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First-Generation College Graduates' Perceptions of Participating in Required Academic Advising Sessions for Degree Completion

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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2022

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Many first-generation students enter college underprepared, leading them to face challenges that include failure to persist to degree completion. Empirical literature informs how academic advising programs help students persist to degree completion; however, a literature gap exists related to how regularly required academic advising programs influence students to persist to degree completion. This basic qualitative study provides insight into the perceptions of first-generation college graduates regarding how their regularly required academic advising sessions helped them to persist to degree completion. The conceptual framework is Tinto's theory of student retention, which addresses students' academic and social integration. Eight first-generation college graduates who participated in regularly required academic advising from an institution that administered the program served as study participants. One-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants were the means of data collection. The data were hand coded and in vivo coded to conduct thematic analysis. The themes extracted from that data included goals and commitments, institutional experiences, personal normative integration, and outcomes. The results fill a gap in the published literature on how regularly scheduled advising sessions assist first-generation college students in persisting to graduation. As such, the results of this study add to the body of knowledge related to supporting first-generation college students. Positive social change will be realized if more colleges implement this intervention to help first-generation college student persist to graduation and meet their learning goals.

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Dedication

To Carl Fowler, my loving husband, who believed in me and supported me unconditionally. He reminded me daily that if it was easy, everyone would be doing it. "Of course it is hard. It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would be doing it. The hard is what makes it great" (A League of Their Own).

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

First-generation college students are four times more likely to drop out in their first year of school; they also tend to face challenges such as lack of belonging, difficulty with academic-life academic balances, and not fully understanding institutional processes as compared to their peers with parents who graduated from college (Shelbe et al., 2019; Tippetts et al., 2020). In the United States, approximately 33% of college students are first-generation status, and only 27% of first-generation college students will complete their degrees (Ramos, 2019). High dropout rates for first-generation college students require college stakeholders to employ interventions to help this population of learners meet their learning outcomes. One intervention includes new approaches for academic advising to connect with first generation college students (Tippetts et al., 2020).

An advisor is a faculty member, full-time administrator, or academic advisor employed by the institution to listen to the student describe the challenges encountered, while offering advice to promote student persistence (DeLaRosby, 2017; Yonker et al., 2019). Quality academic advising is a proven practice to facilitate student success (Hart-Bridge, 2020); however, little research exists, from the perspectives of first-generation college students, regarding how their participation in regularly required advising sessions influences college retention and degree completion. My study sought to understand how the process of regularly required academic advising sessions influenced first-generation college graduates to persist to degree completion.

This chapter includes an overview of the influence of academic advising sessions on college success that focuses on first-generation students. The problem statement, the

purpose of study, and research question provide, an overview of the gap in research, and the intent of my study to fill the gap in research related to how first-generation college graduates describe their experiences regarding regularly required academic advising to facilitate degree completion are all presented. The conceptual framework of Tinto's theory is discussed as it relates to first-generation college student persistence. The nature of the study summarizes the basic qualitative methodology in relation to the research question. Lastly, I discuss definitions of key concept terms, the assumptions, the scope, the limitations, the delimitations of the study, and the significance of the study to fill the gap in research on the topic and inform best practices to advise first-generation college students.

Background

Researchers such as Covarrubias et al. (2020), Mu and Fosnacht, (2019), Peralta and Klonowski, (2017), Pratt et al. (2019), Savage et al. (2019), Swanbrow et al. (2017), and Tippetts et al. (2020) noted that retention to degree completion is a challenge for many first-generation college students and institutions. In consideration of sociodemographic and economic factors, institutions are forced to seek new ways of connecting with first-generation college students to encourage persistence beginning in the first semester (Tippets et al., 2020). After first-generation college students enroll, they often arrive on campus underprepared, which may lead to a lack of involvement in campus activities and not understanding faculty expectations for academic rigor, leading to low academic performance, poor retention, and failure in degree completion (Pratt et al., 2019). Many students who embark on this new chapter experience stress; however,

first-generation college students experience different stressors and lack ready resources because they are the first ones in their families to experience the demands incurred while transitioning from high school to college (Swanbrow et al., 2017).

To prepare first-generation college students for success, institutions across the country focus on providing academic and social support through programs administered by academic advisors; these are professionals who help build academic and personal self-efficacy to shape and influence self-perceptions while navigating academic expectations (Covarrubias et al., 2020; Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). Academic advisors should be agents who strengthen the connections between a student and the institution from a student's first year to graduation (Savage et al., 2019).

While studies have shown academic advising to be of help to students, the literature on the effects of advising, especially for regularly required academic advising for first-generation college students, is not robust (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Further, there is a paucity of research that explores the influence of regularly scheduled advising sessions with first-generation college students from the graduates' perspective. This is the gap that my study was intended to address. Learning more about graduates' perspectives of required advising sessions informs best practices for advising first-generation students that facilitated college persistence and degree completion and could lead to positive social change.

Problem Statement

The problem explored in this study was many first-generation college students, as compared to their non-first-generation peers, enter college at a disadvantage that affects

their academic performance and well-being (Covarrubias et al., 2020; Schelbe et al., 2019; Swanbrow et al., 2017). Schelbe et al. (2019) noted that first-generation college students were four times more likely to drop out at the end of their first year of college due to decreased access to resources such as social support, financial support, and academic preparation and expectations. According to Tippetts et al. (2020), sociodemographic and economic factors affected persistence that tended to isolate the relationship between academic appointments, which negatively impacted academic performance.

Schelbe et al. (2019) indicated first-generation college students were less likely to remain in college, thus prompting institutions to develop programs to increase retention for these students. Although educators and institutions know the benefits of academic advising in general, educators and institutions do not know the influence of regularly required academic advising on student persistence and degree completion with first-generation college students (Schneider et al., 2017; Soria et al., 2017). Thomas and McFarlane (2018) and Zhang et al. (2019) explained that to discover where students were failing, and where institutions were failing their students, it is necessary to elevate academic advising practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain insight into the perceptions of first-generation college student graduates regarding how regularly required academic advising sessions improved retention and degree completion outcomes. The population of my study focused on approximately 500 first-generation college students, who attended

an institution that established a program regarding regularly required academic advising sessions from 2016 to present. I specifically focused on the first-generation graduates who participated in the program to better understand their perceptions of how the regularly required academic advising sessions helped them persist to degree completion.

Research Question

The literature on the impact of advising is not very robust, and the literature is not robust around the influences of advising on students' learning and development. To help alleviate and navigate the complexities of academic barriers that first-generation face upon entering college, optimizing advising services resulted in positive experiences related to grades earned and self-perceived gains (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). The following research question was explored for this study:

RQ 1 (Qualitative): How do first-generation college graduates describe their experiences while participating in regularly required academic advising sessions influencing persistence to degree completion?

Conceptual Framework

My study is framed on the tenets of Tinto's (1975, 2006) theory of student retention, which addressed student integration into college, both academically and socially. In his work on retention, Tinto explained that students enter college with pre-existing attributes such as family backgrounds, skills, and abilities, that impact the integration of informal social and academic components of the institution (1975). Tinto (1975, 1993) also explained the need to integrate students into institutions' formal and informal academic and social systems through multiple factors, such as relationships

formed with faculty, advisors, or staff member of the college, along with peer group associations and participation in academic activities like academic advising. Advising programs serve to facilitate a student's belonging process, and they also incorporate academic and social integration. Regularly required academic advising is an institutional strategy that could improve student retention, while building understanding as they persist to degree completion (Tinto, 2006).

Tinto found that students who voluntarily withdrew from college when academic and social integration were unsuccessful could be kept by building institutional understanding based on the student's academic and social integration with peers, faculty, staff, and advisors (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Tinto's work has been used through the lens of institutional actions to retain students; this work is related to my study because academic advising addresses successful higher education student integration (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Requiring students to meet for academic sessions on a regularly required schedule could help assess if students are enculturated to the organization, so that interventions to assist in this process may be implemented on a timely basis (Tinto, 1987, 1993). A more detailed discussion of Tinto's theory and how it frames my study is presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The primary purpose of a qualitative study is to help make sense of peoples' interactions within their social world based on a situation or phenomenon (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). My study employed a basic qualitative design that is both interpretive and descriptive. The interpretive nature refers to meanings that are constructed by human

beings as they engage with the world they are experiencing. The descriptive nature conveys what the researcher learns about the topic (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). My study focused specifically on the perceptions of first-generation college graduates who participated in regularly required academic advising sessions to degree completion. I purposefully selected 10-12 participants out of approximately 500 students who participated in this program for my sample, as they provided meaning. Using a qualitative approach, as opposed to a quantitative approach, allowed me to obtain more personal experiences through the views of first-generation graduates, rather than first-generation students focusing on the graduates' perceptions and their own experiences, into how the regularly required academic advising sessions influenced their persistence.

In examining the topic of the perceptions of college graduates regarding their participation in regularly required academic advising sessions, I used semi-structured interviews via video conferencing with college graduates who participated in a regularly required academic advising program and graduated. This approach meant they could freely share their personal perspectives in a private setting without any fear of reprisal. The data included responses from a group of purposely selected first-generation college graduates who graduated within the last six years from a four-year institution of higher learning.

Definitions

The following terms and concepts are used to inform this study:

Academic Advising: The actions of guiding and directing students to successfully navigate through college processes while becoming independent thinkers and problem solvers who can achieve their goals and potential (Zhang et al., 2019).

*Academic Advisers***:** Institutional agents who help students manage course of study requirements while fostering student success (Yonker et al., 2019). For my study, an adviser can be a faculty member, academic adviser, or full-time administrator.

Academic Integration: The measurement of how well a student integrates into the academic system through grade point averages, attendance, academic advising, and interactions with faculty and groups outside the classroom (Tinto, 1993).

Commitments: An individual's interaction between themselves and the institution that determines if the student will persist or dropout of college (Tinto, 1975).

First-generation college students: Students whose parents or guardians have minimal or no college experience in negotiating academic institutional processes, and who face unique challenges in higher education that affect their ability to graduate (Evans et al. 2020).

Persistence: The motivation that allows someone to continue in the pursuit of a goal, regardless of the challenges that arise (Tinto, 2017a).

Retention: Students' retention from their first to second year of enrollment until completion of the four years (Soria et al., 2017).

Social Integration: The measurement of how a student integrates into the social system through extracurricular activities among the institution, group interactions, and resources offered (Tinto, 1993).

Student Persistence: Remaining at an institution until graduation in a reasonable timeframe, typically between four and five years (Savage et al. 2017).

Assumptions

In a qualitative study, many aspects of the design can influence the study's results. While conducting my data collection through semi-structured interviews, I considered my own personal perceptions to avoid bias in the results. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument during data collection and analysis; I was one who was aware of one's own shortcomings and biases, which was crucial to identify, monitor, and sharpen the collection and interpretation of data that might have impacted the study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I assumed that all participants attended their regularly scheduled advising sessions and were active participants in those meetings. I assumed my participants answered my questions honestly while reflecting upon their experiences from the regularly required academic advising sessions. This study was entirely voluntary with no incentives or rewards, and it was solely based on my assumptions that the results of my research benefit future students and institutions.

Scope of Delimitations

When conducting research interviews using guided questions, the conversations had structure and purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research question guiding my study was designed to explore the perceptions of first-generation college students who graduated, and how the regularly required academic advising sessions with their academic advisors influenced their persistence to degree completion. I focused only on the experiences of eight first-generation college students who had graduated, as only

those students could provide insight into how the regularly required sessions resulted in degree completion. A delimitation of my study was limiting participation to first-generation college students who participated in regularly required academic advising and persisted to graduation.

Limitations

An overall limitation of qualitative research is dependability, which could have caused challenges if the results of the data collected did not make sense. I wanted my results to align with the data collected rather than demand the same results from my participants. I deterred limitations by using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling works on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight; therefore, the selected participants must be from a sample group from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I recruited and selected participants who were first-generation graduates, who experienced regularly required academic advising, and graduated since within the prior six years of data collection. I found these participants through social media outlets such as LinkedIn and Facebook. I took precautions not to allow my personal experiences and perceptions to influence any outcomes of my study, considering I worked for an institution that regularly required academic advising put into place.

Significance

The significance of my study generated from researching the perspectives of first-generation college students who received regularly required academic advising and persisted to graduation. Through my study, I sought to offer new information on how the

regularly required academic advising sessions led to graduation by filling the literature gap in an under-explored area. My research findings may contribute to positive social change by sharing best practices and encouraging institutions to put interventions in place to improve retention rates of first-generation college students. The results of my study may facilitate institutions to put more measures in place for first-generation students to build the confidence and knowledge they need to achieve their academic goals.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the study topic and my intent to explore the perceptions of first-generation college student graduates and the influence of regularly required academic advising sessions on degree completion. I also described the problem and the purpose of the study, and I reviewed research findings related to institutions introducing programs to retain first-generation students to degree completion leading to positive social change in this population of learners. The theoretical framework informed my study, and key terms were defined. The study's assumptions, rationale, and scope explained how focusing on retention through regularly required academic advising sessions for first-generation college students led to degree completion. Limitations and biases were discussed, along with the significance of the study. In the next chapter, a more detailed examination of the problem, conceptual framework, and literature review will include more information on the importance of regularly required academic advising sessions for first-generation college student retention.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of first-generation graduates and academic advising outcomes of student persistence to degree completion. Many first-generation college students, compared to their non-first-generation peers, enter college at a disadvantage that may negatively affect their academic performance and well-being (Covarrubias et al., 2020; Schelbe et al., 2019; Swanbrow et al., 2017). Schelbe et al. (2019) explained first-generation college students are four times more likely to drop out at the end of their first year of college due to inadequate access to resources, including social support and academic preparation. According to Peltra and Klonowski (2017), first-generation college students who have parents with little to no formal higher education knowledge may face challenges such as lack of involvement in student activities, unrealistic faculty expectations, and lower rates of degree completion after enrolling.

According to MacDonald (2018), many students whose parents never attended college do not know the processes of higher education or the academic language. MacDonald explained that this population's lack of knowledge of college processes has led to lower enrollments and lower retention rates among first-generation college students (MacDonald, 2018). According to Tinto (2015), a majority (63%) of college entrants eventually earn their four-year degrees; however, institutional factors encourage student persistence by establishing conditions that promote better outcomes. According to Astin (1993), the educational environment consists of conceptual types of student involvement, such as the selection of majors or a particular field of study and class involvement for a

lengthy period. Astin explained that to improve retention and graduation rates, institutions must focus on their own behaviors by creating solutions that facilitate a relationship between the student and the academic advisors (1993). According to Soria et al. (2017), academic advising practices may positively influence a student's sense of self-awareness, engagement, confidence, and motivation, resulting in first-generation students being better able to handle their experiences in a changing society.

In the research literature, what is poorly reported is the influence of regularly required academic advising on student persistence and degree completion among first-generation college students (Schneider et al., 2017; Soria et al., 2017). According to Mu and Fosnacht (2019), academic advising is multi-faceted and helps students identify goals, select a course of study, and choose campus programs that meet the needs and institutional requirements for future educational opportunities or career goals. There is a need to understand the perceptions of first-generation college students and the influences of how regularly required academic advising sessions support them through degree completion to fill the gap in the literature.

In this chapter, I note the library databases and search engines used to gather information, as well as the search terms used to narrow the search. I describe the conceptual framework and literature related to my topic. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the literature review and described how my research filled a gap in the literature pertaining to the perceptions of first-generation graduates regarding regularly required academic advising and retention.

Literature Search Strategies

To conduct my literature review, I used multiple search engines and databases to include APA Psych Info, EBSCO's Education Source, SAGE Journals, Educational Resource Information (ERIC), Google Scholar, National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), Project Muse, ProQuest, Sage Journals, and Walden University's Thoreau.

Search Terms

As I conducted my search, I used keywords and phrases in different orders and applied Boolean logic using the words and phrases "and," "or," "not," and TX All Text" in the search tool to optimize finding relevant research articles. Search terms included, but were not limited to *first-generation graduates, first-generation college students, perceptions of first-generation college students, first-generation college retentions, experiences of first-generation college students, student engagement, student persistence academic advising, academic advisor, required academic advising, mandatory academic advising, academic advising learning outcomes, student retention, persistence, graduation, resilience, student attrition, Tinto's theory on student retention, Tinto's theory on student departure, student departure, sense of belonging in college, Maslow's hierarchy of need, academic and social integration, self-efficacy, student barriers, students' commitments, students' personal viewpoints, students' influences institutional involvement, institutional programs, student involvement,* and *academic advisor involvement.*

The literature search included finding articles published in the past five years that were peer-reviewed and offered relevant value for understanding the research problem.

When no recent current research was found, I expanded my search to include historical

sources pertinent to the research problem. The website searches provided research articles

on *first-generation college students, student retention, student persistence, academic*

advising approaches, and *academic advising outcomes*.

Conceptual Framework

My study was framed on the tenets of Tinto's (1975, 2006) theory of student

retention, which addressed academic and social integration into college. Tinto explained

that students enter college with pre-existing attributes such as family backgrounds, skills,

and abilities that influence the integration of the institution's formal and informal social

and academic components (1975). According to Tinto (1975), persistence occurs when

students successfully integrate academically and socially into a college experience. Tinto

explained that when students are informed of the benefits of earning a college degree,

which may strengthen their commitments to their institutions, they evaluate whether to

persist or withdraw from college (Tinto, 1975; Xu & Weber, 2018). This theory framed

how the student retention concept related to academic advising and how many students

benefit from the student retention framework. Advising is used to academically integrate

first-generation students within an institution, and if effective, yield positive outcomes for

student persistence (DeLaRosby, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019).

Student expectations of what to expect when entering college are shaped by the

knowledge offered through formal and informal advice from faculty and staff, which, in

turn, creates a roadmap for rules, regulations, and requirements for degree completion

(Tinto, 2012). Institutions should pay close attention to students who are the first in their

families to attend college. Once a student is enrolled in college, they should work with a professional academic advisor who can place particular emphasis on techniques to actively engage and involve students with basic skills (Tinto, 2012). Advising programs facilitate a student's belonging process. These programs incorporate academic and social integration through student engagement, participation, and involvement, mainly during the first year of college and especially for academically underprepared students (Tinto, 2006). Numerous researchers such as Astin, Pascarella, and Terenzini pointed out how involvement matters, and the greater student involvement, the greater acquisition of knowledgeable skills develops by engaging inside and outside the classroom for persistence (Tinto, 1997). Tinto explained that those who participate in high levels of peer and faculty contact demonstrate higher learning outcomes as they persist through degree completion (1971).

First-year advising is essential from professional academic advisors and faculty members to ensure students receive accurate, consistent information and effective academic advising programs created by the institutions to help students persist to degree completion (Tinto, 2012). Faculty advising serves as an extension of the academic adviser as well, while offering emphasis on participation in advising through the classroom using classroom assessments and pedagogies of engagement to actively involved students, especially if they are teaching a first-year course (Tinto, 2012). Effective advising is successful for students to carry out their journey through college, when aligned with an academic advisor or advising programs that offer consistent advice for student retention and persistence to degree completion (Tinto, 2012).

Literature Review

In this section, I provide an in-depth discussion of the perceptions of first-generation graduates and academic advising outcomes of student persistence to degree completion. Advising is used to academically integrate first-generation students within an institution, and if effective, yield positive outcomes for student persistence (DeLaRosby, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). What is not known is how regularly required academic advising leads to degree completion for first-generation college students. Schneider et al. (2017) and Soria et al. (2017) mentioned educators and institutions know the benefits of academic advising; however, to discover where students were failing, and where institutions were failing their students, it was necessary to elevate academic advising practices (Thomas and McFarlane, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). I begin the review with a discussion of (a) student retention through academic and social integration, (b) student commitments and persistence to degree completion (c) sense of belonging, (d) the need for and importance of academic advising support, (e) academic advisor and faculty roles on advising, and (f) academic advising approaches.

Student Retention through Academic and Social Integration

A national study found students who are dissatisfied with their academic advising experiences report low college satisfaction rates, have low graduation rates, and high attrition rates; however, when effective, academic advising is key to student retention (DeLaRosby, (2017). According to Tinto (2012), retention is the rate at which institutions retain and graduate students, which requires institutions to consider all phases of students' experiences. According to Stephenson et al. (2020), student retention involves

looking at the students' motivational skills, professor involvement, and the students'

integration into the intellectual community. Tinto (2006) stated that students' decisions to

stay or leave shift when institutions understand how relationships between individuals

and society play a role in the environment at the institution.

The relationships between students and their institution influence retention by

focusing on students' perceptions of their college experiences that manifest into each

system of formal and informal integration (Tinto,1975). Tinto (2006) explained how

some institutions make substantial improvements to help students graduate, that there is a

heightened focus for institutions to increase the rate of student persistence and

graduation, and expressed, "It would not be an understatement to say that student

retention has become a big business for researchers, educators, and entrepreneurs alike"

(Tinto, 2012, p. 2). According to Tinto (2017a), academic and social integration influence

students' commitments to their institution; the greater the institutional commitment, the

more apt the student will persist to graduation. Institutions should not wait for students to

make themselves available for services; instead, the institution needs to create successful

programs such as required freshman seminars and first-year learning communities as part

of the student's experiences (Tinto, 2012). To address student retention success, Tinto

cautioned, "the institution must begin by focusing on its behavior and establishing

conditions within its walls that promote those outcomes" (Tinto, 2012, p. 6).

Tinto's (1993) academic departure model divides academic and social systems

into two subcategories, formal and informal. The formal academic system consists of

grades and grade point averages, while the informal academic system consists of

interactions among faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993). Tinto explained there is a need to integrate students into the institution's formal and informal academic and social systems through multiple factors such as relationships formed with faculty, advisors, and staff members of the college, as well as involvement in peer group associations and extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto explained that students voluntarily withdraw from college when they fail to integrate academically, socially, or both; however, academic and social integration can be enhanced by building a culture of understanding with key stakeholders, including academic advisors (Tinto, 1975).

According to Tinto (1975), academic integration measures how well students perform in college curriculum and is based on student grade point averages, course grades, attendance, academic advising, and interactions with faculty, staff, and groups outside the classroom. The formal social system consists of extracurricular activities within the institution, while the informal social system consists of peer group interactions (Tinto, 1993). Social integration measures how well students integrate into the college environment based on their interactions among peers, and participation in on-campus organizations, activities, and resources available (Tinto, 1975, 1993). According to Tinto, students can integrate into an institution by committing to personal goals that foster a sense of belonging to the institution leading to persisting to degree completion (Tinto, 2006).

Academic advising programs function as a belonging process to promote academic and social integration (Tinto, 2006). Additionally, academic advising programs can positively influence the academic and social integration process if the focus is on

building relationships (Tinto, 2006). Recent studies found that students left institutions due to inadequate academic and social integration, further suggesting that institutions can improve persistence for their students through departmental and faculty support (Lew et al., 2020).

According to Tinto (2006), institutional actions should connect specific programs and practices to support students, the faculty, and staff through programs that positively influence student retention. Regularly required academic advising is an institutional strategy that can positively impact student retention while building understanding from personal commitments and viewpoints (Tinto, 2006). Tinto's theory relates to my study because academic advising is an integral component of assessing students' learning outcomes to determine if they are academically integrating to the learning institution (Tinto, 1975).

Student Commitments and Persistence to Degree Completion

Institutional commitment is a well-studied concept related to understanding the interpersonal communications and the transactional nature of the relationships between students and key stakeholders, such as academic advisors at their institution (Savage et al., 2019). Savage et al. explained student persistence and retention are generally defined as remaining at an institution until degree completion; however, students' decisions to stay or leave may be influenced not only by academic progress or well-being, but by their perceptions of the messages communicated to them by institutional members (2019). As communicated by Tinto (1993), commitments indicate the degree to which individuals are dedicated to the institutions into which they gain entry. According to Savage et al.

(2019), another way to describe institutional commitment is students' level of confidence and satisfaction with their choice an educational institution, and how relationships with the student communicates a commitment to assist students to meet their learning goals.

There is an assumption that students enter college with the commitment to complete their degree, and there is an assumption that experience influence self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and the motivation to persist to degree completion (Tinto, 2017b). According to Tinto (2017a), "The result of a sense of belonging is often expressed as a commitment that serves to bind the individual to the group or community even when challenges arise" (p. 4). Tinto explained that a sense of belonging leads to commitments that later influence motivation and persistence, which may anchor the student to other students within the institution (Tinto, 2017a). Once students anchor themselves to the institution or a specific group, they are more likely to persist because their motivation is enhanced (Tinto, 2017a).

Tinto described a longitudinal process of student characteristics, such as psychological characteristics and self-esteem, that play a role in students' initial commitment to the institution and the goal to graduate (Savage et al., 2019). Savage et al. (2019) explained that academic and social integration affect students' initial commitments based on their interactions with their institution's formal and informal systems, which is based on the student's level of engagement in interpersonal communications and relationships (Savage et al., 2019). Interpersonal communications are essential to understanding the transactional nature of commitment between the student and the institution, as interpersonal relationships play a role in mediating student

success (Savage et al., 2019). Interpersonal communications and relationships also influence students' decisions to stay or leave their institution, and is dependent on their interpretation of feelings and perceptions from the messages that members of the institution communicate to them (Savage et al., 2019).

Student motivation to persist is shaped by the students' perceptions of the value of the education offered; a student's interest is a key driver for engagement that leads to persistence (Tinto, as cited in Kahu et al., 2017). Savage explained that improving persistence requires an understanding of students' communications between professors, advisors, and administrators that influence commitments to the institutions (2017). According to Tinto (2017), persistence is another way that implies motivation, which allows students to pursue a goal when a challenge arises; however, the student must want to persist in seeking degree completion. According to Sharma and Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018), students' motivations guide them in the direction of where they are going and what they want to do, which contributes to college persistence and learning successes. According to Tinto (1993), "while it is the case for most, if not all, institutions that academic involvement matters more than social involvement, it is also true that both social and academic involvement influence persistence" (p. 131). Current research shows many first-generation students note that services such as academic advising motivate students to persist to degree completion, and that student persistence increases when students meet with academic advisors (Evans et al., 2019; Foschacht et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993).

As explained by Tinto (2017), students' perceptions of belonging can mirror experiences that directly shape the daily interactions with other students, faculty, staff, and administration that influence students to persist to degree completion. Tinto (2017) explained, "universities need to understand students' perceptions and their impact on the persistence of all students; it is particularly important that universities understand how these perceptions" (p. 5). Bean and Metzner explained students' perceptions of their educational experiences form through the interactions of academic advising personnel and course scheduling resulting in academic outcomes that positively affect the integration process (1985).

According to Savage (2017), commitments between students and the institutions can determine if a student stays or leaves college and can be influenced not only by students' attributes and feelings, such as their current progress and well-being; but their perceptions of the messages that members of the institutions communicate to them regarding worth and their importance within the institution. Savage explained that how educators or advisors communicate academic performance to the students can affect their perceptions of how satisfied they are with their institution (Savage et al., 2017). Recent research shows students expect an academic advisor to share institutional support through effective communication with characteristics that reflect caring about the students through being accessible, role modeling, and advocating for the students by providing appropriate guidance (Davis et al., 2019). Appropriate guidance could lead to a sense of student belonging evidenced by a feeling of fitting into an institutional environment, academic motivation, and respect and value from peers, faculty, and staff (Burger, 2023).

Sense of Belonging

One of the five hierarchal tiers of Maslow is belongingness and needs, which reflect a basic human psychological condition to include a relationship with people, social networking, confidence, and respect by others while belonging to a group or community (Abbas, 2020). According to Malm et al. (2020) and Yenney (2020), a sense of belonging is defined as how people perceive themselves and how people feel others perceive them, which reflects students' feeling of connectedness to a college experience. Tinto explained that a sense of belonging is often expressed as a commitment that integrates individuals and groups with a common interest or similar socio-cultural background when challenges arise (Tinto, 2017). Retention for first-generation college students is promoted through satisfying relationships and experiencing a sense of belonging that influences the level of social and academic engagement students have with institutional stakeholders such as academic advisors (Schelbe et al., 2019).

Tinto (2017a) mentioned that for students to integrate successfully, they must feel a sense of belonging to a group, place, or person at an institution. According to Davis et al. (2019), first-generation students can benefit from a sense of belonging through interventions such as orientation, first-year seminars, and mentoring for intentional engagements that promote social and academic integration. Davis et al. (2019) explained an association between student belonging and persistence relates to retention and completion rates as social belonging is a critical factor in determining retention, particularly for first-generation students.

According to Tinto (1975), improved persistence rates are linked to personal levels of commitment, individual viewpoints, and educational influences experienced prior to enrolling in an institution. Tinto explained students are more likely to persist with positive interactions and experiences from the institution through the congruency of student beliefs, values, and expectations (Tinto, 1975). According to Yenney (2020), personal connections are important for cultivating belongingness, and noted personal connections may occur through face-to-face services from the academic advising office. Tinto (2017) shared, "The result of a sense of belonging is often expressed as a commitment that serves to bind the individual to the group or community even when challenges arise" (p. 4). Recent findings evidence that first-generation students are less likely to drop out and persist to graduation when they feel a greater sense of social support and belonging (Schelby et al., 2019). According to Yenney (2020), to foster a more supportive environment on campus, academic advising sessions build rapport, set clear expectations, and incorporates positive feedback suggesting that academic advisors' roles serve as a front-line service.

The Need for and Importance of Academic Advising Support

The need for academic advising goes beyond record keeping and advising students about academic activities. By centering on the ability to build positive relationships students are optimally positioned to attain academic success (Emekako, 2021). Academic advising is a front-line student service where professionals cultivate belonging for students through positive working relationships that connect students to their institutions through targeted support, promoting retention, and building consistency

in student/staff relationships (Yenney, 2020). According to Emekako (2021), academic advising leads to the development of relationship building that hopefully opens the pathway for enrolled students to become lifelong learners who continue to grow from their experiences. As reflected by Tinto's theory of attrition, once educational access is given, it needs to be supported for the student to reap developmental success (Emekako, 2021). According to Tinto (1993), institutional members such as faculty, staff, and student peers influence the capacity to improve student effort. Mu and Foschnat (2019) reported that academic advising traditionally focuses on the influences of student retention and satisfaction and shows direct and indirect effects on student success. Mu and Foschnat (2019) explained that students who contacted academic advisors were often more knowledgeable of resources, leading to clear educational plans.

Academic advising is arguably one of the most important functions of the student affairs profession in higher education, and focuses on student outcomes, retention, and satisfaction (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). During the 1980s, academic advising was identified as a well-defined occupation on college campuses to direct students to essential resources such as orientation, degree planning, and course selection (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Reported by Schneider et al. (2017), and supported by Tinto's theory, academic advising is necessary to help students meet their academic, social, and personal educational goals.

According to Zhang et al. (2019) and Tinto (2012), academic advising has never been an institutional priority because most institutions place more value on new programs, building renovations, and securing funding. Thomas and McFarlane (2018) explained that the best way to discover where students are failing and where institutions

are failing their students is to elevate academic advising practice. Academic advising can devise developmental approaches to include motivation, success initiatives, and responsibilities, and rewards that lead students to success through reflective expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (Zhang et al., 2019).

Academic advising is one part of the academic integration process that enhances the goal of student persistence by building relationships to understand the students' barriers and needs and to help guide students work toward degree completion (Ellis, 2014; Fosnacht et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). According to Mu and Fosnacht (2019), students select institutions that best fit their needs but feel they must overcome complex bureaucratic and informational barriers to complete college. Ellis (2014) explained that quality academic advising contributes to the success of undecided students who have not declared a major as they transition into college, and that relationships between the academic advisor and student facilitate student satisfaction, retention, and success.

According to Spratley (2020), academic advising is crucial to student success by helping students develop competencies that provide students with the capacity to succeed in society. Spratley (2020) explained academic advising is an extension of the student learning environment focused on assisting students in navigating their own development and providing a connection to academic, faculty, and campus resources. According to Spratley (2020), through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community by critically thinking about their roles and responsibilities as students. Academic advising, if well developed and appropriately accessed, is perhaps the only structured campus endeavor that can help students sustain interaction with a caring

and concerned adult who can help them shape a quality academics experience (Spratley, 2020).

Academic Advisors

According to Tinto (2012), academic advisors are a group of social and emotional institutional support agents who engage with faculty, staff, and peers to provide clear expectations for student success. According to Vianden (2016), academic advisors serve to build quality interpersonal relationships with students, foster student successes, and improve overall student persistence. Academic advisors vary from institution to institution and include faculty members, counselors, or professionals hired specifically to perform academic advising while providing a wealth of information that students can use to help them succeed (Smith et al., 2004; White, 2020; Yonker et al., 2019). Recent research informs that academic professional development workshops for advisors encourage them to engage in supportive student relationships and understand how best to help students with academic and career goal settings (Yonkers et al., 2019). Recent research further informs how the effects of academic advising become a crucial tool to support teaching and learning, which increases student retention and success through responsible thinking, reading techniques, critical thinking, problem-solving, note-taking techniques, time management skills, learning and revision strategies, along with test and exam prep skills that many first-generation students are unaware of (Emekako, 2021).

According to Surr (2019), academic advisors and student relationships are critical to ensuring student success. Surr explained that advisors offer a human connection to the student enabling the student to be acknowledged, valued, and listened to, and

contributing to student success (Surr, 2019). Academic advisor and student relationships lead to better developmental approaches, helping students explore their academics, career decisions, and life goals (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). When student-to-advisor relationships form and when students attend regular academic advising sessions, they have greater retention to graduation percentages (Savage et al., 2019). Tinto highlighted, "It is one thing to understand why students leave; it is another to know what institutions can do to help students stay and succeed" (2006, p. 6). Emekako (2021) explained the main business of institutions is teaching and learning in the pursuit of academic excellence and knowledge. According to Emekako (2021), student integration is an intrinsic learning activity that requires nurture and support in many ways. Emekako (2021) emphasized that Tinto's revised model of student integration acknowledges that student academic advisors understand the academic and social structures and are continually reinforcing the students' intentions and goals through institutional interactions.

According to Mu and Fosnacht (2019), academic advising is arguably the most important intervention to help students with interventions, ranging from course selection assistance to career planning. Students' commitment to persist to graduation increases when they build meaningful relationships with their advisors (Savage et al., 2019). Academic advising can help students integrate into their institution by fostering a sense of belonging while actively supporting students' decision-making and indirectly influencing their choices to persist to graduation (Savage et al., 2019; Tinto, 2006). According to Emekako (2021), "Once higher education institutions grant access to students, it is only normal that these institutions provide continual support using

appropriate frameworks which consider both academic-and social-related challenges students face." (p. 1). Emekako explained the unique belief systems of academic advising shapes the experiences and the beliefs of value of the students by contributing progressive and developmental pathways through the lens of intentional advising that translates to academic improvement of students who consulted with the academic advisor (2021).

Academic Advisor and Faculty Roles on Advising

Academic advising has evolved from over half a century ago when academic advisors often had a low institutional status, roles were not clearly defined, were not rewarded, and professional development was not provided (Menke et al., 2020). Since then, the many approaches to academic advising have expanded their role to considering the students' entire college experience and attainment of their learning goal (Meneke et al., 2020). Although academic advising is a crucial professional function on college campuses, it is still an emerging profession that requires access to quality training within their first year and ongoing professional development opportunities throughout their careers (McGIll et al., 2020).

Academic advisors develop robust training through professional development programs and become effective advisors to their audience when advising through situations, content, and instructional delivery to engage with the participant most appropriately (Miller et al., 2020). Meneke et al. (2020), explained academic advisors enhance the general education experience of college students when they identify struggling students and determine an intervention that allows them to persist toward their

educational goals. However, higher education leaders often misunderstand academic advisors and underestimate their value despite concerns about student persistence (Meneke et al., 2020).

Advisors strive for professionalization in academic advising by transforming a nonprofessional occupation into a vocation with professional attributes (Meneke et al., 2020). Many academic advisors feel that their administration views them as assisting with course enrollment because there is no specific degree required to practice academic advising; however, many enter the position with a host of different academic backgrounds (Meneke et al., 2020). According to Miller et al., (2020), training and development provide necessary relational skills to advisors when offering students, the opportunity to connect with a professional from their institution who cares for their success.

In the history of academic advising, faculty members were considered the primary academic advisor for college students; however, when faculty members are not given clear expectations of advising, students tend to be dissatisfied with their advising experience (Hart-Baldridge, 2020). Faculty are typically evaluated on their roles in research and teaching; therefore, when advising is embedded as part of the learning within an institution, the advising may not always align with the institution's mission, values, and goals (Hart-Baldridge, 2020). According to (Baird, 2020), faculty advisors spend approximately 11% of their time advising students with academic issues. Hart-Baldridge (2020) reported, the perception that faculty members are uninterested in facilitating academic advising continues.

Baird (2020) argued that the best way to build relationships with faculty members is by engaging with the students, which fosters more opportunities for students to interact with their professors inside and outside the classroom. According to Hart-Baldridge (2020), faculty and students perceive barriers that come from faculty-student interactions, such as faculty being uninterested in meetings and faculty members having little awareness of their role outside of teaching. Hart-Baldridge (2020) explained students might feel uncomfortable when approaching faculty members and have difficulty establishing boundaries outside of the classroom in an unstructured environment.

Hart-Baldridge, (2020), explained faculty members worry that students will not take an interest in the faculty members' work outside of their classroom because of the struggle to establish boundaries of being a friend and professor while interacting as the advisor. According to Baird (2020), faculty members who enjoy their students tend to expand on additional opportunities to interact with them, whether inside or outside the classroom. Baird (2020) explained many smaller institutions with enrollments below 2,000 students utilize the opportunity for faculty members to serve as advisors and role models to the students within their academic departments, allowing the faculty members to advise students within their majors as they navigate through their courses and for some internships.

According to Hart-Baldridge (2020), upon exploring the aspects of faculty advising, faculty valued providing accurate information about academic requirements connected to the student's major; however, they did not see a connection to the general education requirement as part of their role as a faculty advisor. Hart-Baldridge (2020)

explained that faculty who viewed advising as a method of teaching and learning; may be more motivated to advise students. According to Hart-Baldridge (2020), academic advising should facilitate student learning by helping students understand their whole curriculum and giving perspective to their entire experience while in college. According to Baird (2020), while faculty are experts in their fields, there is very little training in academic advising, and the institutions do little to meet the faculty's professional development needs in this area.

Hart-Baldridge explained considering advising roles as tenured and with promotion opportunities motivates faculty to value advising in a reflective learning environment rather than a discretionary extra job should lead institutions to adopt policies that recognize advising faculty-advising as necessary to the institution and reward faculty-advisors for engaging in reflective learning (2020). According to Baird (2020), faculty must understand their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses while acquiring advising responsibilities with a positive attitude. Baird explained even if the institutions do not reward their faculty members for advising practices, the faculty members who do enjoy advising students tend to do it well with integrity and feel satisfied by helping students accomplish their coursework while building confidence in their overall experiences (2020).

Academic Advising Approaches

Academic advising has been shown to be a strategic and valuable element in student persistence and learning outcomes (Mu & Fosnatch, 2019). Institutions are tasked with developing pathways to successfully embody teaching and learning in pursuing

academic excellence and robust knowledge to support the frameworks needed to nurture

student success (Emekakao, 2021). Tinto's model of student integration reports goals and

intentions are continuously reshaped through academic and social structures providing

access to some form of support to prevent student failures (Tinto, 2014). Student

academic advisors contribute progressive developmental pathways for student retention

and academic support using approaches that change the behavior to align the approach

with a student's beliefs and values for the sake of the student's academic development

support (Emekakao, 2021). There are many different types of advising approaches such

as developmental advising, proactive advising, appreciative advising effective academic

advising, and advising outcomes.

Developmental Advising is the effectiveness of success for first-year student

retention occurs through numerous approaches to academic advising (Harris, 2018).

Developmental advising is an approach that focuses on the student's individual needs and

aspirations in achieving both academic and personal goals (Gordon, 2019). According to

Gordon (2019), development advising is a hallmark of student-centeredness and develops

the students holistically to include intellectually, personally, and socially in overcoming

barriers to implementing academic consistency.

Gordon explained developmental advising has not always been a popular avenue

among many institutions; however, the tenant of developmental advising allows the

advisor to integrate 20-minute interviews that foster the students feeling cared for by

someone from within the institution (2019). Developmental advising allows the advisor

to use an approach that focuses on the student's whole person and acquiring important

aspects of information about the student's life during the advising process, which leads to student success (Harris, 2018). Harris explained developmental advising is based on cognitive psychological advancements such as goal setting, which advisors use to assist students through challenges to promote goal setting, decision making, and creating self-awareness (2018).

Developmental advising can be used to develop a close student-advisor relationship focused on achieving the student's academic and personal goals, and the approach can be used effectively in group advising as long as students are acknowledged individually (Gordon, 2019). Gordon explained using developmental approaches for groups, incorporating course content and teaching techniques through first-year seminars or career courses can reflect development perspectives of student success (2019). Despite the multiple academic approaches, developmental advising enables academic advisors to guide students toward self-discovery by overcoming academic challenges while setting life goals (Harris, 2018).

During proactive advising, many first-generation students enter college with insufficient preparation for college-level coursework (Van Jura & Prieto, 2021). Van Jura and Prieto explained many first-generation students face psychological barriers and elevated levels of stress while in college due to a perceived lack of institutional support (2021). Proactive advising is generally understood as intentional contacts initiated by the institution to foster a sense of engagement to help students navigate their path to academic success (Van Jura & Prieto, 2021). Often, academic advisors are challenged

with intentional advising tactics to produce robust evidence of student learning outcomes when considering student retention (Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019).

According to Kraft-Terry and Kau (2019), proactive advising is a curriculum that uses a backward design to acquire a comprehensive assessment plan for continued curriculum improvement for at-risk students targeted for intervention (2019). According to Miller et al. (2019), proactive advising relies on counselor initiative contacts while focusing on advisor and student perceptions of the best approach for advising sessions to realize goals and outcomes. Van Jura and Prieto explained proactive advising is designed to foster positive relationships between the students and the academic advisor while facilitating persistence and success (2021).

The successful approach of proactive advising is an intentional design that scaffolds and augments students' foundational knowledge to aid in growth and development by learning the students' desired outcomes, defining the mode of feedback, then finalizing the content delivery (Kraft-Terry, & Kau, 2019). Proactive advising serves as a communication vehicle to facilitate additional advising opportunities to increase student interaction in persisting to degree completion (Miller et al., 2019). According to Van Jura and Prieto (2021), compared to more passive delivery models, proactive advising is an approach that can facilitate important outcomes such as grade improvement and retention and increased completion rates.

In the early 2000s, appreciative advising was developed based on many developmental approaches such as positive psychology, appreciative inquiry theory, choice theory, reality theory, social constructive theory scaffolding, and zone of proximal

development (Miller et al., 2019). Miller et al. (2019) explained appreciative advising is a developmental path that relies on a student-advisor co-creator design to foster students' strengths through regular advisor and student contact. Miller reported appreciative advising focuses on advisor and student perceptions for recommendations used in orientation courses and advising sessions, which increases the grade point average and persistence levels for students who are in academic jeopardy (Miller et al., 2019).

According to Tian and Louw (2020), appreciative advising views a problem through a lens of a positive view rather than a problem view because appreciative advising is centered on the belief that learning goals are reached through meaningful social communications, interactions, and practices. Tian and Louw explained appreciative advising proposes strength-based mentoring by articulating reflections of students' past positive experiences so they can envision their future through optimism and gain emotional satisfaction (2020). According to Tian and Louw (2020), when students envision their future, the advisor can build off their goals to implement a plan that will encapsulate features that correspond to what the student wants to achieve.

Recent research shows that appreciative advising encourages advisors to guide students to their achievement goals through discovering, developing, and uplifting their talents (Burks, 2022). Burks explained appreciative advising uses optimistic open-ended questions while actively listening to students to form bonds, so that students feel on-campus support (2022). Burks also reports that as the advisor empowers the student to cultivate skills needed to achieve the goals co-developed by the advisor and student, the student reaches independence (2022).

Effective academic advising has been found to increase students' retention rates to degree completion with positive benefits to educational institutions, such as authentic relationships between the students and the institutions' academic services (Ismail et al., 2021). College students enter their institutions with the hopes of improving their lives and earning a degree that will provide growth opportunities academically, socially, and professionally (Karp et al., 2021). College students tend to face barriers such as social, informational, and academic obstacles stemming work-life-school and may be unaware of institutional supports to help them navigate through their challenges (Karp et al.,2021). Most college students are disconnected from the support offered, and these students tend to navigate the support available to them on their own, which can result in their accessing support haphazardly (Karp et al., 2021). According to Ismail et al. (2021), the most significant influence on students' satisfaction is the regular interactions and encouragement provided by academic advisors and quality teaching over a sustained time period.

According to Karp et al. (2021), effective academic advising helps students realize their potential when collaborating with the student and the advisor, as the advisor plays an instrumental role in ensuring students are connected to both academic and non-academic supports. Karp et al. explained that enabling the students to overcome barriers while persisting and completing their degrees expands the role of the advisor in helping the student formulate personal, academic, and career goals (Karp et al., 2021). The development of self-efficacy and practical applications of study skills learned from the academic advisor impacts the students' academic performance in achieving their

academic goals (Ismail et al., 2021). In addition to the expanded role of the advisor, the advisor can also help the students navigate college requirements, understand the resources available, and help them make sound decisions while balancing academic and non-academic obligations (Karp et al., 2021).

According to Karp et al. (2021), students find face-to-face advising meetings to be very effective and more helpful than emails or texts because these face-to-face meetings work through complex issues such as goal setting when planning to select multiple courses over several semesters. Karp explained that the incentives of face-to-face meetings build personalized relationships as the advisor learns about the barriers and challenges their students face to better position the student with supportive services (Karp et al., 2021). The central goal of advising is to play an active role in identifying academic performance for early interventions and proactive measures to help the students by providing positive experiences that effectively build relationships. The advisor understands the needs of students to help them overcome barriers, become self-motivated, and persist to degree completion (Ismail et al., 2021; Karp et al., 2021).

When looking at the academic advising outcomes McGill et al. (2020) explained academic advising is still an emerging profession; therefore, academic advisors need access to quality training within their first year in practice and encouragement for professional development opportunities throughout their careers. McGill et al. (2020) explained that a primary role of academic advisors is solely the devotion to help the students achieve their goals and assimilate academically and socially to the college environment. According to McGill et al. (2020), relational skills in academic advising are

essential for effective advising because a healthy advisor-student relationship can produce significant results in the students' learning satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates.

According to Zarges et al. (2018), teaching and learning have become a focus for academic advising due to a significant shift within the profession, creating the need for advising programs to identify programmatic missions, goals, student learning, and advisory outcomes. As Zarges et al. (2018), explained outcomes of academic advising focus on what students know, what they can do, and providing the advice and resources for students to be successful. Zarges explained that advisor-delivery outcomes measure the effectiveness of what the advisor knows as far as competencies, what they can do in the delivery of their knowledge, and their core values to advise (Zarges et al., 2018).

According to Zarges et al. (2018), advising done well improves the student learning experience while connecting advising to the educational process through retention, student engagement, and persistence to graduation. Zarges explained the role of the advisor is to focus on the issues most vital to the success of students and the institution (2018). To help students achieve degree completion, academic advisors must focus on effective advising through effective training and establishing an institutional culture of advising (Zarges et al., 2018).

Conclusion

In summary, Tinto's (1975, 2006) theory of student retention, which addressed students' academic and social integration into college, has been used through the lens of institutional actions to retain students. His theory related to my research problem of

retention for the first-generation college students who entered college underrepresented and with little to no knowledge of academic processes. Tinto's theory provided a foundation of the institution's role in a student's decision to persist.

Prior research has showed that academic advising positively impacts student retention, while Tinto's theory supported academic advising learning outcomes and persistence (Davis et al., 2019; DeLaRosby, 2017; Titno, 1993). However, there was gap in the research literature regarding how regularly scheduled advising sessions impacted socialization and persistence in first-generation college students. I examined the perceptions of first-generation college graduates who participated in regularly scheduled advising sessions to learn how the experience influenced their persistence to graduation.

In Chapter 3, I explained my qualitative study design in detail, and discussed my rationale for my selected design. I explained my role in the research process and how the data from first-generation college graduates would be collected and analyzed. I also included the method I used to identify first-generation college graduates who I recruited to participate. Further, I identified the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of my basic qualitative study was to gain insight into the perceptions of first-generation college student graduates, specifically regarding how regularly required academic advising sessions improved retention and degree completion outcomes. In focusing on the graduates' perceptions of the regularly required academic advising sessions, the intent was to inform stakeholders of the data findings to guide future programs to help retain students from semester to semester and ultimately persist to degree completion.

In this chapter, I discuss basic qualitative research framework and detail how it aligned appropriately with my research question. As the sole researcher, I use my positionality to describe my methodology in how I planned to locate and recruit first-generation college graduates to participate in my study. I also discuss my intent to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews to gather my data. I further describe my coding process and how I intend to create categories and themes from my collected data. Lastly, I address the trustworthiness and ethics of my research.

Research Design and Rational

The research question driving my study was, how do first-generation college student graduates describe the experience of participating in regularly scheduled advising sessions on their persistence to degree completion? I selected a basic qualitative framework because it supported my inquiry into the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of first-hand experiences lived by first-generation college graduates. A qualitative framework interprets how humans view their experiences and make meaning of their

experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This approach allowed me to connect the dots of the realities experienced and relationships shaped by first-generation college graduates who met with an advisor regularly while seeking degree completion. A quantitative approach was not applicable because experiences and perceptions are impossible to quantify and would not answer my research questions.

Basic qualitative research is motivated by an interest in a phenomenon. The goal was to inform about the phenomenon through people describing their senses, perceptions, and meanings of their experiences to awaken awareness, while also adding to knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). This supported my study to understand how first-generation college graduates felt about their processes of regularly required academic sessions, and if this led the graduates to degree completion. My study also added knowledge to stakeholders who wish to incorporate programs that retain first-generation college students, as well as to fill a gap in the literature related to advising interventions. The basic qualitative study aligned with social constructivism in that it focused on how people interpreted their experiences, constructed their words, and the meanings attributed to their experiences (Kahlke, 2014). This also supported my intention to discover and apply these meanings from the data collected from first-generation college graduates who participated in regularly required academic advising sessions to degree completion.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study comes with a great deal of power; with this power comes great responsibility to pay careful attention to accurately represent

the experiences of others (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The identity of the researcher

serves as the instrument. The researcher needs to maintain reflexivity, which allows for

transparency through continuous assessing and reassessing of their positionality and

subjectivity through guiding assumptions that directly relate to and shape the research

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As my participants' sole researcher

and recruiter, I developed interview questions, recorded the data, and transcribed the

interviews.

To minimize bias, I was cautious to remain objective and not interject my own

opinions or persuade during the data collecting process. I used a nonjudgmental stance as

I interacted honestly and respectfully regardless of the participants responses.

Throughout my qualitative research, I maintained accurate checks and balances to

address methodological implications such as validity issues (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I also

used a reflexive journal to record my feelings, observations, and reactions before, during,

and after the interviews to note any unbiased actions.

As an assistant registrar at a four-year Christian university many years ago, I saw

firsthand that there was a gap in how the institution retained its first-generation college

students from semester to semester. Not only did I serve as the assistant registrar, but I

also served as an academic advisor, a counselor to the student and the parents, a

confidant, and a mentor the students trusted for institutional understandings of their

academic tracts.

In my assistant registrar role, as explained by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), I was

considered the insider because the students understood I knew the functions of what first-

generation college students needed to be successful. Because the institution did not have a designated team of academic advisors, I felt our department professors needed to step in and help advise these students academically. In turn, I became an outsider because I was not in the classroom; thus, I wasn't privy to the professors' workload and relationships with the students. Throughout my study, it was vital for me to practice and maintain reflexivity so that I could acknowledge, understand, and recall my own positionality to ensure my own values, beliefs, and assumptions did not interfere with my research or my results. Because I was working with first-generation college graduates, I was not working with the existing institutions where I once served as an assistant registrar, which allowed me to maintain distance from the institution itself.

Methodology

In Chapters 1 and 2, I described the reason for my study, identified the gap in its existing research, and provided a rationale for why my study needed to be conducted. The first two chapters allowed me to present the *why* of my study, while this section addressed the approach of the study to gather data and find the meaning of the data, which allowed me to present the *how*. In the next few sections, I describe my recruitment plan, the setting, the participation selection, and the data collection and analysis plan. To decrease bias, I adhered to ethical standards and methods to ensure validity, credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Participants for my study were first-generation college graduates who attended a four-year private Christian university and were enrolled in a regularly required academic

advising platform during the last six years. Study participants must have persisted to degree completion to meet the criteria of my study. Additionally, these participants had to share honest perceptions and experiences for my study to provide information-rich answers to answer my research questions and provide insight to inform the gap in the literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Since 2016, an advising program was put into place at the institution of higher learning for first-generation students, and many students have graduated; therefore, I did not foresee any trouble recruiting 10-12 people from the population. After I receive permission from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Walden University, I sent these potential participants a written invitation to participate in my study by campus email. My invitation included information regarding the purpose and intention of my study, a letter of consent clarifying the involvement of the participants who agreed to participate in the interviews, and an explanation of the purpose of my data collection.

I also recruited my participants through personal and professional social media websites such as LinkedIn and Facebook using a social media flyer (see Appendix A). I located the first-generation college graduates who graduated from this institution, without mentioning the institution's name, but by posting the location of the town and state in which that institution was located. Participants were eligible to participate if they were active in the regularly required academic advising platform from 2016 to the present time and persisted to graduation. Potential participants were requested to return a private message to me with their name, contact information, and a brief summary of how they met my inclusion criteria. I read and confirmed each response to ensure trustworthiness.

Instrumentation

As the sole researcher, I was the instrument for this study; therefore, I was responsible for maintaining a commitment of reflexivity ethically and responsibly by paying careful attention to the research process for myself and the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I created interview questions and vetted them with my doctoral committee to understand the perceptions of first-generation college graduates who experienced regularly required academic advising sessions to degree completion (see Appendix B). I asked semi-structured questions, with prompts as needed, to stimulate responses about the participants' experiences, actions, activities, beliefs, and knowledge, as well as probing further to clarify supporting information to explain their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection

When collecting data, journaling provided a way to capture discoveries and ongoing ideas to help make sense of the information and understand the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Reflective journaling is a practical way to note your feelings, observations, and thoughts before, during, and after the interviews. I practiced my interviews and questions with several people that were not related to my study to refine my technique and to ensure I did not interject my own personal feelings. I used my pilot participants to refine my expertise with my zoom setting, such as the word diction that transcribed the audio and to ensure that my facial features did not play a role in my participants' answers as they saw me on camera. Through reflective journaling, I made

sure I did not use useless language such as "um." Those who served in my pilot were excluded from my research study.

To collect data, I addressed my research questions. I conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews virtually through a Zoom meeting to obtain rich, deep, individualized data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A Zoom meeting allowed me to view facial and body actions that I may otherwise not be able to observe through a phone call. I will create open-ended questions and follow-up questions, which I reviewed with my dissertation committee to help keep them objective and non-leading (see Appendix B).

In accordance with Walden University's IRB instructions, I audio recorded each participant who was willing to accept my invitation. I allowed 45-60 minutes for the completion of each interview. The interviews were conducted on the participants' available schedule, and I was encouraged to place themselves in a comfortable setting for privacy. Prior to beginning the interview, I made sure the participant consented to the interview and I reviewed the purpose of my study and clarified any questions the participant poses.

Data Analysis Plan

There are five steps to translating data into a usable form: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Compiling the data is the first step in finding meaningful answers to the research questions. Next, disassembling the data separates the data into meaningful groups through coding, which is the process that identifies the themes, concepts, or ideas that have a connection with each other. Reassembling categorizes the themes that create

themes. Interpreting relies on the researcher to conclude the data presented, which is the response to the research questions or the purpose of the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Qualitative research tends to focus on the frequency, intensity, or behavior, which allows for exploring the beliefs, values, and motives that explain why the behavior occurred (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Analyzing qualitative data from interviews required me to apply themes to texts to label and organize themes and concepts found within the data collected from the participants' unique perspective that offered transparency, visualization of the results, and replication valuable to the data analysis process (Pokorny, 2018). Coding in qualitative research offers short word forms or phrases that are symbolic in capturing data collected from interviews, transcripts, participant field notes, documentation, or journals by offering meaning to the data that can be analyzed for more in-depth meanings and interpretation (Saldaña, 2016).

Qualitative research aligns to theory-driven analysis, meaning the theory informs the data by addressing the relationship between the data and the theory that is often seen when the data is disassembled or themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I read through my interviews several times and highlighted the information by color-coding the data that I felt addressed the research question. I planned to break the data into more minor aspects or similar perceptions, which allowed me to develop the themes I wanted to assign through inductive coding to find emerging themes and additional categories. To refine the analysis, I looked back through my journal record themes to ensure there are no discrepancies in my data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research strategies are vital in establishing trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In conducting my study, I ensured my research strategies, conclusions, perspectives, and results are consistent with the data I collected by promoting trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I acknowledged the responsibility of conducting my study and interpreting my data ethically and honestly to validate and fill the gap in the research literature regarding the perceptions of first-generation college graduates regarding regularly required academic advising and retention.

Credibility and Validity

If established correctly, credibility increases when the participants agree with the construction and interpretations of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravich & Carl, 2021). To establish credibility, I depended on the feedback from my committee and peer debriefing. I had my participants verify their information to ensure that I conveyed and reflected accurately on what was said in their interviews. I provided each participant with a transcribed copy of their interview and allowed them to make any changes they desire.

Transferability

To allow for transferability, the researcher must provide significant details to justify the finding (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative research aims to produce factual statements while maintaining the richness of specific context to parallel the notion of external validity (Ravich & Carl, 2021). I provided sufficient descriptive data about the

setting and methods so that each situation is replicated, and I protected the identity of my participants. Providing this information allows other researchers to understand my process.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of my data in my study that ensures reliability through creating a well-articulated rationale that confirms I created an appropriate data collection plan given my research question (Ravich & Carl, 2021). I accurately reported the details throughout the process by reflecting and writing on rich details and descriptions utilized to perform the data analysis that cultivated and completed my study.

Confirmability

The goal of achieving confirmability is to acknowledge that I remained unbiased in interpreting data by fully mediating through reflexivity and putting aside my personal views for accurate reporting (Ravich & Carl, 2021). I informed all my participants that this practice was part of my process to ensure trustworthiness and ethical values. I also kept a journal to record my thoughts, feelings, and reactions before, during, and after the interviews to ensure that I remained focused and not interject my personal feelings on any conclusions drawn from the data I collected.

<div align="center">

Ethical Procedures

</div>

Research ethics includes the institutional review board (IRB), ethics committees, informed consent, boundaries, reciprocity, transparency, and confidentiality. Walden University ensures that researchers follow the appropriate guidelines before allowing a research project to progress (Ravich & Carl, 2021). I was solely responsible for

maintaining ethical practices and actions during my research. I respected my participants'

rights and privacy by discussing with all my participants my processes for keeping their

information confidential. This included protecting their identity by maintaining secure

records. I have stored all my hard copies of the research data in a fireproof, locked safe in

my home office that only I have access to. The computer where I stored digital data is

password protected and not shared with anyone else—all digital and physical records are

safeguarded for five years before destroying them as per Walden University guidelines.

Participants received a consent form acknowledging their acceptance to volunteer in my

research. My study did not intentionally inflict physical or psychological harm on my

participants as they share their lived experiences and perspectives.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the rationale for a qualitative research design to

conduct my research related to the perceptions of first-generation college graduates

regarding regularly required academic advising and retention. I described my position as

it related to my study and described my intentions to recruit and protect my participants

as well, and how I planned to conduct my study. Finally, I have detailed the

trustworthiness and ethical practices and procedures that I utilized as the sole researcher

of my study. In the next chapter, I discussed and presented a summary of the data

collected as well as the results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of first-generation graduates on how regularly required academic advising helped lead them to degree completion. The research question guiding this study was as follows: How do first-generation college graduates describe their experiences while participating in regularly required academic advising sessions influencing persistence to degree completion? In this chapter, I report the demographics of the graduates who participated in this study, and then describe the data collection process, the data analysis, and the study's trustworthiness. Finally, I will present the results of my study.

Settings

For this study, I recruited eight participants who graduated from a four-year Christian university in the southeast region of the United States. I obtained participants through a social media flyer that I posted on Facebook and LinkedIn social media sites. The participants responded to my Walden University email that they were interested in participating after reviewing and meeting the criteria listed on the social media recruitment flyer. I responded to the participants, requesting a date and time to set up the Zoom meeting. Once the participants responded and provided a day and time for the interview, I returned an email copy of the consent form from the participant along with a Zoom link scheduled for each participant. As I began the recording with each participant, I reviewed the consent form and received verbal consent from the participant. The first interview was held on December 19, 2022, and the last concluded on January 8, 2023. I

conducted interviews over the Zoom platform and converted the video recordings to the Otter.ai application to transcribe them.

Demographics

The participants of this study were all first-generation college graduates who graduated within the last seven years from a four-year institution of higher learning. The participants attended and graduated from the same college between 2016-2022, and all participated in regularly required academic advising sessions. Four participants identified as female, and four identified as male.

Data Collection

After interviewing eight participants via Zoom, I reached saturation of my research topic because no new information was elicited; so, I did not need to schedule more interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) once the data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon being studied, saturation is reached. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, depending on how in-depth the participants answered the questions. The interviews were recorded through Zoom using the closed caption option, and then I transferred the video recording Otter.ai, an application that facilitated my viewing of the transcripts more clearly. I went back through each interview while listening to the audio recording to ensure that the data transcribed was accurate. Once the interview was transcribed correctly, I downloaded each interview as a Microsoft Word document so I could hand code the data.

Data Analysis

As each interview was completed, I went through the transcriptions looking for keywords/concepts to determine themes that aligned to my conceptual framework. Because my conceptual framework was based on the tenets of Tinto's academic and social integration, I used Tinto's student integration theory model to focus my themes. I found additional categories and themes that emerged, allowing me to capture anything outside of the pre-established themes. The four themes aligned to Tinto's student integration theory model, which underlies a student's decision-making processes for persisting in their academic commitments (see Table 1).

I created an Excel spreadsheet where I could mark an "x" when the keywords/concepts were discussed in the interview. Using four colors, I marked a blue "x" for a keyword/concept identified by the participants when they mentioned to get a good job for Goals and Commitments. I marked a red "x" when participants mentioned keywords/concepts about feeling prepared for Institutional Experiences. I marked a green "x" when participants answered questions mentioned keywords/concepts about being involved for Personal Normative Integration; lastly, I used an orange "x" when participants mentioned keywords/concepts about staying on track for Outcomes/Persistence (see Table 1). This process of using themes allowed me to determine which of my themes were used more frequently to understand better what the participants felt was most important among the experiences that helped them persist to degree completion.

In the second coding round, I focused on a greater depth to determine when a participant referred to keywords/concepts in the interviews that aligned with the definitions from the themes developed from Tinto's student integration theory model (see Table 1). I created an additional spreadsheet where I placed the interview questions in a cell and labeled a row for each participant. I typed in the keywords/concepts for each participant that pertained to the definition of the themes developed from Tinto's student integration theory model within the interview questions.

Lastly, I copied each participant's answers to the interview questions in a continuous word document, using the exact wording and phrasing to search for themes that aligned to Tinto's student integration theory model. I identified four themes about students' perceptions regarding the regularly required academic advising sessions that led to degree completion that were relevant to the research question.

The first theme that aligned to Tinto's student integration theory model was *Goals and Commitments*. Tinto asserted that individual characteristics and the individual's social and academic integration are the two most important factors that determine student persistence (Tinto, 1975). The interaction between students' individual commitments and goals to their completion and their commitment to their institution determines whether they persist or drop out (Tinto, 1975).

The second theme aligned to Tinto's student integration theory model was *Institutional Experiences*, which includes academic and social systems. Tinto identified these two systems as the most important systems and contended that if one or both systems did not occur, students were likely to drop out. He mentioned that if extreme

integration occurred in one system, it would cause issues with the other system (Tinto, 1975).

The third theme aligned to Tinto's student integration theory model was *Personal/Normative Integration*, which includes academic and social integration. Tinto explained that students view their own academic integration through a combination of grade performance, which is a kind of extrinsic reward, and intellectual development, which is more of an intrinsic reward (Tinto, 1975). Tinto indicated that social integration directly relates to persistence, and the lack of social integration would lead to attrition issues, and students would be more likely voluntarily withdraw (Tinto, 1975).

The fourth theme aligned to Tinto's student integration theory model (1975, 1993) was *Outcomes*, which focused on persistence. The term persistence, which leads to outcomes, is an active form of motivation that allows a student to continue toward the pursuit of a goal when challenges arise (Tinto, 2017a). Student persistence to degree completion outcomes involves students becoming engaged within the community, other students, academics, and professional staff through a sense of belonging that allows them to feel they matter and belong (Tinto, 2017a). Student motivation to persistence also shapes their outcomes through the perception of their curriculum, and that what they are learning is a sufficient quality to warrant their time and effort (Tinto, 2017a).

Table 1

Themes Developed from Tinto's Student Integration Theory Model

Theme	Label	Definition	Keywords/Concepts
1	Goals and Commitments	An individual's interaction between themselves and the institution that determines if the student will persist or drop out of college (Tinto, 1975).	Job/Career, Accountable,
2	Institutional Experiences	Academic system consists of academic performance and interactions with Staff/Faculty.	Prepared, Felt Good, Friendly, Comfortable, Helpful
		Social System consist of extracurricular activities and peer-group interactions (Tinto, 1993).	Bible Groups, Teammates, Classmates, Roommates, Feast, Impact Day, Sports
3	Personal Normative Integration	Academic Integration: The measurement of how well a student integrates into the academic system through grade point averages, attendance, academic advising, and interactions with faculty and groups outside the classroom (Tinto, 1993).	Interacted, Time Management, Organized, Being Involved, Guided, Coaches, Came to my games
		Social Integration: The measurement of how a student integrates into the social system through extracurricular activities among the institution, group interactions, and resources offered (Tinto, 1993).	Feast, Dorm Wars, Impact Day, Intramurals, Study Groups, Student Ambassador, Bookstore, Writing Center, Computer Lab, Student Services, Registrar's Office
4	Outcomes	Persistence: The motivation that allows someone to continue in the pursuit of a goal regardless of the challenges that arise (Tinto, 2017a).	Prepared, Stay on Track, Organized Time Management, Being Involved, Guided

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As the researcher, I need to demonstrate and address trustworthiness. Through every stage of this study, I engaged in peer debriefing with other colleges in the education field to enhance the study's credibility. In addition, for dependability, I kept a researcher journal where I wrote my own notes and thoughts while working on this study. I accurately reported the details throughout the process by reflecting and writing on rich details and descriptions utilized to perform the data analysis that cultivated and completed my study. Once I began the interviews, I summarized each interview in my journal, and then reflected on the experience and made notes of any significant actions. For example, on December 12, 2022, I wrote, "after having my first interview today. I could hear through the participants' answers how my regularly required academic advising sessions program that I created led to this student's degree completion." I wrote, "I can see where my institutional work as an assistant registrar has come full circle for these graduates and my research study." This reflexive writing helped me remain objective and kept personal biases in check. Confirmability of my findings is evidenced in the use of the participants' own words to support the themes.

Results

Having described my coding process and the trustworthiness of the procedures followed, I now discuss the results of the data collected. The results are based on the research question framed by Tinto's theory of student retention, which addresses students' academic and social integration as it relates to first-generation college students.

Themes from Tinto's Student Integration Theory Model

I used the four themes as identified from Tinto's student integration theory model (see Table 1). Through interview questions and probing questions, I was able to provide a framework for what I wanted to learn from the data to address the research question. The themes discussed were *Goals and Commitments, Institutional Experiences, Personal Normative Integration, and Outcomes.*

Theme 1: Goal and Commitments

The *Goals and Commitments* (see Table 1) finding revealed that many first-generation college students lack readiness resources because they are the first ones in their families to experience the demands incurred while transitioning from high school to college. All eight participants mentioned they had the same or similar goals or commitments when asked what made them decide to attend college, which were to complete college so they could get a good job/career. Participant A state, "mainly to be able to walk across the stage and have a diploma and a degree so that I could get a job that would be able to be my career, from here on out." Participant B's response was a bit more detailed in describing pre-conceptions of goals by replying

> My influence for attending college was just to play lacrosse. I did not know what I wanted to major in. I knew I was great with people, but I did not know that gift was highly undeveloped. I thought it was counseling at first, which I believed that was my calling. I just chose a people degree, which I thought was either counseling or psychology. But I loved the way that the brain worked more than social work, so actually I selected psychology. But it was really to play lacrosse

because I wanted to go to college, and I could go pretty much go on scholarship.

My parents had trades, and I wanted to have a good career.

Participant C had the most unique answer and replied, "I couldn't just sit at the house."
Participant C further explained

After I graduated high school, I had to do something. So, it was either college,

that's what my parents preached, or the military, as my sister did. So, I was like,

well, I gotta do something. So, I started looking into colleges. That was the norm

in high school was college, if not just work. So, I went the college route because I

wanted to get a degree in business. I felt like that was going to help me in the long

run. For me, it was kind of like, my one in a billion chances for an option like

that. So, yeah, that was the main thing, like get a degree that will open

opportunities to for a good job, or a better job that put will put me in a position to

be successful in life and pretty much kind of go wherever I want to go. Because

nowadays, if you have a degree, there's a lot you can do. Without a degree,

there's not a whole lot; there's not a whole lot of jobs that are good paying jobs,

that are willing to give the opportunity even though you do know what you're

smart enough to do the job, they weren't willing to give that opportunity without

the degree. I wanted opportunities to get a better job and be successful.

Participant D commented about setting a standard for younger family members in their
reply.

I decided to attend college because I knew if I had more education, I would get a

better job. I knew I would have been the first generation of my family to make it

through college and complete that milestone; that way, I would be a leader for my younger family members behind me. So that's why I chose to go to college because I know it'll make a difference in my future.

Participant E also commented on a good job, but further elaborated, "No one in my family has ever been to college." The assumption is that first-generation college students did not know how to set goals or know what to expect from their college experience. Participant F was an international student, and the response was very unique.

My mom is from Jamaica. Well, both of my parents are from Jamaica, actually. But my mom raised me, and I just saw the struggles of her growing up, and like, she didn't go to college. She's just been working; she has a clean up after people and has had to do low-grade jobs because she didn't have a college degree. She always pushed us to go to college; I have two other siblings. She pushed us to go to college, to get a degree so that we could have a hand up in the world so that we could be successful as possible. She did everything she could for us to have it good.

The remaining participants had similar comments about their reasons for deciding to attend college as a first-generation college student.

Theme 2: Institutional Experiences

Institutional Experiences (see Table 1) supports my research questions of how first-generation college graduates described their experiences while participating in their academics and attending regularly required academic advising sessions, which influenced persistence to degree completion.

The Institutional Experiences were also vital for academic and social student integration. I started out asking the participants about their ability to meet their academic expectations once they entered college. Participant A replied, "It was not too easy, but it was not too hard." Participant B commented, "I was able to thrive academically, but it was much harder than I expected." Participant C replied,

The Registrar's office had everything lined up for me by showing me what I needed to take and advised me to follow up with my academic advisor each semester, which kept me organized and on track. I would not have known to follow this track had the Registrar's office never set me up with regular academic advising sessions.

After asking about their academic expectations, the participants were asked how they interacted with other peers. Most participants mentioned they met peers by being roommates or through the classroom and their activities. Participant E's comment was unique in relation to approaching other peers, "I just started conversations with people on campus because I was a friendly person, and sometimes students looked like they needed someone just to say, hello." Participant G commented, "I already had friends and church members at college, so they were able to introduce me to new people."

Once questioning the participants about their first experience with their academic advisors, the responses were rich in information. I inquired how the participants felt about their first experience with their academic advisor. Participant C commented, "I was very nervous, but once I realized I could ask any question and they could help me with my schedule, it was very eye opening!" Participant D replied, "It was a good feeling

because I was like a deer in headlights, but they gave me the information up front and kept me on track."

In response to how the participants interacted with their academic advisor. Participant A commented,

We had a lot of interactions, because like I said earlier, she was my professor in a lot of the classes that I took. So, I would see her in classes. Then I also would just see her around. She also would come to some of the soccer games. Actually, if she knew we had a game, she would show up, and we talked a little bit afterwards. So, we definitely interacted a lot.

Participant B replied, "Throughout the day, I would stop by when going to get my mail just say what's up and ask them how they were doing and just talk to them and build my relationship." Participant C remarked, "She helped my with x. y, and z during our sessions, but would show up to my games and eventually made me feel more comfortable."

All eight participants had similar remarks about how their experiences integrated them academically and socially through activities and organizations. Peer groups led them to participate in institutional activities. These activities included Dorm Wars, where dorms competed again one another with games, Impact Day, where students served the community by cleaning yards for elderly residences, painting houses, or building walls for Habitat for Humanity, and Feast, where students all came together for dinner and fellowship. Participant B stated, "I did everything that I could get my hands on." Participant C remarked, "I felt like I belonged. I felt like I was, you know, included. I felt

like I could talk to almost everyone at the university." Participant C added, "You all are going through the same thing, so we always did a lot of that stuff together and were able to talk and share our information feeling confident to discuss with other peers."

All eight participants also had similar comments about how their experiences and interactions with their academic advisor reassured them, kept them on track while making them feel comfortable, and made them feel comfortable when discussing their academics with other peers making them feel involved in the institution academically and socially. When the participants were asked more about their institutional experiences about how they assimilated with their college peers, Participant A commented,

> I was always with a group. Most of them it was my soccer team, just because that's who I was around 24/7, but I also made friends with a lot of people other than athletic things. I think knowing we all were going through tough preseasons and were all struggling with confidence building, made it easy to have those conversations, and it was neat. I also talked to people that weren't athletes just walking around the school, just because everyone was so talkative and just easy to get along.

Participant B replied,

> Well, I knew maybe every student on campus, that was because I was so involved with everything. I gave visitors their tour, so they might show up the next semester, and it was like, hey, you gave me my tour. And I'm like, yeah, I did. This is what you can do. So, I knew everybody almost.

As I interviewed more participants, asking them how they assimilated, the institutional experiences became more detailed. Participant G's response was the most detailed,

> Yeah, I would say, my ability to assimilate was already high. I grew up around people who were different, so being in an environment that there were more different people wasn't a big shock even though I went to a predominately white, high school, and grade school, but I never went to school with a person of Indian heritage or ethnicity, a person of Asian ethnicity, a person of Latin, ethnicity. So, so being in classrooms of people you know, playing games, playing sports, going into different things with other people who were not my family, that was new in itself as well. So, I think I was still able to gravitate towards anyone because I was already used to being around people that were different.

The participants were then asked a series of interviews and probing questions to explain how regularly scheduled advising sessions influenced their career readiness upon graduation. When the participants were asked how prepared they felt upon entering college. Participant A commented,

> Um, at first, I was nervous, but I felt very prepared once I met with everybody, and they helped sit me down and like go through everything about what I needed to do and what courses I would be taken and things in that matter that felt very comfortable then.

Participant C replied,

I felt prepared because in high school, I took like, most advanced or AP classes, but I had no clue how clueless I was until I realized the university had so much in place to really prepare me and keep me on track.

Participant D commented, "I felt like I was pretty prepared for it just trying to adjust to that someone reminded me of you have assignments to do this is what time you need to be in class." Participant D elaborate more about how the institution prepared the student upon entering college by commenting, "time management was big thing, so it took me a while to adjust to everything, but everyone at the university help me prepare upon entering." Participant F responded, "Um, I think that I was well prepared, so I thought." Then Participant F when further to describe the transition in deep detail,

I think that it there's a good transition, especially knowing what classes would be coming, even though I was scared. I was like, oh, my gosh, it did help having those classes selected coming in. I was scared initially, but when I got there, it was just like, it was good, and I felt more prepared because the institution had things ready for me. It was not until I started meeting with the assistant registrar, who taught me process of how to read my degree sheet and understand the course catalog that things started making sense what I was taking what I was taking. Again, I only thought I was prepared. The assistant registrar helped me to change my major without causing me to lose time and classes, and then the academic advisors kept me on track after I changed my major because I was not failing classes being in the wrong major. My first major of Biology just was not for me.

Participant G replied, "Not prepared, and no one from high school helped. I found myself just going to classes with no study material and had to work a lot." However, when asking this same participant how prepared they felt about the expectations of the academic rigor going into the classroom, the response was the opposite, "I felt comfortable because the classes were a good size and more hands-on from the professors, academic advisors, and registrar's office."

Toward the end of my interview with all eight participants, I asked them how the regularly required academic sessions led them to degree completion, along with a prompt question to explain how regularly scheduled advising sessions influenced their career readiness upon graduation. Participant A replied, "It prepared me to feel comfortable with conversations during interviews." Participant B replied, "They had prepared me for what is next." However, participants C replied, "I was prepared and kind of ready for, you know, my options of what you could and could not do." The remaining participants, D, E, F, G, and H had similar remarks. However, all five remaining participants mentioned they were prepared for what was to come with careers and furthering their education.

Theme 3: Personal Normative Integration

Personal Normative Integration (see Table 1), was identified as the themes with the most frequency. This supports the research problem about how many first-generation college students, as compared to their non-first-generation peers, enter college at a disadvantage that affects their academic performance and well-being. When participants were asked who helped them with their application process to enter college, there was a variety of answers. Most participants mentioned that Admissions helped them, other

participants provided additional resources. Participants A and C, were both recruited for athletics, and Participant A replied, "My mom helped and then my coach looked over my application before I submitted it." Participant C commented "My sister helped me a lot, but my coach looked over it once I sent it. My admissions counselor, then contacted me when it was discovered that I missed some information." Participant D's response was slightly different. Even though this graduate was recruited for sports, Participant D commented that he received college application assistance from a family member and shared, "My sister, as much as possible, but I had to have my coach's help; however, the Admission Office helped complete the fine details that were missed and helped get my high school transcript." Participant G replied, "My youth pastor because my parent did not know what needed to be filled out." Participant H is an immigrant and replied, "I had mentors from a group in the United States that were church members of my family and friends that helped international students."

Participants were also asked to describe the help they received upon entry to college as compared to their peers who were not first-generation college status, Participant A noted, "I wish I could have had that much help from my parents because I would not have been so far behind or would not have been so confused about many things." Participant B shared "I would probably say that those students' parents who had already been to college knew what to do and knew what to look for and what to ask for." Two participants eluded that they really did not know there was a difference in the two groups. Participant F replied, "I did not feel a difference, because I just showed up, and thought everyone was confused like me." Participant G commented, "I will say that I

wasn't as knowledgeable on this, I guess the perspective of first-generation versus not was not a thought, so I cannot say that I was able to adequately measure their experience versus mine." Lastly, Participant H replied, "There was an obvious difference of the unknown, and it was a lot of experimentation of what was right or wrong."

When participants were asked to describe their interaction with other peers through activities and organizations after entry, participants discussed the activities they shared together within the community. Participant B mentioned, "We studied together and shared what we discussed with faculty members to help each other with homework and helped each other if someone did not get something."

Participant G shifted to the social system of activities and peer group interactions and expressed, "We had a campus activities board where a group of students came together to plan activities." Participant H commented, "I pretty much mesh together with many of my friends because once we got comfortable with each other, we started sharing more of what we believed in and cared about." Participant D commented, "I do not know how it went together, but it just kind of fell together very well because we all understood that it is a small community." Lastly, Participant E replied, "The main thing that made us close was things like going out to get dinner together and just hanging out at the lake.

Theme 4: Outcomes

Outcomes (see Table 1), consist of persistence, which is the motivation that allows someone to continue pursuing a goal regardless of the challenges that arise. The outcome results were mentioned slightly less than half as much as the replies to social and academic integration. These results supported my conceptual framework of Tinto's

theory as it related to the first-generation college student who persisted to degree completion. The results also supported my study when first-generation graduates described how regularly required academic advising sessions influenced their persistence. The participants were asked how the advice they received from the academic advisor was applied inside and outside of the classroom, Participant A replied. "I was told to stay positive no matter the situation." Participant D commented, "I was given coping skills to keep me less stressed." Participant E remarked, "Their advice helped me to secure an internship." Participant F replied, "They organized me." Participant G's reply was unique, "My advisor gave me ways to keep from procrastinating."

The participants were asked how their regularly required academic advising sessions led them to degree completion. Participants A replied, "I think that it definitely helped me to graduate and stay on track." Participant B stated, "I would not have done it without them, and they made it significantly easier. So, you know, I give a ton of my success to them by keeping me on track." Participant C commented, "Having a plan planned out for me helped out and helped keep me on track." Participant D shared an unusual circumstance when a military and boot camp interfered with the participant's original graduation date. Participant D replied, "The regularly scheduled meetings were very impactful because I was able to stay on track, especially after I come back from military that threw my graduation off from the time I was supposed to graduate." Participant E replied, "It kept me on track to degree completion, but I would say that I think that they would need to take it a step further and do real world integrations. Participants F, G, and H also had similar comments on how they stayed on track.

The participants were asked to explain how they were able to apply what they discussed /learned in advising sessions to help meet their goals. Participant A pointed out, "I think for me, it just helps show that like she cared. And just the whole school institution care." Participant H shared, "I think that was a big thing is just knowing that someone cared that I was doing the right thing and staying on track and everything."

The participants were asked how the regularly required academic advising sessions influenced their career readiness upon graduation. Participant A replied, "It prepared me to feel comfortable with interviews." Participant E commented, "It prepared me during interviews and helped me seek resources in applying for jobs." Participant G stated, "It gave me an idea of what to say, to plan ahead, and to set goals that can be met." Many of the participants in my study indicated how their regularly required academic advising session influenced them to integrate academically and socially with faculty/staff and peers. This supports my argument about how regularly required academic advising sessions improve retention and degree completion outcomes. Participant A said, "A typical advising session definitely positively influenced me, just because she was always very positive, giving me good affirmations and comments." Participant C mentioned how the academic advising sessions were applied inside and outside of the classroom and stated, "I think they definitely influenced me because they kept you focused, and they kept you pretty much moving forward with everything from classes, activities, and all campus related responsibilities."

Throughout the interviews and the data analysis, I kept returning to Participant A's comments about the whole first-generation experience and reaching degree

completion. Participant A mentioned how faculty and staff came to the games of their students, how positive the academic advisors were, the relief felt upon being told to attend regularly required academic advising sessions through degree completion, and how comfortable the relationships built with the institution and peers were. Participant A's experiences were evidence of the outcomes that may result if other institutions implemented regularly required academic advising sessions to degree completion for all first-generation students.

When asked how the participants felt about being told they had to meet with an academic advisor regularly, most were relieved or thought it was normal. All participants were glad they had someone to help keep them organized and on track. Participants B and F were unhappy at first, but later realized the benefits of attending the regularly required academic advising sessions. Participant B replied, "I knew that requirement might be annoying, but I saw it helpful from the jump." Participant F commented, "Um, at the time, it was a little annoying, but it was helpful." After a series of interviews and prompt questions describing a typical academic advising session, participants A shared the encouragement that the academic advisor would give,

> She was always very positive, giving me good affirmations and comments, just saying like, I see how you are in the classroom, you are doing great, you know, I can tell you really love what you're going to do. You're going to be a great teacher and coach one day, and she was just always very positive.

More questions and prompts followed, such as how these regularly required academic advising sessions influenced the participants. Participant E responded, "It definitely gave

direction and help with planning and not going into things blindly." The participants were asked how the advice they received from their academic advisor allowed them to apply skills to interact with their peers and led them to degree completion. Participant F responded, "I could help teammates and other peers understand some questions they had, and I felt more comfortable moving forward to graduate school."

Lastly, the participants were asked to explain how regularly required advising sessions led to degree completion. Participant A replied, "For me, it helped me stay on track. Honestly, probably wouldn't have had enough credits to do what I needed to do. So, I think that definitely helped me to graduate." Participant B commented, "I think it definitely helped. Because these are people that are, they're preparing you like they're asking you, what's next." Participant C responded in more detail,

> They helped out a lot, because I kind of planned out what I needed to take for a semester, what I could push off to the next semester because of my sport. Those regular sessions helped plan my courses and my semesters to come for the whole time I was there. I was like, alright, if I didn't do half of my major classes this semester, what I can afford to take the next at this semester? If not, can take at least one major class during end season and the rest offseason. So having that plan planned out kind of helped out and helped out a whole lot.

Participant D replied, "The required meetings, kept me on track by taking the right classes at the right time to be able to get our degree. I'm so proud of myself for following what was needed to see the finish line." Participant E's response was similar, "The regularly scheduled meetings were very impactful because I was able to stay on

track." Participation F commented, "Um, yes, it helped with degree completion." While Participant H had the most unique response, "It gave you the tools and the knowledge that you needed to make sure you made it to the very end." The outcomes clearly occurred because all of the other themes were effective and followed Tinto's student integration theory.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to answer my research question, fill a gap in the reported literature, and inform positive social change. In this chapter, I discussed my study's setting detailing how I recruited my participants. I then discussed the details of my demographics to outline the specifics of my requirements for my participants. I further discussed my data collection detailing how the interviews were conducted and recorded and how the data was processed. I discussed how trustworthiness was addressed in my study. I then analyzed the data using themes and the information shared from participants about how first-generation college graduates described their experiences while participating in regularly required academic advising sessions to degree completion. In the next chapter, I provide an interpretation of my findings. I will also discuss the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. Lastly, I will describe how this study contributed to positive social change and provide suggestions for future practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain insight into the perceptions of first-generation college graduates regarding regularly required academic advising sessions. I sought to fill a gap in the published literature regarding how required academic advising sessions contributed to persistence and degree completion. My findings revealed that while these first-generation college graduates were students who participated in regular required advising sessions, they were able integrate academically and socially by becoming comfortable with faculty and staff at the institution through their campus activities in and outside the classroom.

I extracted themes from the data analysis and found the graduates excelled in their academic and social integration through what Tinto referred as institutional experiences and personal normative integration. In the remainder of the chapter, I focus on my interpretation of the findings and the study's limitations. I then make recommendations for future research while discussing the implications of the findings, with an emphasis on how this study contributes to positive social change and future practices.

Interpreting the Findings

In Chapter 1, I introduced how first-generation college students enter college underprepared to fully understand institutional processes, as compared to their peers with parents who graduated from college. I sought to fill a gap in the published literature related to whether regularly required academic advising sessions helped students persist to degree completion. The research question addressed in this study was created to elicit the perception of first-generation college graduates about their experiences that helped to

facilitate their academically and socially integration to college and persist to degree completion. Through this process, I delved deeper into how regularly required academic advising influenced first-generation college graduates. I aligned the study with the tenets of Tinto's student integration theory model, which explained that students enter college with pre-existing attributes, such as family backgrounds, skills, and abilities, that impact the integration of the institution's informal social and academic components. My findings supported previous research on how advising programs facilitated a student's belonging process and incorporated academic and social integration.

This study highlights a need for more research into how regularly required academic advising sessions helped students integrate into institutions' formal and informal academic and social systems through multiple factors, such as relationships formed with faculty, relationships with advisors, or interactions with a staff member of the college, along with peer group associations and participation in academic activities (Tinto, 1975,1993). My study's findings contribute to the role of advising for first generation college students and help to fill the literature gap on this topic.

Tinto's Student Integration Theory

The chosen conceptual framework of my study is based on the tenants of Tinto's (1975, 2006) student integration theory. Regularly scheduled advising sessions addressed students' academic and social integration and played a significant role in the success of these first-generation participants who persisted to degree completion. Tinto's student integration theory model to provide a framework for what I wanted to learn from the data to address the research question.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed how Tinto's theory of student integration, as used in previous research studies, identified how students successfully integrate academically and socially through formal and informal systems upon entering college. Tinto's revised student integration theory model emphasized that students' transition integration to college, especially for first-generation students, is influenced by academic advisors who are well-positioned to understand the college academic and social structures helping to support the students' intentions and goals through institutional interactions (Emekako, 2021). My findings support Tinto's student integration theory. The participants' perceptions of their college experiences were positive and were related most with the words *prepared, academic advising,* and *good.*

Academic and Social Integration

Students enter college with pre-existing attributes, such as family backgrounds, skills, and abilities, that influence the integration of the institution's informal social and academic components (Tinto, 1975). Tinto found that students who voluntarily withdrew from college when academic and social integration was unsuccessful could be retained by building institutional understanding based on the student's academic and social integration with peers, faculty, staff, and advisors (Tinto, 1987, 1993). According to Tinto (2017a), academic and social integration influence students' commitments to their institution; the greater the institutional commitment, the more apt the student will persist to graduation. Institutions should not wait for students to make themselves available for services; instead, the institution needs to create successful programs such as required

freshman seminars and first-year learning communities as part of the student's

experiences (Tinto, 2012). Many of the participants in my study mentioned how no one in

their high schools approached them about college paths or offered to help them fill out

their college applications.

My study supports and builds on previous research. First-generation college

students do not have the benefit of parental college experiences, and my participants

described their need to proactively seek out others to assist them with college

applications, provide guidance, and answer questions. Tinto (1975,1993) explained the

need to integrate students into institutions' formal and informal academic and social

systems through multiple factors such as relationships formed with faculty, advisors, and

staff member of the college along with peer group associations and participation in

academic activities such as academic advising. My study supports Tinto's research, as

many of my participants depended upon the admission counselor, coaches, professors, the

registrar, academic advisors, or professors to guide them through basic institutional

processes.

Academic Advising

Previous findings in the reported research revealed that to prepare first-generation

college students for success, institutions across the country need to focus on providing

academic and social support through programs administered by academic advisors, which

help build personal self-efficacy to shape and influence self-perceptions while navigating

academic expectations (Covarrubias et al., 2020; Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). Many of

my participants explained that someone else selected their first classes for them. It was

only when the participants were told that they would be required to meet with an academic advisor that they learned and understood that they were enrolled in classes structured to accommodate their desired degree selections. Academic advisors are agents who strengthen the connections between a student and the institution from a student's first year to graduation (Savage et al., 2019).

My findings revealed that most participants were thankful and relieved that the institution had measures to keep them on track and moving forward. Many of the participants mentioned that the academic advisors were also the professors of their chosen degree path. They described the academic advisor as being deeply invested in their well-being both in and outside the classroom. The findings of my study support Tinto's explanation that student expectations of college are shaped by the knowledge offered through formal and informal advice from faculty and staff, which creates a roadmap for the rules, regulations, and requirements for degree completion (Tinto, 2012).

Limitation of the Study

An overall limitation of qualitative research is generalizability, as qualitative methods focus on small groups of participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative research focuses on the experience of the participants to inform the research question. Generalizability is enhanced when other professionals related to the study findings institute a suggested or real intervention to their situation or setting, and they achieve similar results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Shenton, 2004). Another possible limitation to my study involved the recruitment of first-generation graduates from a specific, four-year Christian university. Reliability and generalizability of my study findings may be

enhanced through replication of my design at other colleges in different parts of the country. Finally, my study was limited by a single methodology. Future researchers may elect to explore my research topic from a quantitative or mixed method approach. Their findings might support mine, which would add to the reliability and generalizability of my findings to a greater pool of academic institutions.

Recommendations

More research needs to be done on the perceptions of first-generation college graduates related to persistence to degree completion. My study participants were graduates of the regularly required advising session intervention who persisted to degree completion and realized their college expectation and outcomes. It is important for institutions to evaluate academic advising sessions and use the data gathered to inform interventions for improvement. Because first-generation students are at a higher risk of not persisting, stakeholders need to know the value of regularly required advising sessions for this population of learners. Further, institutions should consider using first-generation college graduates to mentor other first-generation college students. Future studies should also explore other interventions targeted to first-generation college students to add to the available research of best practices for this population.

Implications

Walden University's mission is positive social change, which is infused into the curriculum. Students are taught and empowered to become change agents that contribute back to their communities, regardless of their size. This vision that Walden University integrated into me is part of the vision I saw for myself to contribute back to my

community, as I am a first-generation college student. My research may inform other colleges and universities that do not have interventions targeted to first-generation college students to consider regularly required academic advising to help this population of learners to persist. Positive social change is realized when students are assisted to successfully integrate into college and persist to graduation.

Conclusion

First-generation college students may be at a disadvantage and need to be supported in their social and academic integration processes. Regularly required academic advising is one way to fulfill this need. The skills first-generation college students need to persist to degree completion are outlined and acknowledged in the reported literature. The participants for my study clearly described the role that advisors played in helping them persist to degree completion. My study should be considered as frame of reference for colleges and universities who struggle with first-generation college student persistence. Regularly requiring this population of learners to meet with their advisors may serve as a best practice for persistence to degree completion.

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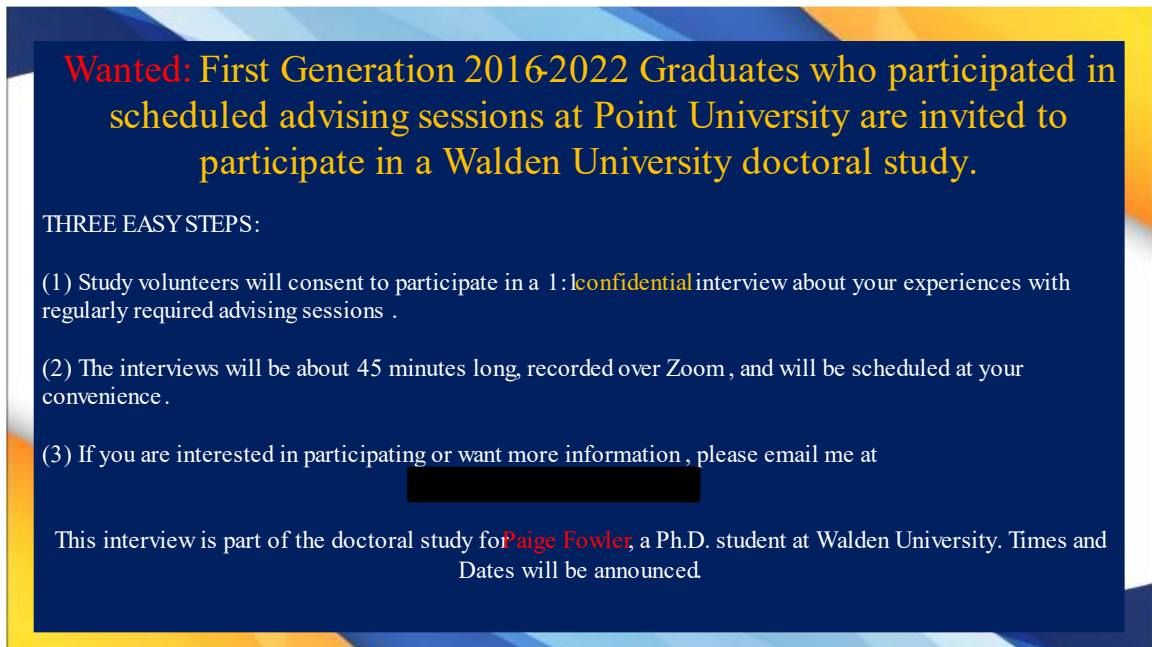
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Appendix A: Social Media Flyer

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What made you decide to attend college?
   Prompt: What attracted you to the institution you selected?

2. How do you describe your preparation for college readiness?
   Prompt: How well did you feel prepared for the academic rigor expectations?
   Prompt: How well did you feel prepared to socialize with other college students?

3. Who helped you fill out college applications and who prepared you for entrance?
   Prompt: How helpful were those who assisted you?
   Prompt: Who assisted you from the college you decided to attend?

4. Once you started college, who helped you decide on what classes to take and explained what resources were available to you?
   Prompt: How would you describe the help you received upon entry compared to your peers who were not first-generation college status?

5. Who guided you on the institutional processes once classes started?
   a. Tell me how you felt as you began to interact with faculty and staff.
   b. Describe any activities, organizations, you attended after entry.

6. Describe your ability to meet the academic expectations.
   Prompt: What resources did you use?
   Prompt: How did you study – alone, study group, etc.?

7. How did you assimilate with your college peers?
   Prompt: How did you meet peers?
   Prompt: What clubs, teams, etc., did you participate in?
   Prompt: What peers, if any, did you socialize with outside of the college setting?

8. Tell me about your experience when you first met with an academic advisor.
   Prompt: How did you interact with an academic advisor?
   Prompt: How did your relationship with advisor influence you academic and social integration?

9. How did you feel upon being told you would be required to meet with an academic advisor regularly?
   Prompt: Describe a typical advising session.
   Prompt: Explain how the sessions influenced you.

10. Tell me what advice you received from your academic advisor that applied inside and outside of the classroom.
    Prompt: Explain how you were able to apply what you discussed/learned in advising sessions to help you meet your goals?

Prompt: What influence did regularly scheduled advising sessions have on your sense of belonging with your peers?

11. How did the regularly required academic sessions lead you to degree completion? Prompt: Explain how regularly scheduled advising sessions influenced your career readiness upon graduation.