouraging them to increase their involvement and improve their perceptions. Chen (2014) also referred to student engagement as a transformational learning process and an essential alteration in how people see themselves and their surroundings. To this end, Schlossberg’s transition theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995) was introduced into the higher education literature as a

conceptual framework for working with various student populations and improving students' engagement to promote academic success.

Trends in Advising and Student Success

Researchers for several studies have examined the trends and issues surrounding academic advising and student success. White (2015) and Troxel (2018) provided credence to the submissions by proponents of academic advising who purported that scholarly academic advising is so significant that it should be considered for in-depth academic inquiry. Because some researchers have relied on a single institution or small samples that produce findings with questionable generalizations when applied to other institutional contexts, Troxel posited that researchers need new, repeatable studies to draw conclusions about the significance of academic advising at the community college level. White also concluded that to be scholarly and authoritative, a “healthy inquisitiveness” is necessary to look at the “current practices of academic advising and to develop new knowledge of how it can be practiced” (p. 274). Two studies that meet these specifications are Tovar (2015) and Lawton (2018). Tovar focused on a Latino community of college students and found that the “interactions with institutional agents (faculty and academic counselors) and select student support programs influence[d] success (i.e., grade point average) and intentions” to complete degrees (p. 46). Lawton recognized the beneficial merit of academic advising and policies designed to deliver meaningful student experience to individuals engaging in transitional change. While these researchers identified the positives of advising, Sechelski and Slate (2018) found the majority of students who participated in their surveys, regardless of gender, were not satisfied with the advising services provided by their community colleges.

Researchers have continued to posit the benefits of academic advising at the community level. Poirier's (2015) dissertation is noteworthy because of the emphasis in the findings that the role of advising in supporting students' academic success is crucial: "a focus on advising to ensure substantial career clarity is likely the single greatest enhancement that Ontario [College] could implement" (p. 81). Student academic success could be considered as synonymous with academic achievement, which is characterized by satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance during students' college experience. Academic leaders in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACC, 2013) have reestablished the need for a renewed focus on student success, which they posited could "reinvigorate the public's appreciation" (p. 18) of higher education. These leaders also indicated that while student immersion and engagement in learning can be supported in many ways, academic advising is now being recognized for its potential for success, particularly for new college students and especially those students who are traditionally underserved and academically unprepared because they may not know where to look for or access the resources needed to thrive in college.

Two highly known central principles of student success are student retention or degree completion in a student's program of choice and a student's academic achievement, as measured by a student's GPA. To foster student success, McFarlane and Thomas (2018) noted that higher education should include (a) institution-wide administration of advising, (b) student success initiatives stressing the importance of campus leadership "staying the course," and (c) a visionary agenda for student success. Further, Hancock, Hepworth, and Littlepage (2018), in their study exploring factors influencing student success, found that institutional commitment to this success was a

key variable that influences students to continue their journey to graduation. Academic advising should be an institutional cornerstone of commitment to students.

Summary of the Literature Review

Academic advising can, and likely will, be a means of supporting all students in the college learning environment. Habley (1994) submitted that a structured academic advising system in which every student can participate outside of a classroom setting is beneficial to community colleges. O'Banion (2013) noted that "academic advising is the second most important function in college" (p. 3) exclusive of actual teaching. However, while these assertions make sense, researchers need to support the literature on academic advising with evidence from more rigorous research.

Despite the theoretical and professional development of academic advisement, the evidence showing the benefits of advising is currently inadequate. The available literature lacks convincing evidence that advising, in practice, has a measurable impact on students (Hagen & Jordan, 2008). While those who conducted previous studies have found a positive correlation between academic advising and student retention and satisfaction (Kohle & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Vianden & Barlow, 2015), there are not many empirical research studies that have shown the relationship between advising and other university metrics. Additionally, the researchers behind the existing literature have focused mainly on a single institution or used a small sample, thus limiting the generalizability of their results throughout the field (Erlich & Russ-Eft, 2013; Metzner, 1989; Smith & Allen, 2014; Young-Jones et al., 2013). As such, it is necessary to conduct further studies to promote broader applicability of the research related to academic advising and academic success.

Many researchers have expounded on academic advising in several academic-related journals. In the Center for Community College Student Engagement's (CCCSE, 2014) national report, researchers outlined in detail the causal relationship between student outcomes and 14 specific educational practices in colleges, which were related to the improvement of student success and included elements of academic advising. In the study, students reported that academic advising was beneficial in assisting them to set and achieve goals for success.

Most students can and have critiqued their higher education programs. It becomes necessary, therefore, for higher education leaders to be cognizant of student perceptions of institutional services (Vianden, 2015; Vianden & Barlow, 2014). Moreover, recent reports have indicated that many students consider academic advising to be of primary importance in the learning environment (Noel-Levitz, 2014a, 2014b). Noel-Levitz further affirmed that in most cases, college students value academic advising as significantly more important than any other aspect of their education. Nutt (2015) submitted that many critics may not realize the inextricable link between student satisfaction and positive student outcomes. Similarly, Schreiner and Nelson (2013) explained that one of the most significant predictors of students completing their degrees is satisfaction with their college experience. The system of academic advising system is the platform for further exploration in this study for a more beneficial advising structure at CCC.

Implications

Few studies have been conducted relative to academic advising and student success. The implications of such a fact are significant because education processes should be well grounded in evidence-based information. Insufficient empirical data and

underpinnings surrounding academic advising and its effects on students' academic success may result in inappropriate advising structures, thus retarding students' progress. Schwartz and Holloway (2014) stated that an optimal advising process equally facilitates the growth of both advisee and adviser, and particularly strengthens a student's educational and social skills. Young-Jones et al. (2013) asked whether academic advising really impacts student success, and I believe it does.

Through email and face-to-face meetings, I will share the findings of this study with the participants and education personnel in the internal and external educational environment where this research was conducted. The findings of the study may influence the ability of CCC's administrators to produce proficient and skilled graduates who can function effectively in a competitive global environment. Thus, I expect higher learning administrators as well as academic, student affairs, and student services personnel will find it beneficial to examine the findings of this research to inform the necessary mechanisms that will advance their efforts in creating rewarding college experiences for their students. The findings may also be used to reevaluate current advising policies, models, and structures with a view to enhance the college transitional process and better outcomes for students.

Summary

Administrators at CCC recognize that as leaders in higher education, they continue to find themselves increasingly scrutinized by inside and outside parties and must engage strategic measures to demonstrate student satisfaction and learning. Because teaching students is essential to an institution's mission as well as incredibly important to those having an interest in the education sector, academic advising seems to offer the

potential for increasing student satisfaction and academic success. It is clear that academic advising serves as a connective bridge for students. Connecting through effective student engagement is vital for academic success, and academic advising is necessary to facilitate these critical connections. Moreover, despite the need to position academic advising as a student success strategy on college campuses, the process of advising well, as demonstrated by an analysis of the literature review, is clearly still developing and requires capable strategic core approaches and mechanisms needed for operation at learning institutions. Thus, I seek to explore the benefits and impact of the advising process at CCC and whether experienced advisers have the potential to develop stronger academic advising programs.

Regarding the trends relating to academic success in the literature review, it seems that several collaborative interventions are required to improve student success, for which a good academic advising structure is necessary. Furthermore, academic advising is a relatively new area—advising's core approaches and concrete structures will need to be better defined in the future for effective coordination at the community college level. Discovering and designing these core approaches is fundamental to providing the expected positive experiences of students. The need for more rigorous yet analytical methods indicates a critical gap in the literature related to how college administrators can design student support programs more effectively. The findings of my study increase the amount of attention that is given to advising as well as the process for creating more proactive and campus-wide strategies. In Section 2, I will present the study's qualitative design methodology components in relation to the context of the problem.

Section 2: The Methodology

In this section, I present the methodology components that are related to the basic qualitative research approach that I used in this study. Particularly, I provide an overview and justification of my study design and approach, which includes information about the setting, sample, measures to protect participants' rights, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques, as well as the findings and themes of the research study.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

My purpose in this study was to gain a better understanding of the academic advising system at the community college level, relative to students' academic success and graduation rates, through exploring how students and academic advisers perceive the advising structure at CCC. Academic advising is one of the valuable service components of the postsecondary college education system, which, according to the AACC (2013), consists of nearly half of undergraduate students nationwide. Because CCC students have not been receiving the required amount or quality of academic advising that the CCC attempts to give them, I also sought to identify practices that related to the subsequent effects of this gap in practice on students' ability to succeed academically and graduate in a specific program timeline. A lack of systematic information exists regarding this issue. Moreover, a gap appeared to exist between faculty advisers who possessed expertise in academic advising and those who did not possess advising skills. According to a 2017 CCC Office of Student Services report, student services officers observed an emerging issue regarding a significant decrease in advising (30%) and student graduation rates (20%) between 2015 and 2017. This situation became a serious concern for the administrators of the college because it was not in accordance with the goals of CCC as a community-learning institution or with the critical educational principle of forging a foundation for successful academic outcomes for students.

The design that I used for this research study was a basic qualitative design. I based my decision to employ this specific design because this approach better addressed the specificity of the problem that I explored in the study. Because academic advising is a significant, supportive mechanism involving the staff and students of a learning institution, it was important that I adequately captured the main stakeholders' perceptions. I deemed the quantitative approach to be unsuitable for use in this study because of the quantitative design method, which involves standardized instruments and does not allow for an in-depth exploration of the views and experiences of study participants. The basic qualitative design has been advanced by proponents such as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and is considered suitable when a study is mainly constructivist in nature and requires interpreting participants' perceptions and experiences. In this study, I gathered pertinent information from multiple perspectives (emanating from three sets of participants) to determine the effects that academic advising has on students' success at the community college level.

I considered the guiding research questions and the necessity of the views, perspectives, and experiences of the participants as being critical to the decision regarding the study's research methodology. The main aspects of the guiding questions for this study surrounded three distinct areas: (a) graduates' experiences and perspectives of whether they consider academic advising important to their college outcomes; (b) the views of academic and faculty advisers regarding their competency level for and their effectiveness of engaging in the advising process; and (c) measures or changes that could contribute to a more beneficial advising structure. In addition, the choice of the approach was further strengthened by the assertions of several qualitative proponents who have suggested recommendations and explanations for conducting basic qualitative research studies and have advanced the design as a logical choice to capture participants' perceptions and experiences. These proponents include Patton (2015), Ravitch and

Carl (2015), and Thorne (2016).

Justification for the Choice of Design

Merriam (2002) proposed six approaches to research, from which I chose the basic qualitative design. I deemed such a basic design appropriate for the context of this study because I explored and examined the effects of academic advising on student success by (a) ascertaining the views and experiences of the sample participants and (b) identifying recurring patterns and themes emanating from the interviews about the advising process at CCC. In qualitative research, “the researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts a study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15), which is what I did in this study. Because the qualitative approach is an inductive investigative methodology, I was able to collect rich, descriptive data regarding the participants’ experiences. Merriam (2002) noted that basic qualitative studies are probably the most common form of qualitative research found in education. This idea appears to have some merit as the appropriateness of the qualitative design and the suitability of its methodology enabled me to gather and analyze information-rich data from those involved in the academic advising process. Therefore, basic qualitative inquiry formed the underlying principle of my study.

Setting

CCC is a 2- to 4-year community college located on an island in the West Indies, which offers associate and baccalaureate degrees. An estimated 300 students graduate on an annual basis. There were approximately 1,200 students and 80 faculty members at the time of this study. Approximately 60% of the faculty staff had been trained as academic advisers, whereas the other 40% were faculty members who were not formally trained in academic advising but were required to engage in academic advising. The institution has experienced significant challenges surrounding academic advising on the part of both students and the advisers.

Academic Advising and the Role of Advisers

Based on the literature in credible educational journals, the role of faculty advisers has become increasingly significant at community colleges. Grites (2013) recommended several actions and tasks that integrate strength-based theories into actual academic advising strategies for advisers as they assist students in creating a campus experience that encourages the students to set and reach individual goals and apply learning-outcome-focused approaches. Educators for NACADA (2012) have been staunch advocates of academic advising and have consistently promoted the benefits of advising programs to students, higher education institutions, and the global community. Arteaga (2015) and Battin (2014) also purported the benefits of academic advising, including positive student connections at learning institutions. The submissions by Arteaga and Battin noted the importance of academic advising both on the broader and the local levels. Zhang (2016) articulated copious benefits of academic advising after investigating how academic advising validates or invalidates a community college student's academic and social experiences. Because advising is a key component of higher education programs, advisers play a critical role in achieving the main purposes of advising programs, which often support student engagement and increase retention and long-term academic success.

In a 2017 information guide, CCC administrators referred to academic advising as a vital educational activity that provides accurate information about program requirements and available opportunities. By using academic adviser guidance, students may successfully complete their degrees in accordance with their abilities, aptitudes, and career goals despite the challenges they may encounter.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of three groups, namely (a) students who had engaged in the academic advising process and who had graduated from the CCC from 2016 to

2019, (b) academic advisers, and (c) faculty members who had served as advisers to students.

The purpose of using all three groups was to capture a rich and diverse perspective from the various personnel who engaged in the advising process.

Access to Participants

Prior to accessing the participants, in the absence of a CCC institutional review board, I asked the college administrator for permission to reach out to the students who had graduated in the specified time period and to the faculty who served as advisers (see Appendix B). I also received permission from the administrators of CCC to obtain faculty listings to alert the faculty of their required engagement (see Appendix C). I also applied and received approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study. After I received approval from the Walden IRB (Approval #02-03-20-0372034), I contacted the CCC to inform administrators of the approval, indicating my intention to commence data collection. I obtained a list of faculty members from the institution and retrieved the contact numbers and emails of faculty from CCC's online registry. I also perused CCC's alumni list and the telephone directory for graduates' contact information. I contacted graduates to advise them about the study and to ascertain their consent to participate in the study. I informed the participants that they were considered to be suitable for participation in the study because of their experiences surrounding the advising process at CCC, which would facilitate the necessary depth of inquiry required for the study.

The sample consisted of (a) eight students who graduated from the institution between 2016 and 2019 and who had met with an adviser in the course of the college experience, (b) three academic advisers, and (c) three faculty members who had engaged in academic advising at CCC. To be included in the study, student participants had to have engaged in the advising process for a minimum of three sessions. I deemed the sample adequate for gathering the

necessary views to address the local problem based on CCC's student and faculty population. Equally important, the sample was representative of the CCC's various areas of study, which ensured a college-wide perspective.

Protection of Participant Rights

I respected and adhered to the ethical principles underpinning research regarding rights of participants. Merriam (2002) stated that research should be conducted (a) ethically to foster confidence and trust in the findings and (b) in such a way that the participants' rights are protected. I began to collect data after I obtained Walden IRB approval to conduct this research study. I sought and obtained written permission to access participants. In addition, I solicited the participants' consent to participate in the study by email prior to the data collection interviews and stressed that their participation was voluntary. I also informed the participants of their right to decline to participate in the interview process, as well as to withdraw or disengage from the process at any time. I assured all participants of their anonymity and confidentiality as well as of the privacy of the process, including data analysis and handling, and of the integrity that would be involved when reporting the findings.

I coded the transcribed data, intentionally, to avoid names and to protect participants identify. I placed the data on a portable hard drive, protected by a password, and securely locked it in my personal study desk. I will retain the data for at least 5 years, after which I will destroy the relevant hard drive that stores the data.

Graduates

I used the purposeful sampling approach to select eight participants from a population of approximately 900 graduates. Merriam (2002) asserted that in qualitative research, the critical factor is not usually the number of respondents but the ability of each participant to provide perspectives regarding the problem under investigation. The sample of participants consisted of

four male and four female graduates who had attended CCC from 2016 to 2019 and who engaged with an adviser on at least three occasions during college. I considered this sample to be an adequate representation of student insights and experiences regarding the issue of academic advising at CCC.

Advisers

At CCC, there are approximately 80 staff members comprising two tenured groups of personnel who have served as academic and faculty advisers to students. According to information published in September 2016 by the CCC Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, advisers engaged in 16 to 18 hours of lecture on a weekly basis, with 2 additional hours scheduled daily for student advising without added remuneration. A sample of three faculty and three academic advisers provided their perspectives relative to the structure of the academic advising program at CCC. I considered the proportion and number of advisers to be appropriate and adequate to gather the necessary views to address the local problem and to mitigate against an overload of information.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was critical in this research study. Patton (2015) referred to the researcher as the instrument of the research. Until April 2018, I was employed for many years at CCC. However, I am currently employed in another area of our nation's government. Because I no longer worked at the CCC, I exercised no authority over the participants, and there was no recognizable institution-related bias; thus, I was able to engage in a fair and transparent data collection process.

Further, my previous experience as a faculty member was advantageous in that I had previously participated in the informal system of advising at CCC. I not only had an interest in the area of study but was also more adept at formulating strong interview protocol instruments to

collect the relevant data from the participants. My relationship with the participants, therefore, was a professional researcher, not a colleague or employee, although I was also in a better position to probe deeper for additional information during the interviews because of my familiarity with the CCC advising process. I was careful to avoid any perception of bias as I interacted with the participants and noted the deeper messages in the participants' responses during the interviews, thus making connections to the problem and mining the data that assisted me in addressing the problem.

Data Collection

I selected eight graduates to participate in the study by using the simple random sampling procedure. I extracted the sample of graduates from the 2016 to 2019 commencement booklets, which contained the names of the students who graduated on an annual basis. I conducted a similar procedure to determine a sample of three faculty advisers and three academic advisers who worked at CCC. I categorized the advisers into two groups of trained academic advisers and untrained faculty advisers. Through this small sample, I gathered the perspectives of graduates and advisers relative to their advising experiences at the CCC.

I used three interview protocols (Appendices C, D, and E) to capture the views of the college graduates and the two sets of advisers. These protocols were based on the systems theory, which is an area of inquiry through which researchers attempt to understand problems. The data collection process consisted of 14 individual interviews, which took place over the course of 4 weeks. The protocols consisted of open-ended questions that were related to my research questions, and each interview lasted for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The questions were sent to the participants by email ahead of the planned session to promote familiarity of content, which accelerated the interviewing process. I choose an interview setting with minimal distractions and closed the doors and windows to promote participants' privacy. I also explained

the purpose of the interview and assured the participants of confidentiality. After indicating the format and length of the interview, I also allowed the participants to clarify any doubts or reservations about the interview. By using open-ended questions, I was able to explore participants' responses more deeply, clarify questions accordingly, and better understand the issue being studied after developing an appropriate rapport with the participant.

I made audio recordings of each interview, which later helped me with creating the verbatim transcription. I made handwritten notes after each participant left the room and placed them in my research log that detailed each participant's informal responses. Morse (2015) submitted that because trustworthiness of results is the foundation of high-quality qualitative research, member checking is encouraged. I asked participants to verify the information they provided in order to minimize any discrepancies and promote trustworthiness. I shared the transcribed interview data with the participants during a member-checking process to confirm data accuracy by email prior to the data analysis process. I asked participants who engaged in the interviewing process to verify the information they provided in order to minimize any discrepancies, but there were none. I kept the digital transcription file in a locked drawer at my home to keep track of the data to ensure privacy. I engaged in the member-checking process to promote credibility of the data-analysis process and higher reliability of findings.

Data Analysis

Data Coding

I transcribed each recorded interview to a Microsoft Word document within 48 to 72 hours of the interview. The document was saved onto my computer hard drive and protected by password. I used pseudonyms in the transcription file to protect participants' privacy and to facilitate coding. I sorted the information from the transcripts according to ideas and perspectives relevant to the research questions and differentiated common and similar data

into units of analysis, which were based on variables surrounding academic advising and academic success. I used the top-down, deductive coding method, through which I developed a codebook and color codes that I matched with participants' transcript ID numbers for analysis. I used broad headings and then advanced to line-by-line coding with more specific information. As more data details emerged, I placed similar codes into the same categories and moved them around to detect consistent and overarching themes. I also indexed and synthesized the participants' perspectives and responses by using a color-coding system to keep track of data. I designated a different color for each transcript, used multiple lines for each similar unit of analysis of the transcript, and examined each colored unit of data for recurring regularities and themes. In the margin of the transcripts I noted the specific data provided, and then I disassembled the data into specific bits of information that I later organized into subcategories and classes of units that were subsumed under more abstract categories. I was able to deal with elements of discrepant data, or data that did not support (or appeared to contradict) patterns or explanations emerging from the data analysis when I used the thematic method of organization.

I later organized the information to generate and identify common themes at a glance. I placed these themes into categories by using columns in Microsoft Excel for a data matrix. The first vertical column of the matrix showed the code names for themes, and the horizontal row showed the code names for responses. As I populated the file, I made sure that the matrix showed each participant's views and responses as related to the themes and subthemes. I then copied and pasted the data into a Word document and labelled the data as an electronic file for ongoing analysis as necessary. I analyzed the responses of the three groups in the sample (graduates, academic advisers, and faculty members who acted as academic advisers) for data categories and themes, which I subsequently organized into tables.

Trustworthiness

Credibility. I strengthened the credibility of the findings by using the member checking process. Approximately one week after each interview, I asked the participants by email to review the interview transcripts. I then verified the information they provided to me. All the participants agreed with the transcribed information, which fostered trustworthiness, greater accuracy, and a correct interpretation of data without discrepancies.

Dependability. I promoted the reliability of my study by collecting and analyzing the data according to accepted practices of data collection and analysis. I also provided participants with a detailed description of how the data would be collected and analyzed, as well as a description of the member checking process. I used direct quotations and responses from participants to give voice to the participants and to enhance the reliability of the findings, which is a common technique in qualitative research.

Discrepant Cases. Another strategy I used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study was to examine the data for discrepant case. However, I did not recognize any significant discrepancy. A discrepant case may have been a graduate who had not engaged in any advising session yet managed to be interviewed as a participant, which could conflict with recognized emerging themes and affect the transferability of a study's findings. Additionally, I highlighted the findings in an electronic format with a comprehensive overview of the study to ensure dependability. To promote the dependability and credibility of my study, I ensured that data collection, analysis, data handling, and reporting were done with integrity and without discrimination and bias to capture the essence of the research process and findings.

Data Security

I sorted, coded, and converted all the raw data to an electronic file. I labeled the electronic recordings, and then to prevent public's access to the files, I stored them in a secure

place for a minimum of 5 years, after which they will be destroyed according to the requirements of the university.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was that the sample was selected from a single community institution, thus limiting the generalization of the findings. Another limitation was the small size of the sample, which may not be representative of the entire population at CCC. The third limitation was that this study is qualitative in nature and allows for significant levels of subjectivity.

Findings

Overview

After analyzing the data from the samples of former students who graduated from CCC over the period 2016 to 2019 and from the academic advisers and faculty members who engage in academic advising, three main themes emerged from the data. The themes were: (a) factors for successful advising, (b) strategies to improve academic advising, and (c) recommendations for a more impactful advising experience. The themes also formed the basis for the white paper policy project.

The study's purpose was to acquire a better understanding of the academic advising system at CCC and its implications for students' academic success and graduation through exploring students' and academic advisers' perceptions of the system. The responses to the research questions proposed for this study captured the following: (a) the graduates' and advisers' perceptions of the advising program, (b) advisers' suitability, training, approachability, and related benefits, (c) and the impact of the advising program relative to students' success and (d) recommendations for improving the system. I used a basic qualitative design and approach which allowed me to harness multiple perspectives regarding the advising program at CCC. In

Table 1, I outlined the prominent themes and subthemes that aligned with the study's findings during the analysis of the data. I choose to use a standard qualitative table to present the data because I think the information is best displayed in the tabular model.

Table 1

Themes and Responses From Participant Interviews

Major themes and subthemes	Participants (<i>N</i> = 14)
Factors for successful advising	13 (93%)
Adviser is approachable, experienced, interested, helpful, and has an open-door policy.	
Good relationship between adviser and student.	
Strong adviser knowledge base.	
Adviser is understanding and welcoming.	
Adviser and student plan and keep a schedule.	
Adviser sets goals and objectives and uses an advising model.	
Adviser accepts tasks and does not consider advising as a forced duty.	
Adviser and student demonstrate willingness in carrying out advising activity.	
Adviser and student embrace advising as a necessary activity and an important element of the adviser's job description and the student's college experience.	
Strategies to improve academic advising	14 (100%)
Provide a remuneration package for advisers for their advising functions.	
Promote greater student and adviser sensitivity to the advising program.	
Design a more organized advising system that allows for feedback and follow up after an advising session.	
Have a cadre of personnel for advising.	
Set defined criteria for the selection of advisers.	
Give advisers the option to engage in the advising process.	
Recommendations for a more impactful advising experience	10 (71%)
Create an intervention-based advising system.	
Advance opportunities to increase adviser's knowledge of student programs and academic paths.	
Cultivate a system for monitoring and documenting student advising.	
Embark on a system of remuneration or incentives to promote advising.	
Set in motion an initiative to employ specifically trained staff or peer counselors to carry out advising.	
Espouse throughout the institution the benefits of academic advising to students.	

Analysis of the Findings

Perceptions and Views of the Advising Program Relative to Students' Success

The results presented in Table 1 suggest that both advisers and graduates are important for maintaining a good, symbiotic advising system. All 14 participants indicated that advisers should understand and know the advising process, which includes knowing programs and available resources to help students be successful. Interviewees also asserted that advisers should be approachable and exhibit a high level of interest in students at all times. For example, graduate participant 1 stated, "A good adviser readily understands student concerns from a student's point of view and is ready to provide the necessary guidance." However, not all participants thought that advisers were as knowledgeable, interested, or prepared as they should be relative to their work in advising sessions.

Many graduates had negative views of CCC advisers. Graduate participant 2 stated: "My perception of the advisers is that they are not knowledgeable enough of the courses I am pursuing to advise me. The purpose is defeated. What is the use of having an adviser when I am not advised properly?" Graduate participant 3 declared, "I really don't need an adviser anyway; they are a waste of time. I could have made it in college all by myself. I was forced into attending the sessions with an unprepared adviser." Graduate participant 4 stated, "My adviser [did] not put enough effort into advising because she said that it is not her job to advise a student. She is only being paid for lecturing and she is forced into advising."

Adviser approachability was a major theme in graduates' perceptions of academic advising. Graduate participant 5 pointed out that academic advisers should have an open-door policy to facilitate "drop-ins" outside of designated advising sessions and should be available to students in a variety of modes, including email and WhatsApp. In the interviews, graduates registered negative views of the advising program they engaged in, and their

perceptions of a satisfactory advising system were not in alignment with their experiences.

The advisers disclosed that many advisers failed to demonstrate the necessary interest in the advising process. They did not exert the required efforts to alter students' perceptions of advising. For example, adviser participant 8 reported:

We are aware that the students are not exhibiting a high level of interest in the advising program, but the students are the ones who are losing out on the opportunity. If they are not interested, why should we be?

Further, adviser participant 10 disclosed, "We don't have the time to engage in academic advising sessions because we have to focus on teaching. There should be specific[ally] trained staff for that process." However, adviser participant 14 noted a more positive view of advising:

Advising gives me immense satisfaction. I am elated that I can play a significant role in the students' experience. In fact, I deem it a great privilege to be so involved and feel that that advising is an academic responsibility which provides an opportunity to know students and better guide them to successful graduation. My students enjoy the advising sessions, and I believe that I have a positive impact on their success and outcomes.

Impact of Academic Advising on Students' Success

Three graduate participants thought that the advisement process had a positive impact on them. Graduate participant 1 indicated that advising increased her sensitivity to her chosen academic program and to the institution because the guidance she received enabled her to not only engage in a smoother transition from high school to college but also attain satisfactory grades, have a better work ethic, and complete her program in a timely manner. Graduate participant 2 stated that his advising experiences helped him to

have good grades and progress to graduation because his adviser kept him on the right path. Graduate participant 3 declared:

Advising helped me to be what I am today in my current situation and to be assertive and honest. I am also more able to speak in a forthright manner, and I have developed time management skills on a more personal basis.

Four other interview participants felt that advising had little or no impact on students. Participant 4 stated outright that advising was a waste of personal time. Participant 6 reported, “I was not interested; the adviser spoke, and I did not pay attention to what he was saying.” Participant 8 affirmed, “I just listened to my adviser and hoped he would finish quickly.” Adviser participant 10 noted, “Advisers are only meeting with students because it’s mandatory. The students lacked motivation and are indifferent to the adviser[s].” Adviser participant 12 opined, “Advisers needed to take more of an initiative to set up meetings with students rather than students reaching out to do so.” The views of the participants demonstrated the need to review and evaluate the current advising structure at CCC.

On the topic related to advisers’ initiative, adviser participant 9 disclosed, “The students are not interested. They are just here to ‘lime.’ The process is a waste of time because invariably, students do not turn up for scheduled advising sessions although the students are the beneficiaries of the process.” Nevertheless, adviser participant 14 described advising as rewarding and satisfying; this participant thought advising was an activity that helped students overcome academic and other college-related obstacles and that guided them to successful graduation.

Recommendations for Improving the CCC Advising Structure

Graduate participants 1 and 4 provided no recommendations, indicating that they

could not think of anything that would contribute to a more beneficial and impactful advising structure at CCC.

Graduate participant 2 stated: “There should be improved adviser advising skills and resourcefulness of advisers to guide students to interventions and appropriate referrals and increased follow-up and follow-through of students after advising sessions to ensure students receive the necessary assistance based on need.”

Graduate participant 3 proposed, “There should be more frequent advising sessions, more knowledgeable advisers, and better adviser-student relationship[s] where students can talk about their concerns, issues, and interests and be guided for better decision making.”

Graduate participant 5 suggested that there should be more emphasis on training to improve adviser skills and that the institution’s administrators should exercise diligence in assigning advisers to students.

Adviser participant 8 remarked, “The institution should develop a stronger advising policy regarding [the] channeling of confidential information, and the process can be greatly improved if soundproof, private spaces are available for advising.”

Adviser participant 9 mentioned, “The advising process should be considered an important and an additional duty. Therefore, appropriate time and remuneration should be provided for advising to be carried out successfully.”

Adviser participant 10 recommended, “Faculty members should not be advisers, and the institution should provide trained persons such as counselors to carry out the process along with special training and set[ting] up defined criteria to be selected as an adviser.”

Adviser participant 12 urged, “Advisers should consider a scripted and scientific approach to advising instead of the ad hoc, ‘one size fits all’ approach being used, which does not necessarily facilitate the interest and success of the student.”

These are all reasonable recommendations from the graduates and the advisers. If considered and implemented, these recommendations would redound to CCC's benefit and advance an improved advising structure for fostering students' success. The views of the participants clearly demonstrated the need to review and evaluate the present advising structure at CCC. Administrators of the college need to place more attention to advising to foster greater buy-in of the process by both the advisers and students.

The data from my study confirmed the findings that an advising problem exists at the local level, providing credence to the research questions which surrounded the experiences and perspectives of graduates regarding the importance of academic advising relative to their college outcomes. When shared with education stakeholders, these views of academic and faculty advisers and graduates regarding the structure and effectiveness of the advising process and measures or changes that can contribute to a more enhanced advising structure at the institution will be invaluable.

Relation of Findings to the Larger Body of Literature

My study, which was conducted at the CCC, is related to a larger body of literature. The findings are supported by Kimball and Campbell (2013), who indicated that advising strategies are critical for supporting student success, and by Kot (2013), who affirmed that advising should be inclusive and connected to organizational structures and cultures. However, Kot also noted that there must be aggressive operationalization of academic advising to make connections between academic experiences and positive learning outcomes, which directly affect an institution's retention and graduation rate.

Based on the findings from my study, many faculty and students at CCC have not yet recognized the significance of academic advising. The negative effects that students experience in response to a decrease in both the amount and quality of advising they receive from their

institution is explored in the work of Siming et al. (2015), who asserted that without frequent interaction and close working relationships between students, faculty, and academic advisers, a student's educational experience is detrimentally affected. It is important, therefore, that measures be implemented to change the views of students and faculty at the CCC regarding advising.

The study's findings demonstrate that although some students at the CCC negatively perceive their academic advisers and the advising system, other students are satisfied with their advisers who displayed a caring attitude and interest toward students and their goals and success. This positive feedback provides credence to my choice of conceptual framework, Schlossberg's transition theory, which focuses on the transitional changes adults experience throughout life and the means by which people cope and adjust. The theory postulates that a good academic advising system utilized by college students, particularly during the first semester, may significantly increase students' retention and promote success, especially when the system uses the 4S system as described in Section 1. Joslin (2018) proposed that leaders in higher education institutions are deemphasizing solo and isolated student support initiatives, instead recommending that administrators identify and address institution-wide structures for improving academic advising. Ellis (2014) emphasized a student's first advising session, during which advisers should gain an awareness of the student's expectations and goals. Giving advisers necessary training and preparation will help them assist students with their goals and reshape any negative thought process or perceptions of the program and the course of study which the students may entertain.

Education administrators and policy crafters are required to examine ways to improve academic advisement programs. Snyder-Duch and Schwartz (2017) acknowledged the significance of students having a good experience at the community college level. Institutions should be held accountable for the actions their leaders take in relation to advising because

according to Zarges et al. (2018), advising has been embedded in higher education for decades and is fundamental to any learning institution. Further, Kim and Sax (2014) and O’Keeffe (2013) also affirmed that advisers who neglect or do not support students make colleges and universities more prone to student attrition and ultimately contribute to a lower graduation rate, revealing the importance of having a cadre of committed and dedicated advisers at the community college level.

A common concurrence among education stakeholders is that colleges and universities have a mandate to help students with their goals. Education is intended to assist maturing youth to the point where students can cope with the basic needs of their lives. Further, Ohrt (2018) found that students who receive a more developmental advising approach see their advisers as trustworthy, and the students listen and progress well. As a result of his findings, Ohrt concluded that a more scientific approach to advising should be considered. Therefore, the administrators of CCC should consider advancing a formal approach such as developmental or appreciative advising at the institution. The potential for increasing academic output, along with the idea that students will perceive their academic experience to be more satisfying, gives credence to the need to further explore how academic advising at CCC can be improved.

Conclusion

To collect the data for this study, I used three interview protocols consisting of open-ended questions, which served as a guide for the participants. I adhered to the principles of data collection and analysis, and I maintained the participants’ privacy. The themes which emerged from the participants’ responses were color coded and analyzed, which led to the findings I presented. I endeavored to foster credibility, validity, and data reliability through member checking. The data were stored and locked away for destruction in about 5 years.

In Section 3, I offer a detailed description of the project I designed from this study. Based the findings, I developed a white paper regarding educational policy for academic advising at the community level. In the project, I present specific structural changes for the CCC advising program that are needed to improve the institution's academic advising program. I also offer support and guidance based on theoretical framework for actions that could be taken to improve the situation and problem at the local level.

Section 3: The Project

Increasingly, community colleges are expected to respond to the changing demographics of higher education in the quest to provide better academic advising services that promote the academic success of students and propel them to graduation. As a result of the push to provide enhanced advising services, educational professionals, particularly those comprising NACADA, continue to extoll the benefits of academic advising. Hence, administrators of colleges place a strong focus on academic advising as an institutional strategy with hope for improving students' college experience. The purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of the academic advising system at CCC and its implications for students' academic success and graduation through exploring students' and academic advisers' perceptions of the institution's advising system. The views of the participants clearly demonstrated the need to review and evaluate the academic advising structure at CCC: Administrators need to place more attention on academic advising to foster greater buy-in of the process by both the advisers and the students.

The experiences and perspectives of graduates and advisers relative to CCC academic advising and college outcomes in my research study confirm that a problematic gap exists at the local level. Certainly, the views of academic and faculty advisers and graduates regarding the structure and effectiveness of the advising process and measures or changes that can contribute to a more enhanced advising structure at the institution could serve to be invaluable when shared with education stakeholders.

The project that I developed from the study was a white paper, which can assist administrators and policy developers in their decision making regarding an enhanced academic advising system, not only at CCC but also at other community-learning institutions. Presenting the results and recommendations in a white paper provided me with the opportunity to directly

advance the document among education stakeholders, therefore increasing the possibility of the project's success.

In Section 3, I will present the goals and rationale of the project genre and the specific project consideration based on the analysis of this study's data, including the way in which I addressed the problem identified in the research study through the content of the white paper. Further, I offer a thorough review of the literature, consisting of relevant articles and perspectives from diverse sources, which undergirds the project genre. Also included in this section is a comprehensive description of the project's required resources, barriers, opportunities, execution, and implications for social change.

Description and Goals

Several modes of presenting the findings of a research study can be used. According to Creswell (2016), one type of research report used in educational settings is a policy or position paper, referred to as a white paper, which presents information to policy makers and stakeholders for decision making. A white paper, as defined by Stelzner (2007), is a hybrid of an article and a marketing brochure that proposes a solution and intends to persuade its audience. Additionally, Kolowich (2014) described a white paper as a "persuasive, authoritative, in-depth report". To disseminate my study's findings, I chose to write a white paper that administrators can use to enhance college advising structures. In the policy white paper, I delineated the graduates' and advisers' perspectives relative to the system of academic advising at CCC and provided key recommendations to improve the academic advising system (see Appendix F). The policy white paper format was suitable to present the information because such a format allows for an easy depiction of findings and recommended strategies for improvement. Creswell (2016) posited that the white paper appropriately highlights key findings and their implications for practice to an identified audience. Consequently, this white paper aligns with the study's conceptual

framework, Schlosberg's transition theory, and Lowenstein's (2014) theory of advising as integrative learning. My main goals of this white paper were to (a) provide insight into the advising structure at the CCC from the perspective of students and advisers, (b) further explore the CCC advising structure within the model of Lowenstein's theory of advising as integrative learning for academic advising at the community college level, and (c) posit key recommendations as strategies to improve CCC's advising structure and the student experience at CCC.

Review of the Literature

This review is a comprehensive summary of the literature regarding the genre of white papers in publishing research. I conducted database searches using the Walden University online library and Google Scholar. I searched terms such as *white papers*, *position papers*, *policy statements*, and *policy recommendations*. The Walden University online library offered access to several databases, including Academic Search Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, and Thoreau. A Google Scholar and Thoreau search of the term *white papers* yielded some vital information; however, there was limited information on white papers from peer-reviewed articles.

Publishing Research

Primarily, research findings are shared through journals, dissertations, and conference presentations (both oral and written). As indicated by Merriam (2009), one must determine the audience for a report before selecting a mode of publication because each audience has its own objective for reading the report. Reports for policy makers and school personnel are typically oral presentations and policy or position papers (i.e., white papers). Although audience is important, a writer must also consider the type of data that will be in the report. Creswell (2015) indicated that qualitative results may be reported using either of two general structures: (a)

qualitative scientific research with detailed procedures and (b) a traditional analysis of themes, reflections and the author's stance all woven into an unfolding story, which is more applicable for ethnographies. Within Creswell's general structures, Lodico et al. (2010) presented six formats for writing the text of qualitative reports: thematic, historical, performance-based, amalgamative, theoretical, and traditional scientific. The thematic format described by Lodico et al., which allows for the discussion of themes as they emerge from the data analysis, is the most commonly used format among qualitative researchers. This format also falls within the general scientific structure described by Creswell.

White papers offer an opportunity to present research findings in a clear, concise manner, highlighting key findings and making recommendations to enact change (Creswell, 2012). As a means of disseminating this research, the white paper was the best medium to present the results of the study's data.

Scholarly Rationale of White Papers

White papers are becoming increasingly useful. Stelzner (2007) stated that white papers have their origin in governmental publications but have evolved into a powerful marketing tool (p. 3). Originally, white papers were legislative documents that served to justify and support political positions (Kolowich, 2014). However, more diverse groups are increasingly using white papers. Neuwirth (2017) concurred with the increased usage of white papers and indicated that the best white papers educate, provoke innovative thinking, and clearly communicate a point of view using statistically sound data and well-researched findings. Further, Evans (2016) stated the white paper provides an opportunity to "deliver insight and thought leadership" in a creative way (p. 1). White papers presently educate a target group, present an identified position, or evaluate a product or theory (Gordon & Graham, 2003, p. 3). The white paper is a suitable medium through

which decision makers can absorb the essence of research in a shorter period of time while still having access to the details of the research if needed.

Because the white paper now has a broader appeal and is considered an educational document grounded in facts, it is an effective format through which to inform educational stakeholders and administrators of community-learning institutions of the results of this study. In my white paper, I analyzed graduates' and advisers' perceptions of CCC's advising structure, its influence on students' success, and possible solutions for an enhanced system of advising that could promote students' success and completion to degrees in the designated time, considering Lowenstein's (2014) theory of advising as integrative learning.

The White Paper Genre

According to researchers, white papers made their debut in politics with the *British White Paper of 1922*, which outlined legislation in governmental policy. From there, the white paper evolved and was used in technology and marketing fields as new products were developed or to position a product in a market (Kolowich, 2016; Stelzner, 2007; Willerton, 2013). The use of white papers is exponentially growing: a general Google search for *white paper* in 2001 garnered a million documents, and by 2006 that number grew to 329 million (Stelzner 2007). Gordon and Graham (2003) defined the *white paper* as a marketing tool, a cross between "a glossy brochure and a technical manual" (p. 2). This definition reflects the position of other authors (Kolowich, 2016; Neuwirth, 2017; Stelzner, 2007). White papers can generate leads, provide thought leadership, and close sales (Stelzner 2007).

Stelzner (2007) indicated that the white paper is a subtle marketing tool because its forefront purpose is to educate its audience in technical, business-related, governmental, and educational arenas. Although no industry standards exist for writing white papers, these documents are persuasive in nature, average 12 pages, and serve to present problems and

possible solutions to an intended audience (Gordon & Graham, 2003; Stelzner, 2007). White papers generally include (a) an introduction to the problem, (b) a background of scholarship that addresses the problem, (c) a solution and its benefits, (d) proposed costs, and (e) an evaluation of the new strategy (Gordon & Graham, 2003; Sakamuro, Stolley, & Hyde, 2016; Stelzner, 2007). Additionally, white papers tend to be circulated via the internet. As such, white papers are structured using color, graphics, and appropriate vernacular language (Evans, 2016; Kolowich, 2014; Neuwirth, 2017). Though they are distributed in a similar manner as blog posts and e-books, white papers are “more serious in tone, less flashy and more heavily researched” (Kolowich, 2014, p. 2).

My white paper aligns with this general format described by Gordon and Graham (2003) and Sakamuro et al. (2016): It has a cover page, an executive summary, an introduction to the problem, scholarship addressing the problem, recommended solutions, and references. I will disseminate the white paper for my project study to administrators, policy makers, and stakeholders of the institution by email and hold subsequent face-to-face meetings with recipients as necessary. The white paper will eventually be placed in the CCC library and on stakeholders’ websites, such as the government’s Ministry of Education.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

One method of disseminating research results to policy makers and school personnel is decidedly a white paper. As the researchers in the literature indicated, this medium can be used to garner support for a recommended strategy and to guide a decision-making process and initiate structural change. The results of the data collected in Section 2 indicated that definitive challenges remain within the existing CCC academic advising system. Thus, in the white paper, I present possible solutions for enhancing institutional academic advising and students’ experiences based on Lowenstein’s (2014) theory of integrative advising to address these issues.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

This is a critical time in the history of CCC, because the institution is seeking to become accredited. As part of this process, a strong push is underway to have CCC become a student-centered institution. Undoubtedly, the findings and recommendations emanating from this research can be used as a valid strategy to improve the advising structure and overall student experience at the institution. During graduations and other events, CCC promotes its motto, “strive for excellence.” In finding solutions to its academic advising problems, CCC administrators—and local government leaders by extension—will need to demonstrate their commitment to this motto by addressing advising issues, which will require appropriating human and financial resources. For example, the Office of Academic and Student Affairs should be adequately equipped with trained advisers to facilitate the advising process at the institution. Therefore, there may be a need to employ and train specialized personnel and remunerate them accordingly. As for disseminating the white paper to CCC administrators and stakeholders, the necessary resources, including technology, email, and website modes, already exist.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

The findings of the study showed that (a) there are untrained academic advisers who are required to engage in the academic advising process and (b) the advisers, whether trained or untrained, who do not consider advising as a component of their job duties. Therefore, the institution must change the orientation of faculty’s responsibilities. Because advisers do not consider advising as a duty, many are reluctant to engage in the process. This may be problematic to the administration, so it would be best to offer some form of remuneration to motivate and reward advisers. In addition, students’ views toward advising need to change; they should see academic advising as imperative to their success. The role of student affairs services will be critical in espousing a renewed perception of advising for students.

The CCC administration will need to address these existing barriers (i.e., a lack of trained faculty advisers and of the positive student perceptions of advising). Therefore, prior to circulating this white paper, I will initiate individual meetings with the administrators of the institution, including those who are in the Office of Student Services. These meetings will serve to inform each key faction of CCC of the importance of addressing these barriers and will begin the process of garnering their support for embracing the recommendations of this project. Such recommendations include integrating “a more holistic view of student engagement in the first year that embraces both academic and social dimensions and their role in promoting successful transitions” as a catalyst for buy-in and change (Krause & Coates, 2008, p. 500), as well as adopting a change management model, such as Kotter’s 8-step model. According to Kotter International (2016), change within an organization will fail unless the organization takes a holistic approach and engages its workforce. Without taking these steps, I envision that some may resist any new change, just as there was resistance when the college began to require faculty to advise students. Applying Kotter’s model will require a committee mandated with the tasks of designing a new academic advising structure and ensuring its implementation and evaluation.

Roles and Responsibilities

As a scholar-practitioner, my role is to present the results of this research study to the administrators of CCC and to be an advocate for the implementation of the solutions I recommend in the white paper. Moreover, as a former member of a stakeholder group, my responsibility extends to internal stakeholders (e.g., the faculty and staff): I need to inform them of the recommendations and ask for their support in actualizing the changes. However, my main responsibility is to ensure that the CCC administration forms a core committee who can spearhead the actualization process.

Project Evaluation

As noted previously, the goals of the white paper were to (a) provide insight into the advising structure at the CCC from the perspective of students and advisers, (b) further explore the CCC advising structure within the model of Lowenstein's (2014) theory of advising as integrative learning for academic advising at the community college level, and (c) posit key recommendations as strategies to improve CCC's advising structure and the student experience at CCC. These goals fit in with the institution's mission to promote excellence of service. Thus, the evaluation of this white paper will be formative and summative.

Because the white paper is a specific report written for an identified audience, evaluating its effectiveness lies in gaining comments and questions from the target group of readers (York, 2017). Therefore, feedback garnered through email from the administrators will determine if they understand and appreciate the perspectives of the students and advisers. Additionally, I expect administrators to express their views on the recommendations I made in the white paper, thus opening a dialogue for instituting these recommendations. The formative assessment of the effectiveness of the project will be realized through the CCC administrators' questions, comments, and concerns. In the long term, the summative assessment of the effectiveness of the project will be ascertained by having the CCC administration implement my recommendations and then assess graduation rates and future graduates' feedback regarding advising.

Project Implications for Social Change

Local Implications

In the white paper I recommend strategies to improve the institution's advising structure and students' overall success and experience. Understanding the existing advising structure at CCC and accepting the recommendations from the findings would enable the institution to enact the necessary changes needed for improvement. Embracing and adopting the integrative learning

principle for conducting academic advising between advisers and students is critical in a learning environment. Essentially, this theory of integrative learning is a guide for administrators and educators to (a) discover that “advising is one of the most important tools they have at their disposal in fulfilling their teaching and learning mission” and (b) recognize that the educational backgrounds of advisers should be “broad enough to help students understand the complementarity of the various ways of knowing in the disciplines they study” (Lowenstein, 2014, para. 69, 72). In this regard, the required toolkit for an improved advising system, which could lead to students’ overall success and thereafter impact the community by producing more developed and balanced graduates, is available.

Far-Reaching Implications

As the CCC and other similar institutions better influence the lives of students, graduates can contribute at the national, regional, and international levels; influence policies of various forms; and attain any position they desire. The implications for social change noted in the white paper therefore lie in the development of generations of graduates who have much to offer society. In addition, within the white paper I espouse the theory of integrative learning, which when the advisers discuss applying this theory in their work, they could find ways for it to be possible for them to embrace their role as scholar-practitioners who foster student scholarship while creating scholarship in their respective fields. Placing integrative advisers on the same level as faculty will elevate community college learning institutions.

Summary

In Section 3 of this project study, I provided a description of the goals and rationale for using the white paper as the project genre. Additionally, I presented a review of the literature and a detailed description of project resources, barriers, roles, and responsibilities. I also discussed how the white paper’s success could be evaluated. I concluded the section by discussing the

implications for social change should CCC administrators, advisers, and educators implement the recommendations in the white paper. In Section 4, I present my reflections and self-development process as I conducted this research.

Section 4: Reflections

My purpose in this research study was to gain a better understanding of the academic advising system at CCC and its implications for students' academic success and graduation through exploring students' and academic advisers' perceptions of the institution's advising system. I was inspired to explore the problem because, as a former faculty member and student adviser at CCC, I am aware of the significant challenges surrounding academic advising at the institution. I am also conversant with the high levels of adviser reluctance and resistance to engage in advising at CCC, a situation that resulted in significant discordance and disharmony. Many reports at CCC surround the issue of insufficient academic advising and the grave concerns of fear of failure and other adverse effects that stem from a lack of academic advising. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do CCC graduates perceive the relationship between academic advising and student success?
2. How do CCC advisers perceive the relationship between academic advising and student success?
3. What do graduates think would contribute to a more beneficial CCC academic advising structure for student success?
4. What do advisers think would contribute to a more beneficial CCC academic advising structure for student success?

I considered the guiding research questions and the views, perspectives, and experiences of the participants as being critical to the study. Accordingly, the main aspects of the guiding questions for this study surrounded three distinct areas: (a) graduates' experiences and perspectives of whether they considered academic advising important to their college outcomes; (b) the views of academic and faculty advisers regarding their competency level for and their

effectiveness of engaging in the advising process; and (c) measures or changes that could contribute to a more beneficial advising structure. The main goal of my research was to inform policy developers, CCC administrators, and other stakeholders of strategies for developing an enhanced advising structure.

Project Strengths

The outcome from this study is a white paper. As discussed in Section 3, a policy white paper document was suitable for the nature and dissemination of the findings and recommendations of the research study for the identified audience of stakeholders. My white paper aligned with Creswell's (2015) concept of presenting research findings (i.e., graduates' and advisers' perspectives relative to the system of academic advising at CCC) to education practitioners in a clear and concise manner and making recommendations for change. Writing a white paper provided the opportunity for me to directly advance the document to CCC stakeholders and thus increased the possibility of my recommendations being implemented.

After investigating how academic advising validates or invalidates a community college student's academic and social experiences, Zhang (2016) concluded that academic advising yields copious benefits. Because advising is acknowledged as a key program of higher education, advisers play a critical role in supporting student engagement and increasing retention and long-term academic success. Grites (2013) recommended several actions and tasks that advisers can do to assist students in creating a campus experience that will encourage them to set and reach individual goals as well as apply learning-outcome-focused approaches. These tasks integrate strength-based theories into actual academic advising strategies. In the white paper, I outlined the critical importance of advising using Lowenstein's (2014) integrative theory of advising, which, if adopted, can improve the advising at CCC and other similar community colleges, making college a more successful experience with better positive outcomes for

students.

Project Limitations and Remediation

This project study and the resulting white paper are limited by the research setting: I conducted the study at only one institution, thereby making the results difficult to generalize. Additionally, the small sample size was not representative of the diverse population at CCC. Because the study was qualitative in nature, it was difficult to avoid subjectivity. However, replicating the research study at different institutions with similar characteristics to the CCC may reduce these limitations. Using a larger and more diverse sample would be more representative of the population and could capture a broader base of perspectives, thus increasing the potential generalizability of the study.

Future researchers could use a different data collection instrument for each group of participants instead of using the same interview schedule. For example, researchers could use a questionnaire for sampling academic or faculty advisers or focus groups for encouraging graduates to express themselves more comfortably. I did not use either of these methods. The use of a focus group for the graduates may have resulted in augmented and richer data. However, facilitating the assembly of graduates who worked and lived in different parts of the country would have been difficult. Nevertheless, I believe that I garnered sufficient data through my chosen methodology to make informed recommendations. Finally, as many people do not read lengthy documents, a risk exists that stakeholders will not give much (or any) attention to the white paper and the recommendations therein. If this happens, it will become necessary for me to follow up face-to-face with stakeholders subsequent to disseminating the paper by email.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Research findings can be disseminated in several ways. Creswell (2015) mentioned three main modes for the dissemination of research findings in educational settings: oral presentations,

journal articles, and conference presentations. However, with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and the subsequent need to exercise physical distancing, I chose to disseminate the white paper through the hybrid mode of email and face-to-face meetings. Thus, I will initially email the white paper to administrators, policy makers, and stakeholders of the institution. I will then conduct face-to-face meetings as necessary during a 2-week period with CCC personnel. Eventually, I will place the white paper in the library and on stakeholders' websites with their permission.

An alternative mode for the white paper's dissemination is a virtual Zoom or Skype presentation. These platforms are used with increased frequency by educational professionals because these platforms have high-definition audio, fast video transfer rates, quality pictures, and instant-sharing tools. By using this mode, I could plan virtual sessions to help stakeholders consume and consider the white paper's contents.

Scholarship

The concept of scholarship is at the core of the Walden experience. According to Walden's administrators, they encourage students to become not just consumers of knowledge but also agents of change who contribute to the advancement of individuals, communities, organizations, and society. Therefore, it is expected that through a student's scholarship, the gap between academia and the real world is bridged, as the scholar blends scholarly research with practical application to solve complex problems in his or her profession. (Walden University, 2017, para. 2)

The doctoral experience has enabled me to "go beyond theory to challenge assumptions, pose new questions, and create innovative solutions and strategies that can be used immediately to inform and elevate" educational practices (Walden University, 2017, para. 2). My immersion in

this research project has enabled me to engage in a significant review of relevant literature because I used diverse search engines such as Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and Thoreau to explore knowledge about academic advising at community colleges and its significance to student success.

Although the literature surrounding academic advising is limited, and few studies have explored the relationship between academic advising and student success, sufficient information existed to augment my literature review. I have been inundated with new information that has contributed to my repertoire of personal and professional knowledge. Further, embracing scholarship has provided the impetus for me to complete my doctoral journey. Although I found the research process tedious, I have been able to develop my research skills and sense of scholarship, while contributing to the resolution of a problem at the community college level and, by extension, in society.

Project Development

After I analyzed my data and examined the findings of my study, I brainstormed the best mode and medium of presenting my findings and recommendations to stakeholders and end-users. Furthermore, I was cognizant that for people to take the results seriously, I had to establish a reasonable degree of credibility. I also wanted to present the research in a way that made sense to the prospective audience and also be in a format that would be attractive and easily available. My committee members also aided me in deciding to develop an educational white paper to convey the findings and recommendations of the study. I realized that by preparing a white paper, I would outline a relevant underlying theoretical framework upon which I would base my strategies for procedural changes to improve CCC academic advising structures. Writing the white paper also formed part of my scholarship because it was necessary to research the construction and format of a white paper as well as provide justification for its use. I developed

the policy paper around the themes that emerged from the analysis and the findings, which revealed that academic advising, if done properly, certainly would have a significant positive impact on students' success. The white paper also contained recommendations to augment and enhance student advising services and support at the community college level.

Leadership and Change

It is important that institutional leaders provide defined and compelling direction so that members of their teams can achieve organizational objectives. Unclear and uncertain expectations within a specific role, especially in the workplace, lead to role ambiguity, which happens when a job and its related responsibilities are not clearly defined (Pearce, Manz, & Sims, 2009). Without taking necessary measures to limit role ambiguity, a company can inadvertently decrease the organizational performance of workers (Arami, 2016; Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Many researchers have discussed the concepts of leadership and change management. When leaders clearly define the roles and responsibilities of employees and set expectations, their organization has the potential to achieve more positive, goal-oriented results. Edmonson, Sumagaysay, Cueman, and Chappell (2016) espoused a view that it is crucial to emphasize the importance of leaders who are responsible and in charge of teams because leaders need strong management skills to transform a static team into a dynamic one. Having responsible leadership will directly affect the implementation of a new and improved advising structure at CCC.

Emerging from the scholarship of my doctoral journey, I concur with the submission of Edmonson et al. regarding the need for strong leadership to enact change. My doctoral journey required strength and fortitude. It also required me to change many habits to conclude this particular chapter of my life.

Analysis of Self as a Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer

Although I had acquired two degrees prior to commencing my doctoral journey, I could not embrace Maslow's concept of self-actualization. I felt incomplete and unfulfilled as an educator at the tertiary level. Walden University provided me with this exciting opportunity, honing my ability to become a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I have certainly been enriched: I have developed as a scholar-practitioner, adopted a scholarship of lifelong learning, and contributed to my workplace and community through my practice. Further, I have developed the ability to exert a positive influence through being a leader in my professional and personal life, thus making a positive impact on society.

As a scholar-practitioner, I have developed strong research and analytical skills brought about by applying basic theoretical principles and concepts of qualitative research to this project. I was also able to hone my research skills by engaging in many drafts and rewrites of documents based on my committee's and chair's critiques and feedback. In the process, I developed and refined many of the skills required for strong leadership, such as critical thinking and complex problem-solving. I am grateful for the many unique opportunities my doctoral residencies, which were strategically placed throughout the program, afforded me to network with peers and professionals in my course of study. Under the guidance of program faculty and my chair, I was able to gain scholarly and professional experience. As I studied alongside other doctoral candidates in the various courses of the EdD program, I was truly inspired by those who shared their experiences in face-to-face classroom discussion and through the Blackboard platform.

In addition, I was able to harness my time management skills by meeting term goals and timelines. Having been plagued with many setbacks and challenges during this journey, I now deeply understand the definition of perseverance. I failed my first course because I was not familiar enough with the portal. After exerting efforts over three semesters to develop my

prospectus, I was informed that the topic problem I was interested in did not align with my specialty. I had to consider a completely new problem and, as a self-funding student, this had significant financial implications. Additionally, the university changed its requirements from dissertation to project in the middle of my program. I could have given up as I was confronted by these consecutive challenges, coupled with personal matters. I did not, however. These hurdles made me a better person and helped me develop the capability and attributes to be the strong leader espoused by Edmonson et al. (2016). While the completion of my program was protracted, I am delighted that I have conquered the challenges thus far and arrived at this juncture. Schlossberg's transition theory can also certainly apply to me as I have transitioned from one state of my life to another while balancing work and family life.

Because I am fundamentally an educator and a leader, I have influenced many lives. Undoubtedly, earning a doctoral degree will propel me to continue to do so. I commenced this program while I served as a lecturer at CCC and later worked in the Office of Student Services. Therefore, I knew firsthand of the challenges faculty and students encountered with the advising system at CCC. I am indeed elated that I was able to explore this particular problem and advanced strategies for improving the advising structure, adviser morale and functionality, and the students' success. Thus, as a component of scholarship, I am not only sharing the research findings but also advancing recommendations for a better structure and experience for both advisers and advisees.

I am pleased that I was provided with the opportunity to develop a white paper as my study project. In the white paper, I outlined a structure for a strong academic advising program that will promote student persistence, success, and positive learning outcomes. With a view to enhance the college transitional process and promote better outcomes for students, I also included recommended measures that I obtained from evaluating current advising policies,

models, and structures. I am humbled that as a scholar, I will have added to the body of research knowledge by developing a paper that can augment and enhance students' services and support at the community college level, starting with the institution where I formerly worked. I am further delighted that the paper will be shared with education personnel and stakeholders, such as Ministry of Education policy holders, administrators, other people who can lead change.

Reflections on the Importance of the Work

This project document is the compilation of my research study, which is the culmination of my doctoral journey, to which I attach a high degree of significance and importance. This is an essential document that illustrates (a) the practices surrounding the problem of insufficient and inadequate academic advising at CCC, (b) advising's impact on students' ability to succeed academically and graduate in a specific program timeline, and (c) the gap that exists between advisers who possess expertise in academic advising and those advisers who do not. I therefore used this document as a platform to address the issues surrounding academic advising at CCC with the goals of increasing student retention and graduation rates and of promoting opportunities for a better student experience at the institution. My documented research is also important because from the findings I could suggest a remedy for those administrators who are seriously concerned regarding CCC faculty advisers who do not fully embrace their advising roles. These advisers negatively affect the amount and quality of academic advising received by the institution's students despite receiving repeated appeals and directives from CCC administration to better engage in the advising process. This problem deserved to be explored.

Implications, Applications, and Future Research

From the findings of the collection and analysis of data from this study I revealed that academic advising has a significant impact on student success. As such, administrators in institutions should have strong academic advisement programs in place that promote student

persistence, success, and positive learning outcomes. As a result of this study, CCC administrators may implement recommended structural changes, which are likely to improve the overall success of students and produce proficient and skilled graduates who can function effectively in a competitive global environment. Hence, I expect that higher learning administrators as well as academic, student affairs, and student services personnel will find it beneficial to examine the findings of this research and to inform themselves of the necessary mechanisms that will create rewarding college experiences for their students. Administrators can also use these findings to reevaluate current advising policies, models, and structures to enhance the college transitional process, creating better outcomes for students. As has been mentioned, better outcomes align with better graduates, who can enact social change in their area of expertise around the globe.

I wrote the recommendations of the white paper around three major themes that emanated from the valuable perspectives of CCC graduate students and of the academic and faculty advisers: (a) factors for successful advisement, (b) strategies to improve academic advising, and (c) recommendations for a more impactful and beneficial advising experience. These themes are the cornerstones of the white paper from which readers can know that academic advising, done properly, has a significant impact on students' success. I recommend replicating this research study using a larger and more diverse sample from other similar institutions as a means of increasing the body of knowledge underlying academic advising and its benefits.

Conclusion

After an onerous start, my doctoral journey culminated in a valuable body of research regarding academic advising and student success. Reaching this final stage in my doctoral journey is indeed a remarkable achievement. Moving from the prospectus stage to the proposal and then to the final project document has filled me with a sense of exhilaration. I used a basic

qualitative design and presented my findings and recommendations in an educational white paper which outlined procedural changes, supported by Lowensteins'(2014) advising theory of integrative learning that could be adopted to improve academic advising structures at the research institution. Notwithstanding the limitations, the implications for social change are evident in that advisers who use efficient advising structures can promote successful graduates who are equipped with the knowledge and expertise to affect and positively influence change in a variety of ways in our global environment.

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Appendix A: The Project Study

A White Paper on Academic Advising for Students' Success at CCC

The Problem

Data captured by a report authored by the CCC's counseling department in 2017 indicated that, on average, less than 50% of students interacted with an adviser from 2013 to 2017. A summary of the statistics from the same report showed that overall advising activities ranged from 16% to 58% among students. Only 66% of the assigned faculty participated in academic advising. On the whole, the number of students who were expected to graduate from CCC during the period under review had decreased by 30%. These statistics have implications for the students' college experience and outcomes as well as CCC's reputation relative to student retention and graduation.

Notably, this paper is founded on the views and perspectives of eight graduates, three faculty advisers and three academic advisers who were interviewed using one of three interview protocols. Because academic advising is a significant supportive mechanism involving staff and students, it was important to capture the main stakeholders' perspectives to advance new strategies for an enhanced and defined academic advising system.

Overview

CCC is a 2- to 4-year community college that caters to students from high schools across the country. Approximately 300 students graduate from CCC on an annual basis. Administrators at CCC recognized that as leaders in higher education, they continue to find themselves scrutinized by inside and outside parties and thus continually explore strategic measures to demonstrate student satisfaction and success. A good academic advising system seems to be one strategic measure that can significantly improve students' satisfaction, experiences, and outcomes.

In a decentralized system of academic advising at CCC, each student is assigned an academic adviser from the first-year orientation period to the completion of his or her program in an effort to promote an environment of students' success. However, CCC lacks a clearly defined academic advising program and an academic advising policy. CCC's goal has been for every student to engage in at least two advising sessions annually to address any transitional problems emanating from the change to college from high school and to tackle any program-related challenges encountered by students. However, such a structure became quite ad hoc, and consequently, advisors and students were not meeting regularly.

Academic advising is conducted by two categories of advisers at CCC:

- academic advisers who possess expertise in academic advising, and
- advisers from the faculty, who are not trained in conducting advising but yet are required to engage in the process.

Currently, counselors, in collaboration with a program's faculty head, assign faculty advisers to a specific number of students. However, as revealed in the study, many advisers who are assigned to a cohort of students are not familiar with the students' programs, nor do they possess the expertise to advise and thus are incapable of providing adequate and successful advising.

Advisers are not remunerated for advising; therefore, many of them have been reluctant to engage in the process. Because no defined advising policy exists, the level and quality of faculty participation in advisement varies greatly. Undoubtedly, owing to a lack of a clear policy, the advisement processes are oftentimes haphazard, resulting in an insufficient amount of advising at the cost to students and to the institution as a whole.

In the absence of a clear advising policy at the institution, several significant implications are useful to note. First, without a defined policy, potential exists for confusion and procedural inconsistencies. For example, according to the graduates, advisers often did not keep their scheduled appointments with advisees. Additionally, advisers would often announce an advising session would take place immediately or at the end of a class when students may be tired or might have other plans. As a result, advisees often did not attend scheduled or impromptu advising sessions. These scheduling issues are not in alignment with CCC required standards surrounding advisement, thus creating institutional discord as well as adviser and advisee disharmony.

Second, no single or combined use of an advising model exists at CCC; therefore, advising is conducted without a defined model, which graduates claim promotes an atmosphere of disorganization. Further, there are no follow-up procedures after advising sessions, so students question the intent and impact of advisement. Advisers seem to be out of touch with their students: study findings indicated that when a student drops out of college, advisers are not aware of it until the end of semester when grades are being reconciled.

The mission of CCC strongly embraces the concepts of excellence and student-centeredness. Academic advising is one of the main tenets upon which these concepts are fostered. Therefore, advising should be provided in an effective and satisfactory manner to the students, who are the main users and stakeholders of the college. It was therefore not unexpected that the major themes which emerged from an examination of the study's data were: (a) factors for successful advisement, (b) strategies for improving academic advising, and (c) recommendations for a more impactful and beneficial advising experience. Based on these themes, in this document I outline a clear academic advising policy for the protocols and responsibilities of all involved in the CCC advising process, beginning with addressing the following:

- What constitutes academic advising?
- What is the role of academic advisers? and
- What is the most effective model or process of academic advising?

Defining Academic Advising

Establishing a clear definition of academic advising is important: when all advising personnel understand their purpose, they can function more easily together.

I recommend that CCC administrators and advisers adopt Braxton et al.'s (2013) definition of academic advising as a guiding force for unifying advisers. Braxton et al. defined advising as a decision-making process whereby students “realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges” with an academic adviser (Braxton et al., 2013, p. 5).

Lowenstein (2014) clarified what Braxton et al. meant by “educational potential,” defining it in terms of a student's learning: “The learning that happens in advising is integrative, and helps students make meaning out of their education as a whole” (para. 60).

The Role of Academic Advisers

Traditionally, the main role of academic advisers was that of performing a service (e.g., registering for classes or tracking graduation requirements). However, as society evolved and as student populations have become more diverse, the roles of advisers have expanded to include mentoring, goal-setting, and developing individualized plans for students.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2017) provides what is perhaps the most authoritative list of abilities advisers need to have to function in their expanded roles. In addition to providing informational knowledge to students, advisers need to perform the following relational job duties:

- Articulate a personal philosophy of academic advising,
- Create rapport and build academic advising relationships,
- Communicate in an inclusive and respectful manner,
- Plan and conduct successful advising interactions,
- Promote student understanding of the logic and purpose of the curriculum,
- Facilitate problem solving, decision-making, meaning-making, planning, and goal setting, and
- Engage in on-going assessment and development of the advising practice.
(NACADA, 2017, para. 8)

Effective Advising Models

There are multiple academic advising models, which can be grouped based on advisor type and advising function. Advisers are normally faculty members or full-time specialists on an advising staff. Increasingly, many institutions are opting to use only specialists for student advising, while others use a combination of specialists and faculty advisers to ensure students have a good advising experience. It is solely up to the institution to consider existing common models and to select one which aligns with its mission.

According to Sun (2019), three models are commonly used to structure academic advising at institutions: the centralized and decentralized models, and a combination of the two, referred to as the shared model. Advisers in centralized models are “placed in advising centers where they advise students with a variety of majors from different Schools,” while advisers in decentralized models are “distributed to individual Academic units or Schools and they primarily serve students whose program of study is housed in the Academic unit” (Sun, 2019, pp. 2–3).

The shared model consists of elements from both, and researchers have proven that all three models can be effective. Regardless of which model administrators choose for an advising structure, institutions should use a model as the base for their academic advisement system.

There are no benefits to students nor to institutions when an ad hoc academic advising system is in place.

Specific Program Strategies for Improving the CCC Advising System

With the definition of academic advising and the role of an adviser in mind, the following is an outline of specific strategies that CCC could use to improve the current advising structure:

1. Function under the aegis of a clearly defined academic advising model with clearly articulated advising approaches. I recommend a shared model of academic advising, in which the processes of registration and advisement are shared with clear delineation of roles among designated professional advisers in an advisement center, department/program-specific faculty advisers, and students.
2. Design an effective academic advising structure and academic advisement policy that reflects the overall mission of the college.
 - a. Write and disseminate the responsibilities and expectations for students, faculty, and administrative participation in the advisement process.
 - b. Include the mission statement and advising policy on the college's website, library, academic catalogue, student handbook, and faculty handbook.
3. Establish clear lines of accountability for administrative, professional, and faculty advisers by removing the responsibility of oversight from college counselors. Instead, appoint a designated administrator to oversee the process, to whom all advisers are accountable.
4. Provide for continuity and follow-up in academic advising procedures. Define clear college-wide protocols relating to:
 - a. Revising faculty job descriptions to include advising,
 - b. Ensuring that each student has an assigned adviser,
 - c. Providing advisers with additional remuneration or an alternative form of reward for advising,
 - d. Requiring advisers to provide designated advisement times for students per student needs,
 - e. Communicating changes in advisers to students,
 - f. Disseminating information on program changes, changes in major/minor requirements, and changes in prerequisites, and
 - g. Addressing the specific needs of each population of students at CCC.
5. Train and provide professional development for advisers in all program areas.
 - a. Provide advisement training for all people involved in the advisement process.
 - b. Establish an advisement training center.
6. Create an assessment system for faculty participating in the academic advising program and use a criterion system to hire advisers.
7. Implement an advising software system to mitigate manual reporting of relevant information and to facilitate earlier and easier follow-up.

Figure 1 illustrates the strategic measures CCC can implement for a more successful academic program.

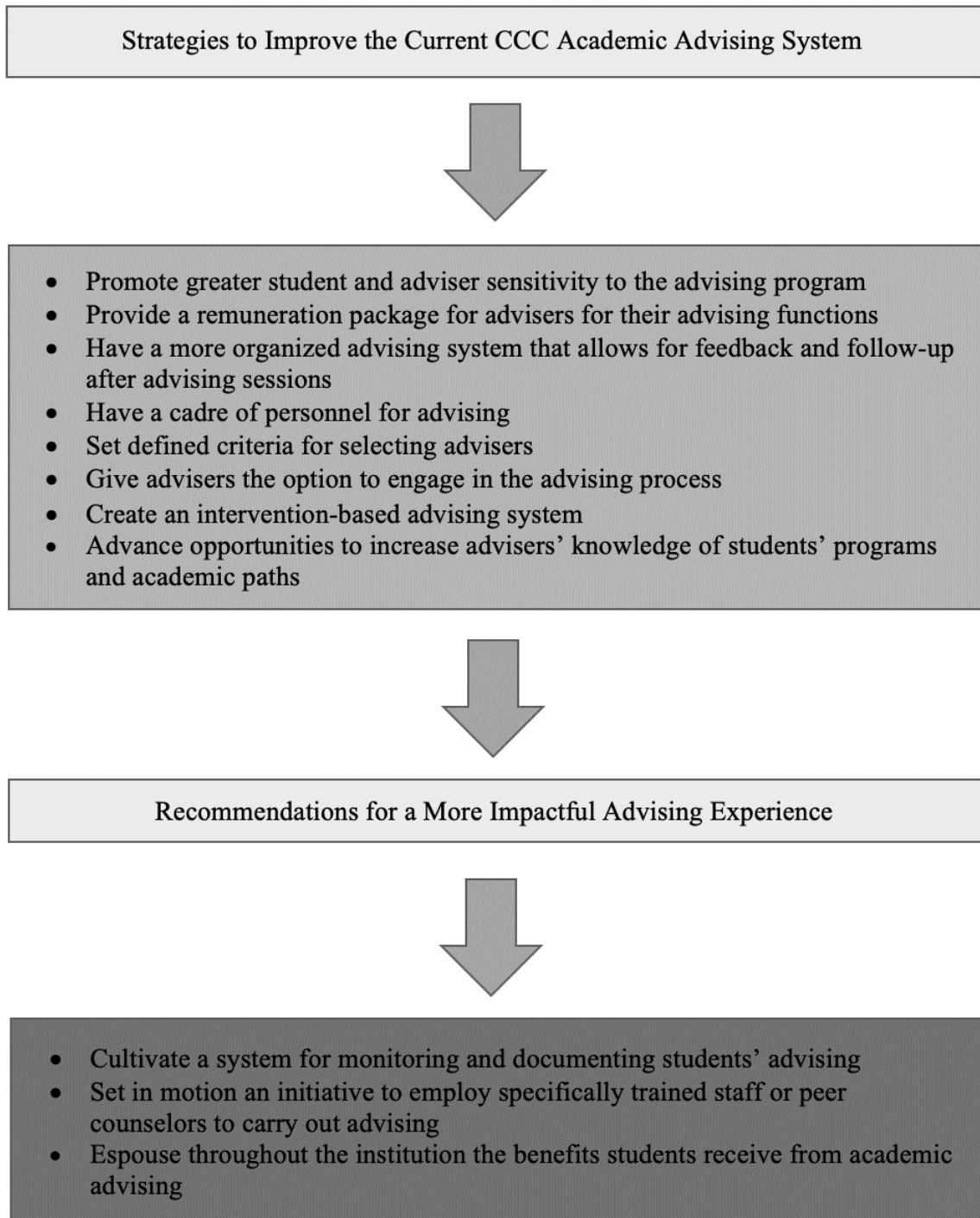


Figure 1. Strategic measures for a more successful academic program.

Conclusion

The policy paper is supported by the views of Kimball and Campbell (2013), who submitted that advising strategies are critical for supporting student success, and by Kot (2013), who affirmed advisement should be inclusive and connected to organizational structures and cultures. There must be an aggressive operationalization of academic advising to make connections between academic experiences and positive learning outcomes, which directly affect an institution's student retention and graduation rate.

Based on the data obtained, many faculty and students at CCC have not yet recognized the significance of academic advising. Siming, Niamatullah, Xu, and Shaf (2015) asserted that without frequent interactions and familiar working relationships between students, faculty, and academic advisers, a student's educational experience is detrimentally affected. It is important, therefore, that CCC administration implement new measures to change the views of students and faculty at CCC regarding advising.

Joslin (2018) submitted that leaders in higher education institutions are deemphasizing solo and isolated student support initiatives. Instead, the focus should be placed on identifying and addressing institution-wide structures for improving academic advising.

According to Zarges, Adams, Higgins, and Muhovich (2018), advising has been ingrained into higher education for decades and is fundamental to any learning institution. Because institutions are held accountable for the actions leaders take in relation to advising, education administrators and policy crafters should carefully examine ways to improve academic advisement programs. Examining and adopting the suggestions in this document has the potential of increasing student academic output and helping students more positively perceive their academic experience.

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Appendix B: Letter Seeking Permission To Conduct Research With Academic Advisers
and Students Who Have Graduated

The President

██████████

██████████

Dear Sir:

I am a Doctor of Education student at Walden University. I am expected to conduct a research study in partial fulfillment of my program. The title of the research is Academic Advising for Students' Success at the Community College Level in the West Indies. In this study, I seek to explore the experiences and perceptions of graduated students and academic advisers regarding the academic advising program and how it impacts the success of students.

I am seeking permission to obtain a listing of members of staff who are engaged in academic advising as well as to allow the same advisers to become participants to interact with me regarding their perspectives of your institution's academic advising process. I also wish to inform you that students who have graduated from the college will also be participating in the study, and I will be retrieving their contact information from commencement booklets and the college's online registry.

Your institution will benefit from the research study because the findings of the study will provide insights that may lead to improved academic advising structures, and consequently, increased student satisfaction, success, and retention.

I look forward to a favorable response and your letter of consent by
Friday.....2019.

Respectfully,

██████████

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

[Redacted]



[Redacted]

Ref: [Redacted]

14th August 2019

To Whom it May Concern:

Please note that permission has been granted for Delores Harris, Walden University Doctoral Candidate, to consult with the necessary personnel of the institution regarding her study surrounding academic advising.

Respectfully yours,

[Redacted]

President

Appendix D: Interview Guide/Protocol for Interviewing Academic Advisers

- A. Introduce the interviewer and interviewee.
- B. Give gratuitous remarks regarding participation.
- C. Remind of the purpose of the research study, informed consent, how the interview will be conducted, the length of the interview, and that the interview's audio will be recorded.
- D. Inform the adviser of the number of questions that will be asked (approximately 20) and provide assurance of confidentiality.
- E. **Questions:**
 - 1. Please explain the training you engaged in to prepare you for the role of academic adviser. RQ2
 - 2. Describe the type of academic advisement approaches or strategies you use (e.g., appreciative, developmental, etc.). RQ2
 - 3. How would you define your role as an academic adviser? RQ2
 - 4. What do you think attributed to your being selected as an academic adviser? RQ2
 - 5. What criteria are used to be selected for training as an academic adviser? RQ2
 - 6. Explain any additional remuneration you have been receiving for engaging in academic advising at your institution. RQ2
 - 7. What are your views regarding your preparation to engage in academic advising? RQ4
 - 8. Please describe the current academic advising structure at the college. RQ2

9. What benefits do you think students derive from academic advising while in college? RQ2
 10. What are the overarching policies or regulations regarding academic advising at CCC? RQ2
 11. What are your opinions on the major strengths and weaknesses of the academic advising program at CCC? RQ2
 12. What impact do you think CCC's existing academic advising program has on students? RQ2
 13. In your own words, tell me how academic advising is specifically related to student retention and graduation. RQ2
 14. Describe the monitoring processes related to the academic advising program at CCC. RQ2
 15. How would you describe your experience as an academic adviser at CCC? RQ2
 16. What institutional support do you receive to carry out your academic advising duties? RQ2
 17. If given an opportunity, what would you improve or change about the academic advising structure or program at CCC? RQ4
 18. What are your views on continuing to be an academic adviser? RQ4
 19. Tell me anything else you would like to say about the advising process.
- F. Close by clarifying any information.
- G. Remind participant of the member checking process.
- H. Thank interviewee for participating.

Appendix E: Interview Guide/Protocol for Interviewing Faculty Academic Advisers

- A. Introduce the interviewer and interviewee.
- B. Give gratuitous remarks regarding participation.
- C. Remind of the purpose of the research study, informed consent, how the interview will be conducted, the length of the interview, and that the interview's audio will be recorded.
- D. Inform the adviser of the number of questions that will be asked (approximately 20) and provide assurance of confidentiality.
- E. **Questions:**
 1. Please explain the training you engaged in to prepare you for the role of academic adviser. RQ2
 2. Describe the type of academic advisement approaches or strategies you use (e.g., appreciative, developmental, etc.). RQ2
 3. How would you define your role as an academic adviser? RQ2
 4. What do you think attributed to your being selected as an academic adviser? RQ2
 5. What criteria are used when deciding if a faculty member can become an academic adviser? RQ2
 6. How do you feel about being a faculty member as well as an academic adviser? RQ2
 7. As faculty adviser, explain any additional remuneration you have been receiving for engaging in academic advising at CCC. RQ2

8. Explain how someone not being formally trained as an adviser affects the advising given to a student. RQ2
9. Explain the current academic advising structure at the college. RQ2
10. What benefits do you think students derive from academic advising while in college? RQ2
11. What are the overarching policies or regulations regarding academic advising at CCC? RQ2
12. What are your opinions on the major strengths and weaknesses of the academic advising program at CCC? RQ2
13. What impact do you think your institution's existing academic advising program has on students? RQ2
14. In your own words, tell me how academic advising is specifically related to student retention and graduation. RQ2
15. Describe the monitoring processes related to the academic advising program at CCC. RQ2
16. Describe your experience as a faculty academic adviser at CCC? RQ2
17. Please explain any major differences and similarities between advisers who are trained and those advisers who work here and are not trained.
18. If given an opportunity, what would you change for the improvement of the academic advising structure or program at CCC? RQ4
19. What are your views on continuing to be a faculty adviser? RQ4
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your situation as it relates to the advising process?

- F. Close by clarifying any information.
- G. Remind participant of the validation process.
- H. Thank interviewee for participating.

Appendix F: Interview Guide/Protocol for Interviewing Graduates

- A. Introduce the interviewer and interviewee.
- B. Give gratuitous remarks regarding participation.
- C. Remind of the purpose of the research study, informed consent, how the interview will be conducted, the length of the interview, and that the interview's audio will be recorded.
- D. Inform the graduate of the number of questions that will be asked (approximately 21) and provide assurance of confidentiality
- E. **Questions:**
 - 1. Over what period did you attend CCC?
 - 2. How were academic advising sessions with your adviser conducted? RQ1
 - 3. Tell me about the way the academic advising meetings were initiated? RQ1
 - 4. What are your views about the advising process at CCC? RQ1
 - 5. How would you describe the relationship between you and your academic adviser during your time at CCC? RQ1
 - 6. Explain how you think you benefitted from academic advising while at CCC? RQ1
 - 7. How did the advising program at CCC assist with your transition from high school to college? RQ1
 - 8. How would you describe the overall academic advising experience at CCC? RQ1
 - 9. What qualities do you think a good adviser should possess? RQ1

10. How did you view your adviser's approachability and effectiveness at CCC?

RQ1

11. What suggestions do you have for advisers' services at the CCC? RQ3

12. Tell me about the types of resources which were provided to facilitate the advising process at CCC? RQ1

13. How do you think the academic advising program at CCC could be better organized in order to help students succeed academically and socially? RQ3

14. What are your views regarding new students' engagement in the advising process? RQ1

15. What impact do you think the academic advising program at CCC has had on your own development and current situation? RQ1

16. What would you recommend for change about the advising program at CCC if you had an opportunity? RQ3

17. Is there anything else about the program you would like to tell me?

F. Close by clarifying any information.

G. Remind participant of the validation process.

H. Thank interviewee for participating.