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## Perceptions of Nursing Students and Academic Advisors on Academic Advising and Nursing School Retention

Shelia Holmes- Carter  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Shelia Holmes Carter

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Vicki Underwood, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Sydney Parent, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Glenn Penny, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Perceptions of Nursing Students and Academic Advisors on Academic Advising and  
Nursing School Retention

by

Shelia Holmes Carter

MS, Delta State University 2006

BS, Mississippi Valley State University 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2022

## Abstract

Low retention rates in nursing programs extend the nursing shortage, result in lost revenue for institutions, and place financial burdens on students who leave. This research addressed the retention problem in the nursing program of a Southeastern community college. Guided by Jeffreys's nursing universal retention and success model, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand first- and second-year nursing students' and faculty academic advisors' perceptions of the role of academic advising in nursing students' persistence and the experiences that facilitate program completion. Interviews with participants, eight advisors and eight first- and second-year students, were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using open and axial coding. Thirteen themes emerged, including that the nursing students viewed academic advising as an important part of their college experiences and believed that their academic advisors' knowledge, availability, support for students, and mutual trust affected their decision to persist in the nursing program. The academic advisors viewed career advising, personal guidance, and maintaining ethical responsibility as aspects of their role, in addition to academic advising. Advisors believed a comprehensive academic advising professional development program would help them build better relationships with their nursing student advisees and work better as a team to support students and increase retention. Based on these findings, a policy recommendation describing a professional development training program for nursing academic advisors was created. Retaining more nursing students may bring about positive social change by increasing the number of nurses available to meet the continuously growing demand in health care.

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## Dedication

I would like to give honor and praise to God for His grace that empowers me to flourish, even in adversity. I am forever grateful for His enablement to achieve this goal and the opportunity to continue this “heart” work (II Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 1:6; Isaiah 41:1).

To my husband and daughters thank you for continuous support and prayers. Najawa and Anansia this work is another example of the persistence, perseverance and patience that I preach and endeavor to practice before you daily. Always make God your priority; acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will direct your path. Carter, it been a long time coming, thank you for always inspiring and encouraging me to be the best version of me –the person whom God has purposed. Your prayers, support and love have been a true lifeline.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

Many students in nursing programs at community colleges drop out and never return to complete their studies (Harris et al., 2014; Kubec, 2017). After completing the first fall semester, fewer nursing students enroll the subsequent spring semester, and even fewer return for the following school term. The recurring drops in enrollment present challenges for community colleges to increase nursing student graduates. In addition to placing financial burdens on the students who leave, nursing student attrition results in loss of revenues to the colleges and makes the nursing shortage a more complex issue (Kubec, 2017).

A community college located in the Southeastern region of the United States faced similar challenges regarding its nursing student population. This 2-year public community college offers a nursing program leading to an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing degree. Students who complete this 2-year program are prepared for immediate licensure and may take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) to become certified and begin employment.

The general undergraduate population at this school consists of approximately 10,000 students with 45% enrolled part time and 55% enrolled full time (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018a). Demographics for the college represent the general trend for community colleges regarding the older-than-average age of students and the preponderance of minority ethnic and racial groups as follows: 32% of students over 25 years of age, 61% female, 62% Black, 26% White, 5% Latino, 2% Asian, 2% mixed race, and 1% nonresident aliens (NCES, 2018a). There is no campus housing; all

students live off campus. The percentage of students who started classes in fall 2016 and continued in fall 2017 was 54% for full-time students and 34% for part-time students, reflecting research findings that part-time students are less likely to persist (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Overall retention rates are poor for this community college in general. Of students starting in 2014, 10% graduated and 9% transferred to another school; by gender, 9% of the males and 11% of the females graduated. General graduation rates by race and ethnicity for those enrolled were: 6% mixed race, 7% Black or African American, 8% nonresident alien, 15% White, 16% Hispanic, 25% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 30% Asian students (NCES, 2018b).

The high attrition rates experienced in nursing programs and community colleges throughout the nation are also present in the RN program at this community college (department chair, personal communication, September 10, 2018). The fall 2017 attrition rate was over 50% and Spring 2018 was just 50% (department chair, personal communication, 2018), each figure slightly higher than the 47% that has been reported for students enrolled in associate degree nursing programs nationwide (Harris et al., 2014). In conformance with leaders of nursing programs throughout the nation (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2012; Betts et al., 2017), this program chair was dismayed at the high rate of attrition and wanted to find ways to increase nursing student retention (department chair, personal communication, September 10, 2018).

Academic advising has been suggested as having a positive effect on nursing school retention (Drake, 2011; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Smith & Allen, 2014; Soden, 2017; Vianden, 2016). However, academic advising differs from one college to the next and may also take on different forms at the same school. At this particular college,

prenursing students meet with any subject matter advisor prior to entering the nursing program. When they register for classes, they can also meet with a financial aid advisor if needed. However, once they are admitted to the RN program, members of the nursing faculty serve as their academic advisors. After an initial meeting with a nursing faculty academic advisor, students decide if and when they want to meet with a faculty advisor again. There is no obligation to continue to see a faculty advisor under normal circumstances, but nursing students are required to make an appointment with a faculty advisor if they are failing a course (department chair, personal communication, September 10, 2018). Although researchers are still seeking to determine the extent to which academic advising affects student retention rates, an expansion of support from academic advisors would likely enhance student success and increase student persistence among first- and second-year students (Kot, 2014). Thus, to address the problem of high attrition among nursing students at this community college, perceptions of nursing students and academic advisors were explored, specifically, how the existing academic advising process at this local community college affected nursing student attrition.

### **Rationale**

The recurring decline in nursing student enrollment presented challenges for a local community college. In addition to placing financial burdens on the students who leave, nursing student attrition results in loss of revenues to the colleges and fails to ameliorate the national nursing shortage (Kubec, 2017). The nursing school has identified nursing student attrition as a serious problem at this institution (department chair, personal communication, September 10, 2018).

Researchers have found that academic advising may help both 2-and 4-year college students prevail in the face of institutional obstacles by offering them the supplementary assistance needed to achieve in their classes and successfully navigate through school policies and procedures (Ganti, 2019; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Moore et al., 2019; Soden, 2017). Among several evidence-based interventions that Bumbly (2020) found to be effective retention strategies for nursing students were vigorous orientation, mentoring, and remediation, services customarily provided by academic advisors. Due to its nature, academic advising can be a key component of a nurturing mentoring environment that instills self-confidence in students (Hande et al., 2017).

Effective academic advising has enhanced the academic experiences of nursing students, enabling these students to meet challenges and achieve educational goals and objectives, but enhancements are needed to improve the academic advising process to increase nursing students' satisfaction and retention (El-Sheikh et al., 2019). According to El-Sheikh et al. (2019), in order to offer nursing students the tools and support needed for academic success, it is important to identify areas where academic advising programs need improvement from the perspectives of both the academic advisors and the nursing students.

By reviewing the academic advising practices that have been and are being applied, researchers better understand how this factor can increase student persistence and improve student outcomes and add evidence-based knowledge of approaches that can improve academic advising practices (McIntosh et al., 2021). Higher education institutions that have participated in similar studies where the strengths and weaknesses of their academic advising programs were identified were able to make rewarding

changes to those programs based on the results and recommendations from the research (El-Sheikh et al., 2019; McIntosh et al., 2021; Obage & Jeawon, 2021; Troxel & Kyel-Blankson, 2020). Additionally, researchers have expounded on effective methods and best practices of new and existing academic advising approaches following studies conducted at various institutions (Ganti, 2019; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019; Obage & Jeawon, 2021; Opsahl & Horton-Deutsch, 2019). One example is appreciative advising which encompasses individual and group meetings where academic advisors offer guidance to students in a welcoming setting, are accessible to students as needed, show interest in the students as individuals, and provide a caring atmosphere (Hande et al., 2017; Opsahl & Horton-Deutsch, 2019). Appreciative advising has been shown to increase student persistence and academic achievement of undergraduate nursing students (Hande et al., 2017).

The problem of high attrition among nursing students at the local community college was addressed by studying the nursing students' and academic advisors' perceptions of the role of academic advisors in nursing student persistence and the experiences that helped students continue to complete their degree program. An exploration of the positive attributes of the academic advising strategy currently in use and its challenges led to the policy recommendation for a professional development training program that aims to improve academic advising services and reduce nursing student attrition.

### **Definition of Terms**

Definitions of special terms associated with the study problem include the following:



*Academic advisor:* A member of the nursing faculty at this college, or for some other schools, a separate employee with the title of academic advisor (Smith & Allen, 2014). The academic advisor should be aware of each student's academic strengths and weaknesses or risks and how these may affect persistence in the program (Darling, 2015a).

*Academic advising:* Counseling that emphasizes teaching and learning while incorporating each student's curriculum (Lowenstein, 2013). In general, this encompasses counseling that supports student achievement, retention, and degree completion (Darling, 2015a).

*Appreciative advising:* "The intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials" (Bloom et al., 2013).

*Attrition:* As defined by Tinto (1975, p. 94), "a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college" that continuously affect the student's "goals and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout." This definition is used in the study only with students who decide to drop out and not students who are forced to leave due to failing their courses. Thus, for this study, attrition is defined as the withdrawal from or postponement of successful completion of degree requirements.

*Nontraditional students:* Students who are 25 years of age or more, who might have children, might be registered part time, and are usually commuters residing off-campus. In addition, they are frequently members of racial and ethnic minorities,

underprepared, and economically disadvantaged (Castleman & Long, 2013; Martin et al., 2014; Rose & Hill, 2013; Yu, 2015).

*Persistence:* The individual student's desire and action to continue enrollment in an academic program through to completion despite perceived obstacles (Heid, 2014).

*Retention:* The tracking of students who begin and complete an educational program (Porter, 2008) is normally expressed as a rate at which students continue to be registered in their program at their original school until graduation (Tinto, 1975).

Retention refers to progressing through program or degree requirements to graduation for the individual student.

### **Significance of the Study**

Understanding the perceptions and experiences of first- and second-year nursing students regarding nursing faculty academic advisors and academic advising could contribute to the improvement of advising services and subsequent nursing student persistence. If academic advising is viewed negatively or students reveal they are missing assistance in various areas, their views can lead to improvement of the provision of this service. On the other hand, understanding how nursing faculty academic advisors view their roles and advising activities will reveal whether there is a discrepancy between students' and advisors' perceptions of this service. Such knowledge could also aid in further improvement of academic advising on this campus. Finally, the provision of improved faculty academic advising services can lead to increased nursing student retention.

Increased retention of nursing students may result in greater numbers of nurses graduating and entering the workforce to alleviate the shortage of nurses. Not only will

this benefit the individual nurses who will now be employed in the career of their choice, it will benefit society to have increasing numbers of competent healthcare providers. In particular, the graduation of disadvantaged ethnic and racial minority student nurses, often highly represented in the community college, and their entry into the workforce will contribute to positive social change for this group that has faced many obstacles, as well as benefit the diverse population of patients they will care for (Loftin et al., 2012). Therefore, although this study was not directed at nontraditional or minority students specifically, it was anticipated to be a factor in the findings and was therefore considered in the review of the literature.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand first- and second-year nursing students' and faculty academic advisors' perceptions of the role of academic advising in nursing students' persistence and the experiences that facilitate program completion. The research questions (RQs) were intended to illuminate the nature of the problem and produce findings that fulfill the purpose of the inquiry. The research questions consist of the following:

RQ1: What do nursing faculty academic advisors perceive their role to be in working with first- and second-year nursing students?

RQ2: How do nursing faculty academic advisors view the efficacy of their current practices in relation to student retention?

RQ3: How do first-year and second-year nursing students describe their experience with academic advising services?

RQ4: What advising services do first-year and second-year nursing students believe positively or negatively affect their decision to persist in the nursing program?

### **Review of Literature**

This section consists of a description of the concept that grounded the study, that is, factors affecting student retention, in particular nursing student retention at community colleges. General factors related to community college students and 4-year college students were included because community college nursing students share several characteristics with other community college students as well as 4-year college students, some of whom previously attended community colleges. Although community college students and 4-year college students are diverse in many ways, general findings regarding student persistence might still apply to community college nursing students in particular instances or illuminate areas where the groups differ.

The literature search included the following databases: Medline Complete, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PsycArticles, PsycInfo, Science Direct, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Database for Dissertations and Theses, and Google Scholar. Key search terms entered in these databases included *nursing student persistence*, *nursing student attrition*, *nursing student retention*, *student retention*, *student persistence*, *nontraditional students and degree completion*, *minority students and degree completion* and *community college persistence*. Additional search terms included: *academic advising*, *academic advising and student persistence*, *academic advising and student retention*, *academic advising and nursing student persistence* and *academic advising and nursing student retention*. The original search yielded thousands of references. A number of

sources were duplicates that were excluded. Abstracts and publications without an English version were excluded. Further reduction excluded publications more than 5 years old except for seminal or classic studies, foundational studies, and historical research with few or no updated studies.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Jeffreys's nursing universal retention and success (NURS) model was used as the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual frameworks and theories of Tinto (1988, 1993, 1997, 2010), Astin (1997), who further developed Tinto's approach, Bean and Metzner (1985b), as well as Braxton et al. (2004) who focused on the experience of community college students, were considered. However, the model developed by Jeffreys (2004, 2012) was chosen because it most closely related to the approach of the current study. Jeffreys's NURS model has been used worldwide as a framework for determining and evaluating the various factors that affect nursing student retention and success (El-Soud et al., 2017). According to Jeffreys (2020), the NURS model is an enhancement of classic models of student retention that provides a basis for researching and designing retention strategies. Jeffreys referred to the model as an easily adaptable framework that actively involves faculty and students. Using this approach to study the factors that affect student retention in nursing programs helps researchers to "identify at-risk students, develop diagnostic-descriptive strategies to facilitate success, guide innovations in teaching and educational research, and evaluate strategy effectiveness" (El-Soud et al., 2017, p. 98). Additionally, Jeffreys's NURS model provides a framework for increasing student retention by globally linking faculty and researchers who share this purpose to one another (El-Soud et al., 2017).

Overall, the NURS model emphasizes interacting factors that affect student persistence in a nursing program, including student attributes, student affective factors, academic factors, environmental factors, professional and social integration, outside surrounding factors and professional integration factors in order to develop ideas for enhancing research and improving student retention and success (Jeffreys, 2021b). The model has been applied to more than 60 professional development programs at both undergraduate and graduate institutions in nursing programs and other areas of study throughout the world (Jeffreys, 2020). The recommendations offered in this model to nursing programs and faculty enable researchers and educators to positively influence student retention and academic success in alternative ways (Jeffreys, 2021a). These aspects of Jeffreys's model were used to guide the development of the interview questions about academic advising of nursing students and its effect on nursing student retention, especially with respect to academic and psychological outcomes as significant factors. These concepts also informed analysis of the data which illuminated the role of student attributes, professional and social integration as well as environmental factors. The grouping of interacting factors that affected nursing student persistence aided in the analysis of findings. Finally, the use of a qualitative descriptive methodology blended well with the NURS model because it provided an effective tool for assessing student affective factors as well as psychological outcomes by asking study participants to express their feelings regarding the phenomena under study.

## **Review of the Broader Problem**

### ***Student Retention***

Student retention has been viewed as a student success indicator for higher education institutions for over 40 years (Caruth, 2018). Caruth (2018) stated that retention rates had not improved in 20 years although colleges and universities have focused on ways to increase student retention for a considerable length of time. Although various causes of low retention rates have been identified, low retention rates indicate that students are dissatisfied with the services they receive at the colleges or universities where they initially enroll as first-time students. Sundquist (2019) suggested that retention rates are low when students are unable to form connections with classmates, professors, or some part of the school community that helps them to become attached. Similarly, Caruth listed collegial integration as one of the variables that predict retention, in addition to educational performance, socio-economical characteristics, and institutional support.

Even though problems with persistence related to an evolving and diverse student population affected a majority of higher education institutions, these issues were particularly concerning for institutions with high percentages of nontraditional and minority students like community colleges because these students have had the lowest rates of degree completion (Yu, 2015). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2019), persistence and retention rates remained lowest at 2-year institutions between 2012 and 2018 when these rates were improving overall and declined at a higher rate among community colleges when persistence and retention rates dropped overall. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) reported

that the retention rates of first-year students dropped 2.1 percentage points from fall 2018 to fall 2019 in the community college sector, which was higher than the decline in retention in 4-year institutions.

Additionally, community colleges register a larger proportion of the low-income and non-White individuals who enroll in colleges and universities; 44% of low-income, first-year students who attended in fall 2015 were enrolled at community colleges (Levesque, 2018). Low-income students are less likely to complete their degree (Bjorklund-Young, 2016). Enrollment of non-White individuals at community colleges in fall 2015 included 56% of Native Americans, 52% of Hispanics, 43% of African Americans, and 42% of Asian/Pacific Islanders (Levesque, 2018). In general, non-White students have lower rates of graduation than White students (Bjorklund-Young, 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Moreover, higher numbers of African American students and low-income students drop out of school than do White students, Asian students, and students from upper socioeconomic status families (Bjorklund-Young, 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

### ***Minority Students and Nontraditional Students***

The NCES (n.d.) defined nontraditional students based on variables relating to student enrollment patterns, financial status, family status, and high school graduation status in addition to the background variables of age, gender, and race that nontraditional students are commonly characterized by. These commonly used variables include being older than normal age, attending school part time, not living with their parents, caring for dependents, working full time, being a single parent, and being a recipient of a general education development diploma or high school completion certificate. Studies of



outcomes of nontraditional students have also involved students who transfer from one institution to another and those who leave school temporarily but enroll again at a later period (NCES, 2019). Nontraditional students of all races and ethnicities are entering 4-year and 2-year colleges in growing numbers (Chung et al., 2017). As of fall 2015, 10.5 million undergraduate students were enrolled at 4-year colleges and 6.5 million at 2-year community colleges. At the 4-year schools, 77 % of students attended full time but only 39 % attended full time at community colleges (NCES, 2018b).

During fall 2019, students older than 25 years of age comprised nearly 9% of the population of students enrolled at 4-year public institutions and 21% of students enrolled at 2-year public institutions (NCES, 2021). The NCES (2021) further reported that in fall 2019 a much larger proportion of students 26 and older than students 25 and under were enrolled at both 2-year private for-profit institutions, over 54%, and 4-year private for-profit institutions, 66%. Proportions of minority students enrolled in community colleges were also reported as being higher in fall 2019, during which nearly 53% of these students comprised the population at public institutions and 66% at private for-profit institutions. During the 2013-2014 academic year, 28% of student nurses were from minority ethnic or racial groups, 15% were male, and 42% in associate degree programs were over 30 (National League for Nursing, 2021b). However, enrollment in associate degree nursing programs for the 2019-2020 academic year reduced to 21% for minority ethnic or racial groups and to 35% for students over 30, but the percentage of male students for the 2019-2020 academic year was the same as for the 2013-2014 year, 15% (National League for Nursing, 2021a). Additional significant disparities between students attending community colleges and those attending other higher education institutions

relating to their nontraditional status are attendance status, the amount of time spent employed, and being parents of children under 18 while actively enrolled in school. The number of part-time students was determined to be higher at 2-year institutions than at 4-year institutions (NCES, 2021). In 2019, 63% of students attending community colleges were part-time students, but only 26% of the population at 4-year institutions were part-time students. Likewise, more students attending community colleges were employed while enrolled in 2018 than those attending 4-year institutions (NCES, 2020). Although the NCES (2020) did not report a significant difference between part-time employment for 2-year and 4-year students in 2018, 46% of community college students compared to 41% of students attending 4-year colleges were employed full time in 2018. More specifically, considerably more part-time than full-time students who were single heads of their households, single and caring for children under 18, or living with spouses were employed. Based on the 2015-2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 3.8 million enrolled students were parents of children under 18 (Cruse et al., 2019).

Concerning gender, the results of the study indicated that 62% of the female student parents were single and 61% of the male student parents were married. The Institute for Women's Policy Research reported 42% of student parents were enrolled at community colleges during the 2015-2016 academic year, and the remaining 58% were split between public, private for-profit, private non-profit, and other 4-year institutions (Cruse et al., 2019). Being employed and being a student parent were both identified as reasons why students enrolled in community colleges attend school part time and why these students are at risk of dropping out (Brauer & Foust, 2020). Brauer and Foust (2020) found that employment significantly raised the likelihood of students leaving school before

graduating and attending college as a parent added to the challenge of balancing work and school.

### ***Retention of Nontraditional Students***

Past studies of persistence and retention among students in higher education emphasized individual attributes and shortcomings that would indicate students at risk for dropping out of school (Aljohani, 2016). These attributes included ethnicity, age, gender, and finances (Chen et al., 2019). From the end of the 1960s through the 1970s, there was an increase in systematic research focused on the development of theoretical frameworks of persistence based on the importance of the relationship between the student and the institution of higher learning (Aljohani, 2016). A number of models resulted from these research efforts, including Tinto's (1975, 1993) institutional departure model, and the nontraditional student attrition model (Bean & Metzner, 1985a).

Bean and Metzner (1985b) and Braxton et al. (2004) aimed to supplement knowledge regarding the persistence of nontraditional and nonresidential students that was not considered in earlier models (Yu, 2015). Bean and Metzner developed a framework for nontraditional students, that is, commuting students and students older than average. They did not believe that the social integration of nontraditional students was significant because these students were not likely to join in socially due to not living on campus. Rather, they emphasized academic performance, desire to drop out, personal factors, and environmental factors. They proposed that environmental factors have a more significant effect than academic factors on the decision of nontraditional students to drop out. In addition, they proposed that family variables had an influence on nontraditional students' decisions to leave an institution of higher learning.

On the other hand, Braxton et al. (2004) proposed a revision of Tinto's (1975) student integration model to examine attrition factors in community colleges as well as universities. They examined factors affecting students who did not live on campus. Their results indicated that involvement in the classroom was more significant for the academic performance of students who did not reside on campus. Moreover, spouses or parents of nontraditional students had a greater influence on these students than the institutional environment. Braxton et al. concluded that commuter schools ought to create connections that are important to nonresident students. In sum, Braxton et al. determined that delivery of the program of study and support should be tailored to the differing needs of nonresident students. Jeffreys (2004) expanded these models to include the distinctive characteristics of nursing students and nursing programs.

Tinto's approach involved the need to include students in learning communities that improve the student's aspiration to continue through graduation despite individual conditions or particular experiences that might be unfavorable. Tinto believed that the activities and academic atmosphere of the institution, such as the quality of student-faculty communication as well as additional collegial experiences, affect the decision of the student to persist through graduation, particularly in the case of students who did not drop out due to inability to perform academically but for other reasons. Astin's (1984) student development theory further emphasized the participation of the student in learning. According to this theory, the more time a student spent on acquiring knowledge, the more likely the student was to persevere through to completion of the degree.

The concepts of these models intersected with respect to the environmental influence, both on and off campus, on persistence. However, the NURS model extended

beyond those concepts based on the nature of this interaction and the specific attributes of nursing students and community college students. Environmental factors were useful to consider when determining reasons for persistence because student advising can extend beyond the traditional academic focus to identify and assist with possible environmental factors.

In particular, for nontraditional ethnic and racial minority nursing students, obstacles to graduation comprised financial and employment challenges, insufficient educational preparation, lack of study skills, absence of support from family, lack of role models or mentors, as well as discrimination and seclusion in the clinical environment (Graham et al., 2016). These kinds of obstacles have contributed to an inequality in the profession of nursing and caused rates of attrition of up to 85% in ethnic/racial minority student populations (Graham et al., 2016). In general, minority students share many characteristics and challenges with nontraditional students, such as raising children while attending school, financial issues, together with challenges unique to their situation as ethnic or racial minorities (Porchea et al., 2010). Nontraditional students of all races face a variety of barriers to persistence and completion of their degrees. Many nontraditional and ethnic and racial minority students have problems that can be reduced by institutions of higher education, both off campus and in the classroom (Wong, 2018). These problems are often not related to specific coursework but might still be alleviated through expanded advising services on campus (Chen, 2017). A significant problem facing nontraditional students derives from the stress of balancing many demands and varying roles at school, at their place of employment, and in their personal relationships (Park & Swanson, 2021). Other barriers to completion for both nontraditional and minority students with low

incomes include needed services and financial resources (Remerick, 2019). Moreover, the growing population of parents enrolling in colleges and universities makes affordable childcare on campus another important issue (Noll et al., 2017). A number of sources have cited childcare obligations as the primary reason for dropping out of community colleges before attaining their degrees (Iloh, 2018; Noll et al., 2017; Yu, 2015).

### ***Nursing Student Retention***

Student persistence and completion of a degree program has been a challenging issue for all institutions of higher education. To alleviate the nursing shortage and counter this trend, schools of nursing raised the number of students admitted beginning in 2002 (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2012). However, a result of this increase in admissions was a rise in the number of students at risk for academic failure because of insufficient preparation for the demands of the nursing program or the difficulties in balancing the responsibilities of school and family, or both (Kaufman, 2013). In spite of growing admissions, persistence did not improve to a significant degree. However, in 2012, rates of degree completion increased 10% (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2012); conversely, rates of attrition from 28% to 53% appeared throughout the United States (Harris et al., 2014).

Research findings have indicated that a major reason for high rates of attrition was that students were insufficiently prepared for the academic demands of nursing programs (McDonough, 2012). Nursing students gave the following reasons for dropping out of nursing programs: (a) high levels of stress (McDonough, 2012) and (b) family and financial needs (Kaufman, 2013). In Williams's (2010) qualitative study of attrition during the initial, nonclinical stage of the nursing program at a small Midwestern college,

students were requested to consider a point in time when they felt like leaving the program and to “Tell me what helped you stay in nursing” (p. 364). Students’ comments revealed four themes, three of which were labeled: *Keeping Up*, *Not Giving Up*, and *Doing It*. According to Williams (2010), they described a mindset, or self-talk. The last theme, *Connecting*, described relationships. The initial theme focused on keeping up with their studies and not falling behind. Time management and successful use of school assets were important elements of this theme. *Not giving up* referred to seeking help from an advisor when facing academic issues like failing grades. *Doing it* described the attitude of persisting and unlearning the idea of not being able to do it. The desire to be a nurse was a strong motivator in *Not giving up* and *Doing it*. *Connecting* referred to relationships with peers, friends, family and even patients. Availability of faculty was very important via telephone and e-mail, if not in person. This study focused on the perceptions of students who persisted in their nursing program but did not include the perceptions of students who decided to drop out.

McDonough (2012) conducted a case study of five nursing students and three members of the nursing faculty. Participant interview results indicated that both educational and non-educational themes contributed to dropping out, including unexpected rigor of the program, conflicting responsibilities, negative experiences learning nursing theory, and a lack of positive faculty-student interactions. However, the students all agreed that they learned more in active learning situations, including clinical or simulation classes. They liked individual interactions with instructors and patients. On the other hand, students also reported insufficient study, issues with time management, and lack of test-taking skills, as well as medical terminology as shared reasons for failing

courses. Finally, students said they felt overwhelmed, terrified, and stressed out regarding their studies.

In a study conducted to understand the experiences, current practices, and recommended practices from the perspectives of instructors of nursing students at a community college, Jones (2021) described several factors that affect retention. Academic self-confidence, students' personal goals, student's commitment to the institution, social support, achievement motivation, study habits and time management skills, contextual influences, general self-concept, and social involvement were the non-academic factors identified. Additionally, Jones pointed out that both the factors that affect retention and the strategies used to improve retention may differ for nontraditional students as compared to traditional students. Jones listed a summary of the strategies that the instructors suggested using for retention. In addition to the provision of academic, counseling, and financial services, these strategies included nursing student orientation, early identification of at-risk students, instruction on organizational study and test-taking skills, working with students to create study plans, coaching and tutoring, review of tests, one-on-one meetings with students, personal connections with students, availability to students, engaging learning activities, expressed care and concern for students, and encouragement and support (Jones, 2021).

Everett (2020) emphasized the importance of faculty sharing the responsibility for nursing student success and retention, and recommended strategies for supporting the development of nursing students academically, socially, and emotionally during their first semester of enrollment. Everett viewed mandatory student success courses and seminars as a means of addressing student retention. Students who enrolled in these courses were



instructed to tell stories of their first-year experiences using visual images in reflective papers that would be evaluated to broaden understanding of effective practices for transitioning and retaining students. Rucks-Ahidiana and Bork (2020) described how first-year experience courses can be used to help faculty interact and build relationships with students and connect students with resources they need to transition to college, continue enrollment, and succeed,

### *Academic Advising*

Jones (2021) distinguished between background, academic, and environmental variables that make up the framework for evaluating and decreasing student attrition and identified academic advising as an academic variable that contributes to both academic and psychological outcomes. Academic advising fits the model of integrating students into the academic life of the school, focusing on the classroom, and tailoring counseling to the differing needs of community college students and has been suggested as having a positive effect on student retention. McGill (2021) identified academic advising as being a means to achieving desired retention rates at institutions of higher learning where students' needs are the focus of the academic advising program. To heighten retention, the academic advisors must be trained and equipped to interact with the students and to provide what the students need, want, and deserve (McGill, 2021). Studies by others who included Tinto's (2010) concept of persistence found a strong connection between academic advising and rates of persistence (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Soden, 2017; Vianden, 2016).

The full extent of the role of academic advisors remains unclear to faculty and staff at institutions of higher education (McGill, 2021). Moreover, studies show that the

role of academic advisors is unclear to the students as well. Many first-year students do not distinguish the role of academic advisors from that of high school guidance counselors; these students' expectations of academic advisors depend on the relationships they had with their guidance counselors during high school (Walker et al., 2017). In the results of a study involving 162 first-year students, Walker et al. (2017) reported that students perceived whether academic advisors cared about them and their success or did not care based on varying levels of advisor communication with the student, student's desire to have a relationship with the advisor, and advisor accessibility. Anderson (2021) indicated that beginning students often assume that their academic advisors know everything and will tell the students what they need to do about everything they encounter at a postsecondary institution.

Higgins (2017) identified several conventional roles of academic advisors, including helping students understand school rules and regulations; helping them meet academic major and degree requirements, as well as helping them schedule their courses to complete their degree programs in a timely manner. Academic advisors were in place to make sure students had the information they needed to make good choices in academic planning. They were mentors who showed concern for students' personal and professional development, helping them to set and achieve goals. McGill (2021) considered this a simplistic view of the role of academic advisors and suggested academic advisors assume a larger role in helping students. In addition to the traditional information-based practices, academic advisors have the responsibility to fulfill advising practices that enable them to build relationships with students, focus on the holistic

development of the students, and help the students to develop their individual strengths and assets (Ye et al., 2020).

In the past, the leading model of academic advising was prescriptive advising (Hande et al., 2017). The method of interaction was linear, with advice coming from the adviser to the student. Subsequently, developmental advising approaches were implemented to encourage student persistence. Donaldson et al. (2016) referred to this approach as *intrusive advising*, where academic advisors are less authoritative, students are more involved in the advising process, and the students must interact with academic advisors each term to continue enrollment. According to Hande et al. (2017), appreciative advising was developed as an alternate type of student advising that permitted professors and students to cultivate common goals. Appreciative advising encompassed individual and group meetings to offer guidance and a caring community of peers. Appreciative advising has been shown to increase student persistence and academic achievement of undergraduate nursing students (Hande et al., 2017).

In general, academic advising has been shown to affect student persistence (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Soden, 2017). A significant part of this process was the nature and quality of the relationship between the advisor and the student (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Jones, 2021). Advising has encompassed coaching, counseling, teaching, supporting, and even parenting styles (Darling, 2015b; Soden, 2017). The best style was determined by the needs of the student and the nature of the connection they developed with their advisor (Soden, 2017). In particular, the quality of the emotional connections with school staff, student achievement, and general satisfaction were all related to the relationship between the advisor and the student (Vianden, 2016). According to Vianden (2016),

students were less motivated to persist if they perceived their academic advisors to be unresponsive or unknowledgeable of academic and nonacademic matters.

In general, researchers of 2-year and higher education have used three interconnected interactional conceptual frameworks: integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993), involvement (Astin, 1984), and engagement (Kuh, 2001), in addition to Bean and Metzner's (1985a) important conception of nontraditional student attrition. A key idea underlying these frameworks was that persistence was the outcome of the interface between student, school, and external elements (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). According to Hatch and Garcia (2017), the concepts of involvement and integration mainly encompassed student actions, and thus possessed implications for actions of the educational institution. Engagement contained two essential elements; the first consisted of the quantity and quality of time students spent on their studies and additional actions that result in their academic achievement. The second comprised the method the educational institution chose to assign personnel and supplementary resources, as well as organize opportunities to learn and services to inspire students to join in and gain from these opportunities. As a result, engagement encompassed a mutual phenomenon that showed ways in which students engaged and were engaged by the school (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Advising services were a crucial component in this process of mutual engagement.

### ***Academic Advising of Nursing Students***

The question persisted of whether academic advising was an effective strategy in improving nursing student retention. Focusing on academic counseling, Harrell and Reglin (2018) evaluated the advising program of a community college's nursing program

to determine whether student satisfaction with faculty advising was related to student persistence. The authors assessed the faculty advising program from fall 2012 to fall 2016 employing a convenience sample of 210 nursing students, reporting demographics of nursing students who answered the Nursing Student Academic Advising Inventory (NSAAI) as consisting of 9 males and 100 females: 80 White, 13 Black, 9 Hispanic, 3 Asian and 4 Other. The NSAAI questions were derived from the Academic Advising Inventory developed by Winston and Sandor in 2002. The NSAAI consisted of 22 statements with options for answers ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* for each of the 22 statements that were divided into four parts, each with different scales, measuring developmental-prescriptive advising; advisor-advisee activity; student satisfaction with advising; and demographic information. The following two research questions formed the basis of their cross-sectional descriptive-research design: (a) To what extent are students in the School of Nursing satisfied with the advising in the faculty advising program? (b) To what extent is the faculty advising program effective in increasing the persistence of nursing students from preimplementation to postimplementation? Overall student responses to the NSAAI indicated that the students were satisfied with their faculty advisors. High retention percentages were evident each semester during the period of program implementation from fall 2013 to fall 2016. The authors concluded that the manner in which faculty advisors interacted with nursing students strongly affected the decision of students to remain in the nursing program. In addition, they maintained that the results of the NSAAI were evidence of Tinto's principle of dimensions of institutional action, that continuous, individual contact of students with faculty and staff were critical to lasting student persistence (Harrell &

Reglin, 2018). The faculty advising program enabled continuous student contact with faculty, which was essential for student perseverance and high rates of persistence. Nevertheless, as the authors noted, the small sample of students and small number of nursing faculty was a limitation of this study (Harrell & Reglin, 2018). Further research could enlarge the sample of students and faculty advisors to achieve greater diversity in age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Mooring (2015) surveyed 109 nursing faculty and advisors for nursing students. Based on the survey results, Mooring concluded there was no relationship between the quantity of academic advising strategies employed and the persistence of nursing students, but there was a correlation between two of 30 advising approaches and persistence. Although these findings could be due to chance, these two approaches suggested the importance of student advisor interactions that were meaningful to the student, including discussion of the significance of higher education and advisor assistance on choice of the academic major or concentration.

Diverging from most studies, Champlin et al. (2015) described a team-based intensive advising program at a baccalaureate nursing program from the advisors' point of view. Twenty-one sophomore nursing students who had basic level scores on the Test of Essential Academic Skills participated in a team-based intensive advising mentor program. Three full-time members of the nursing faculty offered the advising. Additional staff who provided resources for the advisors included the director of academic advising, two pre-nursing academic advisers, and the baccalaureate day-section coordinators. The three advisors employed a strengths-based advising strategy to encourage academic success. Central to strength-based advising is the belief that motivation is the primary

goal of advising and advisors should openly try to stimulate excellence in the student (Champlin et al., 2015). To do this, the intensive advisors emphasized the strengths of their student advisees, with the goal of increasing their motivation to excel in their studies. In addition to focusing on their student advisees' strengths, the advisors tried to develop robust relationships with their student advisees, increase their academic skills, and offer suitable referrals.

As the advisor-advisee relationships developed, the advisor and advisee determined how many individual sessions were desirable. Sessions occurred face-to-face in the advisors' offices. The average number of meetings was once a month for about one hour. Advisors employed electronic communication to schedule meetings, offer information, for follow up, and to check in with the student advisees.

In-depth interviews of the three nursing faculty member advisors were used to assess the first semester of the team-based intensive advising mentor program. Audiotape and transcription were used to record the interviews. Data analysis of the transcripts revealed five interrelated themes: (a) Establishing a connection with the student; (b) Balancing advocacy with building self-efficacy; (c) Developing a timeline and a concrete plan for the intensive advising relationship; (d) Collaborating as a team member and participating in a mentored process; and (e) Building a strong knowledge base helps advisers become effective (Champlin et al., 2015).

According to the advisors, the primary factor in developing a relationship with the advisees was the face-to-face sessions. The three advisors stressed the importance of becoming acquainted with the nursing students both academically and personally. The advisors viewed multiple sessions with their advisees throughout the semester as a

successful strategy for intensive advising. They also said informally connecting with students outside the classroom and advising meetings was an effective strategy. They sought opportunities to greet students they passed on campus and to follow up on subjects that students noted were personally important to them. This behavior facilitated the development of a deeper relationship with the students and it helped the students to feel they were important members of the campus community. Adopting a method of mutual problem solving that required students to be accountable for their achievements was effective as well. The advisors also identified team collaboration and mentoring less-experienced faculty as helpful and recognized that knowing about campus resources was vital for them to offer appropriate referrals.

The advisors also identified teaching advisees how to develop study skills, reduce stress, and access support resources as an effective strategy. The nursing program incorporated information about coping with anxiety into the nursing classes taken by the student advisees so the advisers could strengthen this information in advising sessions. In addition, it was viewed positively that the lead faculty advisor taught the class in which the students were enrolled. Finally, the advisors all thought the most significant challenge was finding sufficient time in the busy schedules of nursing students and nursing faculty for intensive advising.

### **Implications**

Academic advising has been shown to positively affect student persistence. Different kinds of advising may have different effects for different students (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Due to the variation in prior academic preparation and various external factors nursing students face, they might need a broader conception of advising than



strictly course scheduling or remediation. The perceptions of the nursing students and advisors interviewed at this local community college have added to knowledge regarding the nature of effective academic advising for community college nursing students at this school and may lead to changes in academic advising at this local community college.

In particular, study findings indicated the need for an additional professional development process for the faculty academic advisors at this school. Based upon the results of the study, nursing faculty academic advisors need to enhance their core competencies in the informational area and the relational sphere (see also National Academic Advising Association, 2019). Various texts, workshops, symposiums, online courses, and other programs can be used to enhance their knowledge and skills. Some of these opportunities were found to be available at the school; others require participation at external sites.

### **Summary**

In response to an undesirably high nursing student attrition rate at a local community college, this study was conducted to understand the perceptions of first- and second-year nursing students and academic advisors in the Department of Nursing of the role of academic advisors in student persistence and the experiences that facilitate program completion. The review of the literature related to factors that influence student persistence in general and nursing student persistence in particular at baccalaureate and community colleges. Many students who enrolled in nursing programs at community colleges left without earning a degree with higher attrition for ethnic and racial minority nursing students, a trend that was pronounced at the local community college serving as

the research site. Academic advising has been found to be an important element in helping nursing students to persist in their academic studies.

Three sections follow. Section 2 details the qualitative methodology that was used to collect and analyze the perceptions of the first- and second-year nursing students regarding their academic advising experiences while attending this community college as well as the perceptions of the nursing faculty academic advisors regarding their roles in this process. Section 3 presents a rationale and description of the genre of the project that was created as a result of the findings from the research, a review of literature related to the genre, a description of the project with evaluation plan, and implications for social change. In Section 4, the strengths and limitations of the project are discussed, and recommendations for alternative approaches to addressing the problem of high nursing student attrition are listed. A description of what was learned through the research, reflection on the importance of conducting the research, and implications for future research are also included in the section. Lastly, the components of the project are presented in Appendix A.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

Most studies on student retention at community colleges have been quantitative in nature (Aljohani, 2016). This study used a qualitative descriptive approach because this methodology could illuminate the personal feelings of the nursing students at this community college regarding academic advising services and their reasons for persisting or planning to drop out of their nursing program. Understanding these students' perceptions enhanced current knowledge regarding students' perceptions of academic services and possible effects on their persistence to degree completion at this school. The qualitative approach could also elicit the perceptions of the academic advisors regarding their roles in this process. Understanding these perceptions may lead to programs to assist in improving academic advising and nursing student persistence.

Qualitative research focuses on collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing information (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Researchers who use the qualitative method view truth as subjective and believe that many truths exist. According to this approach, truth is constructed by the study participants (Creswell, 2013). The goals of this approach are to construct a composite, holistic understanding; analyze the spoken word, examine the detailed replies of study participants; and conduct the research in a natural environment (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of qualitative research is to attain knowledge of individual motivations, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors that might result in a more profound comprehension of outcomes. In other words, qualitative researchers adhere to the belief that truth can be found through an understanding of the ideas, thoughts, values, and behaviors of individuals according to their perceptions (Grbich, 2013). This concept is

especially relevant to the purpose of the present study, which was to understand first- and second-year nursing students' and faculty academic advisors' perceptions of the role of academic advisors in nursing students' persistence and the experiences that facilitate program completion.

Many researchers consider the qualitative descriptive research design chosen for this study to be an acceptable qualitative methodology distinct from other qualitative approaches (Kim et al., 2017; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). It has been extensively used to study nursing and health care related phenomena (Kim et al., 2017). Even though ethnography, case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology also describe phenomena, normally they are not entirely descriptive because they are said to additionally attempt to clarify or interpret phenomena (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). An uncomplicated qualitative descriptive approach is a useful alternative when a researcher seeks an all-inclusive summary of phenomena that are experienced by individuals or groups of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). This descriptive approach is based on a naturalistic viewpoint which guides the study of phenomena in their natural state (Sandelowski, 2000).

The qualitative descriptive method is less theoretical than the other qualitative methods (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Neergaard et al., 2009). This enables flexibility in selecting a research paradigm for the planning and implementation of a study (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). For instance, the researcher is free to choose whether to start with a theory regarding the phenomena under study or not. As a result, it is not necessary to adhere to a particular theory if inquiries lead to a different perspective (Sandelowski, 2010).

In this regard, qualitative descriptive research is not burdened by a previous obligation to follow a theoretical or philosophical tradition. For instance, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology are built on particular methodological structures that arose from particular disciplines (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In comparison, the qualitative descriptive method is based on naturalistic investigation of a phenomenon in its natural condition to the degree it is possible within the research setting. Although qualitative descriptive studies differ from other qualitative approaches, they might possess a few of the characteristics of these alternate methods. For example, a qualitative descriptive approach might possess grounded theory characteristics if the researcher employs constant comparative analysis to examine the data (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). But such a study would not be grounded theory if the researcher did not generate a theory from the data.

In qualitative descriptive studies, the aim of researchers collecting the data is for observers to learn about the essential qualities of the particular phenomena under investigation. Therefore, data collection may encompass interviews that are small to medium length, open-ended or structured, for individuals or focus groups (Kim et al., 2017; Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). Conversely, data collection might also consist of observations and analysis of reports, records, photographs, and documents.

Also different from other qualitative methods, researcher analysis of the data in qualitative descriptive studies does not follow preset rules that are derived from the epistemological or philosophical tradition of the discipline which produced the particular qualitative method (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Instead, qualitative descriptive findings

are only derived from the data. The researcher produces codes while analyzing the data throughout the research process. However, like alternate qualitative research approaches, qualitative descriptive research usually involves concurrent collection and analysis of data.

In qualitative descriptive research, the presentation of data encompasses an uncomplicated description of the data that is logically organized (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The organizational method is determined by the preference of the researcher and the method of data extraction. Examples include the following: (a) time of incident; (b) categories and subcategories; (c) real or reverse chronological order; (d) most predominant to least predominant themes; (e) changing from a wider context to a narrower context; or (f) describing an incident according to the perceptions of more than one individual (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The result is a descriptive summary of the phenomena organized so that the information is presented in the most relevant manner possible.

Purposeful sampling techniques are frequently used in qualitative descriptive studies, including maximum variation sampling which is considered useful for gaining comprehensive understanding based on copious data (Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). In qualitative descriptive research, almost any purposeful sampling method can be employed (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). As is true for the other qualitative methods, the aim is to acquire participants who will provide copious data.

The chief method of data analysis used by many descriptive qualitative researchers is content analysis (Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). However, sometimes thematic analysis is used as well. Use of these types of data analysis methods

results in low-inference interpretation (Kim et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009). Low-inference interpretation enables diverse researchers to agree more easily on similar conclusions even if they do not present them similarly (Sandelowski, 2000).

### **Participants**

Eight first- and second-year nursing students and eight faculty serving as academic advisors in the nursing program were the participants for this study. The reason for selecting eight student participants in this study was a desire to include enough first- and second-year students and students of diverse ethnic identity of both genders. Theoretically, to represent major ethnic or racial minorities for a population of this size, three or four representatives of each major group needed to be recruited. The two major groups of nursing students at this college are African American and Caucasian and there were at least three students from each group who participated. Asians, American Indians, non-resident aliens, and others were not actively recruited for this study because their numbers at this community college were significantly small. However, they were not excluded from participating. The number of male students in the nursing degree program at the local community was also considerably low, and none of the male students responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Finally, the same representational approach was applied to both first- and second-year students, ideally obtaining four student participants for each class, though the numbers of students recruited for each class were not expected to be equal or demographically representative.

The participants were required to have the following characteristics to be included:

- First- or second-year nursing student at the local community college, and

- Proof of current enrollment in the nursing program such as registration documents or a student ID.

The reason for including both first- and second-year students was to determine whether students had different perceptions and experiences in their first year than their second year. In addition, first-year students could express whether they intended to re-enroll and complete their studies or leave the program. Second year students could express why they decided to continue. The reason for selecting eight as the number of faculty academic advisors was to ensure saturation in the data and ethnic and racial representation as well.

### **Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used to obtain the participants. This is defined by the inclusion of particular criteria met by the participants when they are selected (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Creswell (2013) presented an all-inclusive examination of qualitative sampling techniques, listing three important aspects of a purposeful sampling strategy as follows: (a) the participants or sites; (b) the sampling method; and (c) the sample size. The sample was obtained based on the participants' knowledge about academic advising at the local site, which is a 2-year institution.

Nursing student study participants as well as nursing faculty academic advisors were recruited by means of Department of Nursing email. All recruitment materials listed a contact phone number and email to respond if they had questions and if they desired to participate in the study.



### **Role of the Researcher**

In order to establish a researcher-participant working relationship, I sought to establish good rapport with the study participants (see Zakaria & Musta'amal, 2014). Rapport was built with the individuals interviewed as a means to facilitate the production of rich data and to ensure mutual respect was sustained between myself and study participants (see Guillemin & Heggen, 2009). Feelings of trust, understanding, and empathy also helped to create an environment where interviewees felt free to express their beliefs without censure. I was careful not to influence responses or create expectations of particular responses while building rapport with the potential study participants.

My role as researcher encompassed following the principles of the methodology chosen within an ethical framework of respect for the rights and welfare of the study participants. The principal responsibilities of the researcher with respect to study participants involves protection from harm, guaranteeing informed consent, privacy, honesty, honoring participants' rights and dignity, and objectivity (American Educational Research Association, 2011; American Psychological Association, 2010). Thus, I explained the purpose of this research project and study procedures to participants according to Walden University's guidelines. Possible conflicts of interest were avoided by apprising the study participants of the purpose of the study. I had no personal or professional relationships with the study participants or their college, so there was no conflict of interest due to financial incentives or power differentials. I described the mutually beneficial features of the study to the study participants. They were encouraged to ask questions and all queries were answered.

The essence of qualitative research is frequently interpretative. As a result, biases, opinions, and assumptions of the researcher can interfere with the analysis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is necessary for the qualitative researcher to counteract or bracket preconceptions by identifying previous ideas and beliefs that might bias analysis (Fischer, 2009; Husserl, 1960; Polit & Beck, 2008). As a qualitative researcher, I related to study participants to comprehend how they made sense of their experiences (see Creswell, 2013). At the same time, I remained impartial (see Husserl, 2001).

### **Access to Possible Participants**

Permission to interview nursing students and faculty academic advisors for the nursing program at the community college was obtained from school authorities prior to commencing the study, as well as from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (Approval # 12-18-19-0169811). I informed study participants that they did not need to participate in the study if they did not want to, that their participation was entirely voluntary, and if --they changed their mind at any time, they could withdraw. Also, the participants were informed that after they had completed an interview, they could have still requested to withdraw their responses. The recruitment email included informed consent provisions which assured them that their data would remain confidential. Any quotes or analyses provided in the study would not be linked to any person by name. Only the interviewer will know the identity of the study participants. Moreover, data were stored securely on a USB device and locked in my desk at home after it was no longer in use. Participant information remained private. I informed participants that they could request a copy of the study findings once the study was complete.

## Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was open-ended interviews using a standardized protocol designed for each group (see Hendricks, 2013; Webb, 2015). Employing a qualitative approach, an attempt was made to use a consistent style or method of presentation for each interview (Yin, 2016) by using a set of standardized interview questions. The interviews used an informal tone, which permitted social interaction adapted to each interviewee (Yin, 2016) and extended the depth of each question.

The preliminary interview protocol for the nursing students is provided in Appendix B and the preliminary interview protocol for the nursing faculty academic advisors is in Appendix C. Additional follow-up and probing questions were asked based on responses given by participants to the preliminary protocol to ensure research questions could be addressed from the interviews. To ensure depth and breadth of content obtained from the interviews, each interview was allotted one hour for completion. After gaining permission of the study participants, the interviews were recorded via online teleconferencing and transcribed. At the conclusion of the interview, I asked the participants if they had any additional questions or comments they would have liked to have added. When they indicated they had nothing more to say, I thanked them for their participation and ended the interview.

Brief researcher notes were used as an auxiliary source of data for this study. However, limited notes were written during the interviews which took place online. According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), several qualitative researchers discreetly take small, keyword-based notes in the course of the interview, while keeping eye contact

with participants. However, given that the interviews were not conducted face-to-face, gestures and eye contact were limited. The dates of the interviews and the identifiers used to replace the names of the interviewees were entered on the first page of each set of notes. I also noted my own thoughts regarding incipient themes, areas of clarification, and any relationships identified among participants' perceptions immediately after completing the interview (see Grundmeyer, 2012).

### ***Validity of Interview Protocols***

The nursing student and faculty academic advisor interview questions were first developed based on the literature review of nursing student advising and student advising in general. Content validity of the interview protocols was assessed by means of expert review. The content validity of an interview protocol can be established based on the opinions of a panel of experts (see Zamanzadeh et al., 2015). This panel may contain content experts as well as lay experts. Lay experts comprise individuals similar to the proposed study participants, in this case, nursing students and nursing school academic advisors; and content experts consisted of professionals with experience in the field under study, in this case, nursing school academic advising (see Zamanzadeh et al., 2015). Review by nursing students similar to the research participants was used to enable representation of the population for whom the nursing student protocol was being constructed (see DeVon et al., 2007). However, these nursing students were enrolled in a nursing school program at a different institution so that study participants would remain uninformed about the development of the interview protocol or the study itself until they were recruited. The faculty academic advisor experts who reviewed the protocols were also from a different school to avoid biasing the faculty academic advisors who were

interviewed. Using a qualitative content validity process, the content experts and lay experts were asked to make recommendations regarding use of suitable accurate language, grammar, word order, and methods of coding (see Zamanzadeh et al., 2015). The panel of experts were also asked whether the questions would measure what they were intended to measure or the underlying construct and if they were understandable (see de Vet et al., 2011; Rattray & Jones, 2007). Necessary changes in the protocols were made.

### **Data Analysis**

A conscious effort was made to suspend all previous beliefs regarding the responses under study and practice bracketing when assembling and analyzing the data similar to the phenomenological approach described by Husserl (1960). In addition, neither denying nor affirming of preconceived ideas took place due to the importance of basing the analysis of the data on the actual experiences of the participants (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018). Specifically, five steps were used to analyze the data generated by the interviews (see Löfgren, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998):

1. Open coding, which involved listening to the recordings, reading the transcripts, and finally, reading the field notes. The transcripts were read twice and compared to the field notes.

2. Axial coding, which involved creating labels for relevant items, such as specific words, particular phrases, significant sentences, or segments appearing in the transcripts and the field notes.

3. The next step required decisions regarding which codes were most relevant to the research questions and the phenomenon under study, while generating themes.

Conceptualization of the data occurred at this point.

4. In the fourth step, categories or themes were identified and decisions were made about which ones were most pertinent to the research questions and how they related to each other. This stage embodied new knowledge regarding the topic from the viewpoint of the interviewees.

5. Finally, conclusions were made regarding which themes were more relevant than other themes or if a hierarchy existed among themes and if the themes were related. However, no findings were ignored, and the lack of discrepant cases is discussed later within the results of the data analysis.

At this point, the data were assembled and grouped according to themes. presented in the form of a narrative, and produced as qualitative text (see Creswell, 2013). When cautious analyses based on coding and classification were completed, I had connected individual accounts into emerging themes (see Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Following collection of the data, exploration of the data, coding, and classification, results were presented.

After the responses of each group of first- and second-year nursing students and nursing faculty academic advisors were collected and analyzed separately, dominant themes in each group were compared. It was necessary to determine if the students perceived the experience of advising and their expectations of their advisors in the same way as advisors viewed their behavior and roles as academic advisors in the nursing program. It became apparent whether they were close in agreement or were divergent and

whether second-year students had different perceptions from first-year students. No discrepant responses that were significant to the study were noted. No differences in ethnicity or race appeared in perceptions of either group. Findings were determined by the responses of the students and their advisors who answered the interview questions. Evidence of quality and procedures to assure accuracy and credibility were attained through the enhancement of dependability, trustworthiness, and confirmability.

To enhance dependability, I have explained the data collection process and the method of generating themes in detail (see Merriam, 1998; Sargeant, 2012). The decision-making processes used throughout the study were also explained. In addition, I used detailed, complete, dense explanations, which will permit readers of the study to make informed decisions regarding transferability (see Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness of the data was strengthened by suitable sampling regarding the research questions (see Sargeant, 2012). First- and second-year community college nursing students were from the population of student nurses at the community college. Though the sample was purposeful, it was anticipated that the sample would be representative of student nurses at this community college. Trustworthiness was enhanced by considering feedback from the study participants, including the eight academic advisors who were interviewed (see Ashworth, 1997). Finally, data were examined rigorously to identify discrepant cases as cases that seemed to support any particular interpretation to see if they pointed to flaws in the latter interpretation (see Maxwell, 2012). The data analysis, including the lack of discrepant evidence, was reported to allow readers to draw their own conclusions.

To counteract possible bias and enhance confirmability, I recognized that my previous work in the field of education might influence my interpretation of study results. I believe that academic services that meet students' needs help motivate students to achieve their goals and remain in an academic program. Finally, I observed, asked questions, and listened impartially to study participants.

### **Limitations**

An acknowledged limitation of many quantitative student persistence studies is difficulty in generalizing their findings to broader populations (Aljohani, 2016; Jeffreys, 2012). Similarly, it is not always possible to transfer qualitative findings from one institution to another due to unique characteristics and environments at each campus. Because the data that was used in this study was collected from a sample of first- and second-year nursing students and nursing program academic advisors from only one local community college campus, it may not be fully representative of the academic advising systems of many other community college campuses or other 2-year nursing programs at other institutions. Also, because this was a qualitative study, findings could not be statistically represented. There is the possibility that some of the interview questions were answered with some bias, although steps were taken to minimize bias in the study as previously mentioned. Participants' responses may have been affected by what they thought I expected them to say or what they felt was safe to say due to academic advisor-student relationships.



## **Data Analysis Results**

### **Descriptive Data for Academic Advisors**

The sample consisted of two groups, academic advisors and current nursing students. The first group was made up of eight academic advisors whose job description encompasses academic advising, as it is not considered a single or separate profession at the local community college where the study was conducted. The first eight of the 16 academic advisors employed in the Department of Nursing at this college who accepted the invitation to participate in the study were selected. These participants provided a representative sample of the department's population of academic advisors.

Most of the participants were female (75%). There were only two males (25%) employed as academic advisors in the Department of Nursing at this local community college and both participated in the study. Most of the participants were also African American (75%). All the participants reported having obtained postgraduate education. Table 1 presents their demographic information:

**Table 1***Participant Descriptive Data: Academic Advisors*

Variables	Categories	N	%
Gender	Male	2	25.0
	Female	6	75.0
Age	26 - 35 years	2	25.0
	36 - 45 years	4	50.0
	45+ years	2	25.0
Race	African American	6	75.0
	Caucasian	1	12.5
	Asian	1	12.5
Highest degree	Undergraduate	0	0.0
	Postgraduate	8	100.0
Tenure	2 to 5 years	5	62.5
	6 to 10 years	3	37.5

*Descriptive Data for First-Year and Second-Year Nursing Students*

The second group in the sample consisted of four first-year and four second-year students enrolled in the nursing program at the community college. The first eight students who responded to the invitation to participate in the study were selected and interviewed. These participants provided a representative sample of the students enrolled in the nursing program at this 2-year college.

All of the nursing student participants in this project were female. According to the Biennial Survey of Schools of Nursing, 2019-2020 reported by the National League for Nursing (2021a), males comprised 15% of the students enrolled in nursing programs at community colleges throughout the United States; however, according to the website

of this college, males constituted only 5.7% of the students enrolled in nursing programs at the research site. Therefore, with respect to gender, the sample was representative of the majority of the students at the college. The majority of the student participants were also under the age of 25 (6 out of 8 students) and African American (5 out of 8 students). The sample consisted of three transfer students and five students who attended no other colleges prior to this one. Table 2 presents their demographic information.

**Table 2**

*Participant Descriptive Data: First- and Second-Year Nursing Students*

Variables	Categories	1st-Year		2nd-Year		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Female	4	100.0	4	100.0	8	100.0
Age	18 - 25 years	3	75.0	3	75.0	6	75.0
	25+ years	1	25.0	1	25.0	2	25.0
Race	African American	3	75.0	2	50.0	5	62.5
	Caucasian	1	25.0	2	50.0	3	37.5
Prior College	Transfer	2	50.0	1	25.0	3	37.5
	Non-transfer	2	50.0	3	75.0	5	62.5

### *Coding and Thematic Analysis*

The data collection method for this study consisted of individual interviews with nursing students and academic advisors. After the interviews were completed, the procedures previously noted were followed to ensure accuracy and provide evidence of quality in the analysis of the data. Following the transcribing of the interviews, analysis

of the data that were collected began with open coding. The transcripts of the interviews were read thoroughly to search throughout the data for similarities and differences in the participants' responses and to be open to all possible theoretical directions of the data, as Williams and Moser (2019) suggested. Next axial coding was conducted to refine the codes into labeled themes. Relationships between the open codes were identified using the constant comparison method to help organize the data. According to Williams and Moser (2019), the constant comparison method in conjunction with line-by-line coding enables the researcher to deeply engage in the text and recognize and codify discrete thematic connections with other codes. Selective coding followed the axial coding, wherein themes were developed using the codes and labels that were most relevant to the research questions. No discrepant cases were found to contradict the themes that emerged during the coding of the data.

A final review of all transcripts was conducted to identify any additional data that were not previously recognized and that could be used to strengthen the identified themes. It was then necessary to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the data that were collected to support the validity and reliability of the results. One way that this was accomplished was to ensure that data collection was adequate to establish trustworthiness through data saturation. All of the transcripts were examined, but no additional themes were identified from the academic advisors' interviews after the fourth participant's responses were coded. Similarly, responses of the nursing student participants became repetitive and lacked new information after the fifth transcript was examined.

Moreover, to ensure that obtained data would be accurately analyzed and reported, thick descriptions were used to provide a detailed account of the data. The thick

descriptions offered a deeper and richer visualization of the participants' experiences with academic advising from both advisors' and nursing students' perspectives. This, in addition to adding credibility to the research, made the themes easier to identify.

The data are presented by listing the distinct concepts that were identified for categorization using open coding and axial coding and the themes that were determined to be most relevant to the study using selective coding. Themes that were established from the responses of academic advisors are presented first, followed by those based on responses from first- and second-year nursing student participants. A summary table of themes and codes follows the discussion of each RQ, with the codes in bold text to make them easily distinguishable. As previously noted, identifiers were used to replace the names of the participants; the student participants are referred to as S1 through S8, and academic advisors are referred to as A1 through A8.

**RQ1: What Do Faculty Academic Advisors Perceive Their Role to Be in Working with First-Year and Second-Year Nursing Students?**

The predominant themes generated by the responses of academic advisors were they feel responsible for academic advising, career advising, personal guidance, and an ethical relationship with their advisees. These four separate themes were developed from the coding of the interviews with the academic advisors for the different roles they believe they have in working with first- and second-year nursing students. The codes comprising the first theme, Academic Advising, were curriculum and monitor academic progress. The Career Advising codes encompassed setting career goals and campus career-related resources. The codes forming the theme Personal Guidance included

provide information, referrals, and navigate online system. The codes for Caring and Ethical Responsibility included genuineness, honesty, fairness and confidentiality.

### ***Theme 1: Academic Advising***

As it pertains to academic advising, the academic advisors who were interviewed felt that they were responsible for ensuring students receive and understand their respective curriculum for completing the 2-year nursing program. The academic advisors stated that they held the responsibility of providing students with information and access to resources that promote academic progress. One advisor, A2 encourages students to form small study groups with their peers. Another advisor, A5, advises students to work with a study buddy.

The academic advisors indicated that they help those who may be at risk of failing a course, being placed on academic probation, or being dismissed from the college. A4 commented, "The earlier I know a student is having trouble in a class, the better. I encourage my advisees to contact me as soon as they start having problems in a class so we can look at alternatives." A5 responded, "I invite my students to come see me the minute their grades start declining. There are ways to prevent them from failing if they communicate with me." A7 stated, "If a student at risk of failing a course or being dismissed from the college, I am directed to inform the student of options he or she may have for continuing enrollment."

### ***Theme 2: Career Advising***

Career advising was perceived to be a part of the academic advisor's role in the Department of Nursing. Participating academic advisors agreed that the ultimate goal of the nursing student was to obtain a career in the nursing field using the education and

skills they gain from their studies at the local community college. Thus, their acknowledged duties as academic advisors included helping students understand how their academic abilities and personal interests relate to various career fields in nursing that students could consider, helping students to use this information to achieve career goals, and referring students to career-related resources. Academic advisors kept track and informed students of dates and times of career services events such as career fairs and provided resume review services and letters of recommendation as part of their role. Three other academic advisors made statements similar to A5. “I receive emails from students requesting that I look over their resumes and provide letters of recommendation for school or employment.”

### ***Theme 3: Personal Guidance***

As students’ first point of contact, academic advisors were responsible for referring students to campus services that were relevant to their individual needs, and for the same reason, they were frequently charged with showing students how to navigate the online system. Personal guidance, the advice and support provided to students concerning issues other than those directly related to academics and career planning, was identified as being significant to the role of academic advisor. Five of the participants communicated that they partly fulfill this role by informing students of current and changing policies and procedures and of the requirements for being enrolled in the nursing degree program. A1 responded:

Yes, I believe it is necessary to help nursing students in non-curricula spheres, such as locating childcare, obtaining financial aid and/or housing, and developing

time management skills, but I refer my students to the campus services that are available to meet their needs.

As indicated in the above statement, providing personal guidance was accomplished mainly by referring students to campus services that are relevant to their specific needs. However, the academic advisors verbally acknowledged the need to have general knowledge of the steps needed to solve their students' issues and to be able to inform students of how to contact the right sources. The advisors indicated that they assist students with simple course navigation issues.

#### ***Theme 4: Ethical Responsibility***

According to their interview responses, the academic advisors committed a part of their role to ethical responsibility which entailed showing genuine concern and care for meeting the needs of their advisees, ensuring the information they provided to students was also updated and accurate, being empathetic and sensitive, being honest and fair with students, and maintaining confidentiality. A3 stated, "As academic advisors we have explicit ethical responsibilities to all students to provide them accurate and honest information, to respect the confidentiality of their information, and to treat them equitably." A2 validated this by stating, "What we do for one student, we must be willing to do for all the students that we advise." It was further corroborated in A5's response, "I am accountable for showing support to the student when conflict arises with an instructor." The themes that were established during coding of the interviews are presented in Table 3.



**Table 3**

*Coding and Themes from Academic Advisors' Interview Responses for RQ1*

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Perceived Roles of Academic Advisors
Theme 1: Academic advising to ensure student progression Make sure students understand <b>curriculum</b> Provide info/resources to promote academic progress ( <b>academic progress</b> )
Theme 2: Career advising for continued success Help to achieve <b>career goals</b> Refer to <b>career-related resources</b> and events on campus
Theme 3: Personal guidance and referrals to resources <b>Provide information</b> on current and changing policies, procedures, and program requirements Refer to campus services relevant to individual needs ( <b>referrals</b> ) Show how to <b>navigate online system</b>
Theme 4: Caring and ethical responsibility Show genuine care and concern ( <b>genuineness</b> ) Be honest ( <b>honesty</b> ) Be fair ( <b>fairness</b> ) Maintain <b>confidentiality</b>

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*Note:* Codes are presented in boldface type.

## **RQ2: How Do Nursing Faculty Academic Advisors View the Efficacy of Their Current Practices in Relation to Student Retention?**

Academic advisors perceived that first- and second-year nursing students adequately benefit from their current practices and that they positively influence nursing student retention and persistence at this community college. However, the participants identified some areas where these practices could be further developed to become increasingly effective for the students. The themes that emerged related to the perceived issues with current academic advising services and suggestions for making academic advising more appropriate and effective for the students.

The advisors identified the lack of initial training, a vague job description, and the need for enhanced collaborative team effort among academic advisors as the perceived issues with current academic advising services. Suggestions for improvement included a developmental advising approach as well as team building and collaboration, a comprehensive academic advisor development program and finally, the necessity of ensuring that students are informed and understand all changes and improvements to academic advising services.

***Theme 5: Perceived Issues with Current Academic Advising Services***

***Need for Initial Training for Academic Advising.*** Only one of the academic advisors, A7, affirmed having received initial training for the role of academic advising during the onboarding process, which took place at a different institution. The advisors knew what was expected of them as instructors but received no initial training as academic advisors that would adequately prepare them for advising the students. A7 responded:

Academic advising involves much more than simply guiding students through their curriculum which would require little or no training to do. It is a teaching process within itself that also involves helping students to realize further educational and career options, assisting students with navigating the campus and online learning systems, informing students of current and changing policies, and informing them of the various resources available to them.

A1 had not received training for academic advising. Three participants mentioned being mentored by skilled instructors/academic advisors since being employed at the college.

***Limited Job Description.*** The participants admitted that they became academic

advisors because it was part of their job description and that the job descriptions were limited in relating the actual responsibilities of the academic advisor's specific role other than guiding students with fulfilling academic requirements for the nursing program. A2 replied, "As an academic advisor, I am only required to help students follow the nursing program curriculum that leads to their degree." Similarly, A6 answered, "My role as academic advisor is to help students register for the classes that correspond to the curriculum for the nursing degree program. The remaining duties I have, according to my job description, relate to my role as instructor." It was apparent to these participants that their roles encompassed meeting with students regularly, directing students to campus resources, assisting with career planning, and other duties in addition to assisting students with course selection and registration although these other duties were not specified in the job descriptions.

***Student Support.*** A third notable point made during the interviews regarding efficacy of academic advising services was how the academic advising process is not well designed to support students. A1 stated, "The academic advising process is not very student-friendly." A3 noted, "Students are reluctant to come to me for assistance because they are unaware of, or confused about, what I may be able and willing to assist them with outside of class scheduling." Based on the responses of the participants in this group, there was a lack of student support and guidance services from academic advisors because of students' ambiguity about the academic advisors' roles.

***Increased Team Efforts.*** Two participants indicated that academic advisors in the nursing program need to work more collaboratively as a team to be more effective. A7 stated, "The academic advising process would be more effective if we worked more as a

team to share experiences, information and ideas about various advising approaches that would enable us to develop new ways to meet students' needs." These responses suggested that participants believed a more holistic approach to academic advising would increase the quality of the services being provided to the students.

***Theme 6: Suggestions for Improvement***

***Implement New Approach to Academic Advising.*** Several advisors suggested that they might implement the developmental advising approach, which would extend scheduling of classes to include the exploration of life goals and vocational goals and empower students toward autonomy. A5 stated:

This approach to academic advising involves more than the scheduling of classes for the students. They are guided to explore their life goals and their career goals using this method. The students are given more responsibility for their education and the decisions that are made toward their achievement.

One participant, A7, who had previously received training for academic advising, did so while working at a different institution prior to working for this community college. In the interview this participant reported that:

The university implemented a comprehensive training and development program for academic advisors. We received handbooks and training manuals and attended workshops where facilitators explained several different aspects of academic advising and how certain actions can positively impact students.

The academic advisors agreed that some form of training would enhance their skills enabling them to improve services to their advisees.

***Team Building and Collaboration.*** Another suggestion regarding how to improve the efficacy of the college's academic advising services was to implement peer-to-peer professional development that would allow the academic advisors to train each other. As mentioned by A5, "This would not only improve the skills of all of the academic advisors, but it would also encourage teambuilding and develop the advisors both personally and professionally." Meetings would be held where designated academic advisors conduct presentations for one another. One or more academic advisors would receive training in an area where they are deficient from a colleague who is knowledgeable in that particular area, and then turn around and provide training to that colleague in an area where they are skilled.

***Ensure Student Awareness.*** Academic advisors specified that students were not knowledgeable of how they could assist them, and suggested steps be taken to ensure the roles of academic advisors are made clear to the nursing students. In particular, A4 stated, "Without knowledge of the changes and improvements, students will not benefit from the services any more than they do from the services we currently offer." According to the academic advisors, ensuring advisee awareness necessitates meeting and communicating with the students as frequently as possible to keep them informed.

Results of the data analysis of the academic advisors' perceptions of academic advising revealed that they viewed appropriate and effective academic advising as critical to the success of first- and second-year students in the nursing program. They identified areas of weakness in academic advising services and suggested improvements. Table 4 lists the themes that emerged from analysis of academic advisors' perceptions of the efficacy of their current practices.

**Table 4***Coding and Themes from Academic Advisors' Interview Responses for RQ2*

Theme 5: Perceived Issues with Current Academic Advising Services
Need for initial training ( <b>no initial training, only mentoring</b> )
Limited job description ( <b>only specifies helping students follow curriculum</b> )
Student support (process <b>not student-friendly</b> and should <b>support students</b> more)
<b>Increased team efforts</b> are needed among academic advisors throughout program
Theme 6: Suggestions for Improving Academic Advising Services
Implement new approach ( <b>development advising</b> and <b>academic advisor development</b> )
Team building and collaboration ( <b>peer-to-peer training</b> )
Ensure student awareness ( <b>inform students about changes</b> )

*Note:* Codes are presented in boldface type.

### **RQ3: How Do First-Year and Second-Year Nursing Students Describe Their Experience With Academic Advising Services?**

Nursing students had both positive and negative experiences with academic advising services. Three themes emerged from the interviews, reasons why the students met with academic advisors, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with academic advising services they received, and students' perceptions of advisors' attitudes and behavior toward them during advising sessions.

#### ***Theme 7: Reasons Students Met with Academic Advisors***

Two of the first-year nursing students indicated they expected to meet with their advisors for the first time in person at the end of the semester to schedule classes for the upcoming semester. The remaining six student participants had all met with their respective advisors to prepare their schedules for previous semesters. Two participants mentioned they also met with their academic advisors to change their schedules, and one

participant was self-obliged to meet with her academic advisor because she was in fear of failing and being removed from the nursing degree program. S3's reply was, "I met with my academic advisor because I was failing courses and wanted to do whatever possible to keep my grade point average from dropping too low so that I could continue in the nursing degree program." She was directed to obtain advice on what she needed to do to improve her grades and maintain the required grade point average that would prevent her from being removed. Three students said they met with their advisor by email to get their PIN to register for the next semester. Also, in the words of S7, "I met with my advisor because I had a conflict with one of my instructors." All of the students who had previously met with an academic advisors stated only course scheduling, registration, and academics as reasons for meeting with them.

#### ***Theme 8: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Academic Advising Services***

During the interviews, some students expressed satisfaction with the academic advising services they had received. These students stated that they were provided access to registration and guided to register for the appropriate classes based on their curriculum. S2 stated that her advisor eagerly walked her through the entire curriculum for the nursing program and provided specific details about each course, which gave her a positive experience with the advisor. Another student stated that her academic advisor readily responds to any questions and concerns she might have relating to her curriculum. However, other students expressed dissatisfaction with the services they had previously received from their academic advisors. One student, S6, indicated she had to go to another advisor who was not assigned to her to complete registration. "The academic advisor that I was assigned to was not responding to my email requests for my

registration PIN. I was finally provided the PIN by another instructor in the nursing department.” Another student, S5, stated, “I was advised to register for classes in my curriculum, but I wanted to complete more hours during the semester than I was advised to take.” Most of the students indicated they were satisfied with the academic advising services.

***Theme 9: Students’ Perceptions of Academic Advisors’ Attitudes and Behavior Toward Them***

S2 indicated she got the impression that her academic advisor was nonchalant about assisting her. She stated, “The advisor was unconcerned about my issues and seemed to be rushing me as if I was interfering with something more important that needed to be done.” Other students stated that their academic advisors listened attentively to them and adequately addressed their concerns. Table 5 lists the themes derived from analysis of nursing students’ perceptions of their experiences with academic advising services at this school.



**Table 5**

*Coding and Themes from First- and Second-Year Student Responses for RQ3*

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Students' Experiences With Academic Advising
Theme 7: Reasons students met with academic advisors Prepare <b>schedule</b> for upcoming semester Get <b>PIN</b> to access courses for registration for upcoming session <b>Change schedule</b> <b>At risk of failing</b>
Theme 8: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with academic advising services <b>Followed schedule</b> as advised ( <b>satisfied</b> ) Followed schedule as advised ( <b>dissatisfied</b> ) <b>Further guidance</b> from other than assigned academic advisor (dissatisfied)
Theme 9: Students' perceptions of <b>advisors' attitudes</b> and behavior towards them Advisor was impatient / <b>uninterested</b> / unconcerned Advisor <b>listened</b> to student and addressed concerns

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*Note:* Codes are presented in boldface type.

**RQ4: What Advising Services Do First-Year and Second-Year Nursing Students Believe Positively or Negatively Affect Their Decision to Persist in the Nursing Program?**

The themes that emerged from the data were derived from the nursing students' expressed beliefs that the level of knowledge, availability, support, and trust of academic advisors affected their decision to persist in the nursing program. Interview responses from the nursing students revealed that from students' perceptions, relational and supportive behaviors exhibited by academic advisors in addition to curricular and personal knowledge encourage persistence in the nursing degree program. The four themes that were identified to support this research question were the overall knowledge of academic advisors, the availability of academic advisors to assist nursing students, the type of support that nursing students receive from their academic advisors, and the level

of trust developed with the academic advisor. Students made suggestions for improvements in some of the areas noted below.

***Theme 10: Overall Knowledge of Academic Advisors***

Students expected academic advisors to have knowledge of the curriculum requirements. S1 noted, “Academic advisors should know which classes are required each semester in order to complete the nursing program.” Students expressed the importance of having knowledge of required classes. The students also suggested that academic advisors should know the prerequisites for the classes.

One of the student interviewees had attended a 4-year university prior to enrolling at the community college. She credited her advisor with being able to walk her through the process of identifying transferrable credits and guide her through her curriculum to determine which classes remained for her to complete. However, another student, S2, complained that her advisor would not substitute a class that she had previously taken at another institution because it was named differently from what it is titled at the community college.

***Theme 11: Availability of Academic Advisors***

Student interviewees voiced the importance of their academic advisors being available when they are supposed to be available. These participants mentioned that they expect their advisors to be in the office during the scheduled office hours, to keep appointments and return phone calls, and to respond back to students in a timely manner. S8 responded, “Academic advisors should be in their offices during office hours,” and five other nursing student participants gave very similar responses. S7 stated, “Academic advisors should respond to student emails within 24 hours or no more than 2 days after

they receive them.” Five similar statements were made regarding the availability of academic advisors as well. With the exception of the student who was assisted by an unassigned advisor, there was no indication in the interview responses that these expectations were not being met by the academic advisors. However, one student suggested reducing the student-to-advisor ratio. S2 replied, “Academic advisors would have more time to work with students if the school reduced the number of students assigned to each advisor.” This would allow the academic advisors more time to work with each student, according to this participant.

### ***Theme 12: Support from Academic Advisors***

In reference to the support nursing students expect to receive from their academic advisors, it was communicated that they would benefit from more personal academic advising sessions. S3 said, “I would like my advisor to show more interest in my academic performance and guide me on ways to make improvements.” S8 stated, “I would prefer to meet with my advisor face-to-face.” Five other participating students agreed with S8.

Although none of the students stated they have sought or would seek non-curricular related assistance from their academic advisors, they all conveyed belief that academic advisors should be able to provide them referrals to campus resources. Helping nursing students with the development of test-taking and study skills as well as time management and stress management skills were considered to be the responsibility of academic advisors based on students’ interview responses.

***Theme 13: Trust of Academic Advisors***

Students agreed that there should be a high level of trust between students and their advisors. They expected advisors to listen with the intention of understanding and resolving issues. S2 stated, “It is important for my advisor to pay attention to my concerns and advise me accordingly.” Three students also stated the importance of listening to the students’ concerns. The students also expected honest and accurate information. Confidentiality was also mentioned by the nursing student participants as being an expectation of academic advisors. The four themes related to RQ4 are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Coding and Themes from First- and Second-Year Student Responses for RQ4*

Relational and Supportive Behaviors Exhibited by Academic Advisors	
Theme 10: Overall knowledge of academic advisors	<b>Knowledge</b> of nursing program <b>curriculum</b> Knowledge of <b>prerequisites</b> for courses
Theme 11: Availability of academic advisors	Be in the office at scheduled time ( <b>office hours</b> ) <b>Respond</b> back to students <b>in a timely manner</b> Increase <b>time with students</b>
Theme 12: Support from academic advisors	<b>Face-to-face advising</b> preferred over emails <b>Counseling</b> for stress management, time management, and other issues <b>Study skills development</b> <b>Mediation</b> between student and other instructors
Theme 13: <b>Trust</b> of academic advisors	<b>Listen</b> and genuinely seek to understand student Be honest with student ( <b>honesty</b> ) Provide students <b>accurate information</b> Maintain <b>confidentiality</b>

*Note:* Codes are presented in boldface type.

## **Findings and Themes**

Several consistencies appeared in the responses of the nursing students and academic advisors who were interviewed for this study. The interviews with the nursing student participants showed that they viewed academic advising as an important part of their college experiences and they believed that their relationships and interactions with their academic advisors affected their decision to persist in the nursing program. Their responses indicated that relational and supportive behaviors exhibited by academic advisors along with having personally relevant knowledge of both curricular and noncurricular issues encouraged persistence in the nursing degree program. The following four themes were important to the nursing students in the advising relationship: the overall knowledge of academic advisors, the availability of academic advisors to assist nursing students, the type of support nursing students received from their academic advisors and the level of trust developed with their academic advisors.

Similarly, analysis of the interview responses from the academic advisors showed that they viewed the relationships with their nursing student advisees to be essential to student progress and retention. They also saw academic advising as a collaborative process between the advisors and their students where their role involved, in addition to course scheduling, exploring the students' academic interests and career goals and helping students develop and improve skills that enabled them to fulfill requirements for completing the nursing degree program. Both nursing students and academic advisors described positive and negative experiences they encountered during academic advising at this community college. The services that nursing students expected to receive from

their academic advisors were consistent with the academic advisors' perceptions of their roles. In addition to the traditional curriculum and registration responsibilities, advisors identified the following as critical to their role: connecting students with resources for improving skills and remediation, career advising, personal guidance and ethical responsibilities, which include exhibiting empathy and genuineness, honesty, fairness and confidentiality.

The review of literature of existing studies identified various models of academic advising with research increasingly focused on student persistence related to the relationships between the student and the institution of higher learning (Aljohani, 2016). Tinto's (2010) conceptual approach proposed that, aside from the inability to perform academically, the atmosphere of the institution (including the quality of student-faculty communication and other collegial experiences) affect the decisions of students to persist through graduation. As such, the need for learning institutions to provide an environment for students that would motivate them to continue through graduation in spite of individual conditions or experiences was identified in the review of literature. During the interviews, academic advisor participants indicated that they believed that part of their role should involve helping the students with non-curricular-related issues and that the relationship between a student and academic advisor in the nursing program does affect the student's decision to remain in the program. The student participants stated that academic advisors should be able to assist students with personal issues related to their studies or campus life by at least informing them of (or referring them to) resources that are available to them. These findings correspond to Tinto's (2010) approach, showing that students need integration into informal academic systems, specifically faculty/staff

interactions, to persist. The results also supported the application of Jeffreys's (2012) NURS model as the conceptual framework used for this study. Jeffreys identified nursing faculty advisement as one of the professional integration factors that affects nursing student retention, and the findings from the study concurred as both groups of participants indicated they believed academic advising affects nursing student persistence.

Additionally, the review of literature indicated that the nature and quality of the relationship between the advisor and the student affects student persistence. Two models of academic advising were identified – prescriptive advising as the traditional model and appreciative advising as the alternative model (Hande et al., 2017). During the interviews, the alternative model of developmental advising was also identified as an approach that is based on shared responsibility of the academic planning process where students participate and make their own decisions. Moving from the prescriptive model to the appreciative model, advisors no longer prepare schedules for the students without collaborating with them and asking open-ended questions that guide how the advisors proceed to follow the curriculum. Developmental advising goes further to help students, also through collaboration, to do it themselves. The responses of both the student nurses and the academic advisors supported prior findings from studies conducted at other institutions that suggested academic advising was a key component of student persistence. In particular, findings supported the appreciative advising model. According to Hande et al. (2017), appreciative advising permits professors and students to cultivate common goals. Appreciative advising encompasses individual and group meetings to offer guidance and a caring community of peers. This model has been shown to increase

student persistence and the academic achievement of undergraduate nursing students (Hande et al., 2017).

The responses of the academic advisors and the nursing students at this community college also supported a significant part of the advising process being the nature and quality of the relationship between the advisor and the student as was discussed by Braxton et al. (2000). In their study of nursing student persistence, Harrell and Reglin (2018) found that the manner in which faculty advisors interacted with nursing students strongly affected the decision of students to remain in the nursing program. Finally, the significance of the findings of the present study regarding the importance of academic advising to the persistence of nursing students was foreshadowed by prior research findings that the quality of the emotional connections with school staff, student achievement, and general satisfaction were all related to the relationship between the advisor and the student (Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

The participating academic advisors saw that there were weaknesses in their current practices. Thus, the necessity to adapt academic advising practices to better assist students and motivate them to complete the nursing program was conclusive based on the data collected from both the academic advisors and nursing student participants in this study. Therefore, the project developed based on the findings of this study is a policy recommendation for the research site to provide comprehensive academic advising professional development training, specifically for academic advisors providing services to students in the nursing program. Implementation of this project would improve the efficacy of the academic advising services that nursing students receive. A detailed description of the project is presented in the next section.



### **Quality of Evidence**

To ensure quality and accuracy, I followed the guidelines for collecting and analyzing data by first using a traditional method of gathering qualitative evidence, conducting interviews (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). The nursing students and faculty academic advisors were asked semi-structured questions in a pre-determined sequence to obtain detailed responses. These two groups were recruited based on their shared associations with the local community college, and because they presented varying perspectives of their individual experiences with the academic advising services, which added to the quality of the research (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify themes. To avoid bias in the analysis of the data, inductive coding and reflexivity (see Hays & McKibbon, 2021) were used. This enabled me to set aside any pre-conceived notions I may have had as an academic advisor and focus on the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Thus all the codes that were identified in the study came directly from the responses obtained during the interviews to further enhance the quality of the evidence (Clark & Veale, 2018).

### **Project Deliverable**

Based on findings relating to nursing students' and academic advisors' experiences with academic advising services and their perceptions of how the academic advising services have affected nursing students' decisions to persist through graduation, the most appropriate project deliverable was reasoned to be a policy recommendation. The proposed project deliverable is a policy paper that describes the recommended policy implementation of professional development training for academic advisors that would address the expressed concerns of both students and academic advisors. The training will

help the academic advisors to establish effective advising practices that offer each student an improved experience which would encourage retention through graduation. Upon acceptance of the policy recommendation and implementation of the training, academic advisors will have enhanced ability to:

- Engage students by helping them to realize how far they have progressed toward a nursing degree and how they can accomplish their goals. The advisors enable the students to visualize who they want to become, and what they need to do to fulfill their vision.
- Equip students to become positively engaged through behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement.
- Empower students to take ownership of the learning process where they make their own informed decisions.

### Section 3: The Project

Based on the findings from the study, a policy recommendation was chosen as the appropriate genre for the project. Interview responses from both groups of participants revealed the importance of the academic advisor-student relationship in encouraging the nursing students to persist. Participating academic advisors conveyed that there are drawbacks to their current academic practices, suggesting the need to make improvements that will enable them to better assist students and promote retention. Thus, a policy recommendation paper was deemed an appropriate means to convey the findings from the study to administrators and others who make decisions about the academic advising services provided to the nursing students at the local community college. The format used for the policy recommendation is a policy paper designed to address a problem by providing a solution to the problem with adequate information to justify the decisions that are made concerning the issue (see American Library Association, 2007). This policy recommendation paper was structured on the identified needs of the academic advising program and the goals desired to be obtained by decision makers who establish policies for academic advising. It includes, among other standard segments of a policy paper, the background and definition of the problem, the current status of the problem, the importance of addressing the problem through policy changes, a list and comparison of alternative solutions, a description of the recommendation, and plans for implementation and evaluation (see Rodin et al., 2016). The goal of the project is to influence those who have the authority to implement new policies or improve existing ones to take actions toward enhancing academic advising services in order to increase retention rates among nursing students.

## **Rationale**

Policy recommendations provide alternatives for solving issues and achieving desired outcomes by presenting written policy advice to those who have the authority to influence policy decisions. This policy recommendation paper is focused on academic advisors who work with first- and second-year nursing students. Researchers, administrators, and student services specialists of the National Association of Academic Advisors view academic advising as a process that serves to provide students with needed resources to be successful at achieving their college and career goals (Lance, 2009). Outcomes of the research leading up to this project substantiated the opportunity to heighten the effectiveness of academic advising for the Department of Nursing at a local community college. Because this policy recommendation paper is grounded in evidence about the academic advising services nursing students had been receiving, and how improving these services might help to address the problem of nursing student attrition, it was determined to be an appropriate genre to use to present the nature of the problem and the alternative solutions that were gathered from the study.

To address the problem using a policy recommendation, the results from the review of related literature and findings from this study were combined to identify the background of the problem in terms of what led to its existence and what efforts had been made in the past to resolve it. After noting this information in the policy recommendation paper, the current problem of nursing student attrition as it relates to academic advising at the research site was presented along with the identification of those who are and should be responsible for addressing it. The policy recommendation paper describes why it is important for policymakers to address these issues and lists the stakeholders who were or

may have been affected by the problem. In the next section, alternative solutions not included as recommendations are listed with explanations why others were chosen over them. The recommended solutions, together with a plan for implementation and for evaluation conclude the project. Following is a review of literature that explicates the research relevant to policy recommendations as they are used to encourage support and acceptance of proposed solutions, such as those intended to improve academic advisor services at the research site.

### **Review of the Literature**

This review of literature presents an overview of the policy recommendation genre, why it was a suitable means of delivery for this project, and how this genre should be appropriately applied to address the areas of needed improvement in academic advising identified from the research. The search for related literature was initially conducted by accessing several databases in the Walden University Library, including ABI/Inform Collection, Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC, and Gale Academic OneFile Select. Search terms used to find supportive information included *the history of policy recommendation, policy, advantages of using policy recommendation, academic advising policy, how to write a policy recommendation, contents of a policy paper, best practices for policy recommendation, educational policy development, and recommendations for policy changes*. There were very few resources published within the last 5 years available for review on the topic of policy recommendation. Searches conducted outside of the Walden University Library databases produced only a few current articles that met the criteria of the project as well. To ensure the discovered literature was sufficient for explaining how the research could be used to guide

development of this project using the policy recommendation genre, foundational articles and other less recent but relevant articles were reviewed.

### **Policy Recommendation**

Policy guides the attitudes and actions of members of an organization in regard to a particular issue or problem. Policy is a set of ideas or plans used as a foundation for making decisions regarding the issue or problem (Morris & Gallagher, 2018). Not only is policy a basis for decision-making and execution of plans, but it is also a means of defining and clarifying objectives and expectations to personnel so that they perform accordingly (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). Thus, most organizations, including institutions of higher learning, have written policies to guide personnel on what their roles and responsibilities are and the practices and procedures that are acceptable and/or required for different types of situations. When a policy issue has been identified and analyzed, changes often need to be made and/or a new policy needs to be developed to solve the problem. This is frequently accomplished through a policy recommendation, which is a written submission presented to decision-makers for approval based on the assumption that the writer knows the best policy options available to resolve the issue or improve the situation (Doyle, 2013).

Several researchers have found that policy recommendation is the most appropriate genre for addressing the problems from their studies and present the policy recommendation using a position paper (also termed a policy paper or white paper). For example, Nelson (2021) chose to use the policy recommendation genre to facilitate change to an existing policy for an educational program for gifted and talented students in elementary schools to encourage equitable access to minorities. The purpose of a position

paper, according to Nelson and Miller (2021), is to inform the stakeholders of the need for a new or improved policy by defining the problem, describing the objective of the policy recommendation, and persuading the stakeholders to adopt the recommendation and take the necessary steps to get it implemented. The recommendation provides awareness to stakeholders and helps the writer gain their support (Miller, 2021). Nelson suggested more than once that a policy recommendation position paper resulting from a study produce data-driven decision-making. Both Nelson and Calver (2021) mentioned the importance of policy recommendations aligning with the themes identified in data analysis and how using this genre can lead to positive social change for the respective stakeholders. Calver suggested that policy recommendation can lead to continuous improvement in addition to immediate enhancement, which are goals of this project as well. Both Nelson and Calver also identified policy recommendation as a means of initiating and/or augmenting professional development programs for educators. Voyce (2020) referred to his genre for his research project as a white paper that, like policy recommendation, serves to persuade stakeholders to make informed decisions based on the recommendations given to solve problems. Like Nelson and Calver, Voyce suggested that the white paper should be developed from the themes that evolve from data analysis. However, Voyce asserted that white papers should provide options to enable stakeholders to decide which solutions to take as opposed to directing action.

Policy recommendations are beneficial because they provide the research and evidence needed to make the best decisions (Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, 2012). Individuals who develop policy recommendations want to influence policy and ensure that their recommendations will be accepted, so they will

likely conduct thorough research and gather sufficient evidence to support them. Doyle (2013) emphasized the importance of justifying the recommendation with the issue and its arguments and including in the written documentation three main parts, the issue, analysis, and recommendation. Doyle also stressed four characteristics of a well-written policy recommendation including conciseness, readability, accuracy, and effective argumentation. This fourth characteristic is what sets policy recommendation apart from policy briefs, because the goal is to encourage decision-makers to choose what is being recommended over other obtainable alternatives (Doyle, 2013).

Ten guidelines have been specified for writing policy recommendations: (a) define the objective, (b) decide on a target audience, (c) set out the issue clearly, (d) give options where possible, (e) recognize the current economic climate, (f) fit in with existing strategies or legislation, (g) use international examples, (h) remember the audience, (i) show an impact in the real world, and (j) emphasize the importance of action (Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, 2012). These guidelines are similar to the core components and basic structure of a policy paper as advised by Stanford Law School (2015), which were applied in the formation of this policy recommendation paper. In addition, Stanford Law School proposed key points and a checklist for writing the executive summary, which was referred to as the most important part of the policy recommendation. The key points of the executive summary include the motivation for doing the project and the problem statement which should identify what was addressed in the research; the methods, procedure, and approach that was used to obtain the results; the results, findings and recommendations generated from the analysis of the research;



and the conclusions and implications of the findings that will help the decision-makers solve the problem (Stanford Law School, 2015).

### **Policy Papers**

Distinctions between the goals and reasons for writing policy papers were found in the research. Buckway (2020) stated that this genre can generally be used by anyone for any topic. According to Voyce (2020), policy papers were initially used to administer military policy and were modified by other industry leaders to identify and present problems to stakeholders and recommend solutions. Policies developed by government bodies possessing political and/or legislative power to implement action in response to a problem or issue of concern came to be known as public policy (Rus et al., 2020). Public policy papers were required to be written for those who had the authority to act in response to the needs or problems of a group, community, or society as a whole (Rus et al., 2020). The essential elements of public policy papers included a set of goals and objectives intended to address an issue, a course of action, and justification for the recommended policy (Rus et al., 2020). Policy papers were eventually written to bring awareness to problems in businesses and other non-government organizations and to make policy recommendations for resolutions (Voyce, 2020). Furthermore, white papers made up of similar elements were developed with purposes other than to encourage change in or creation of policies. Malone and Wright (2018) described how white papers have been used to promote sales of new and improved technology, for example. Although the purpose of marketing white papers is different from that of traditional white papers, they are constructed in much the same way (Malone & Wright, 2018). Both government and marketing white papers are used in the health care industry to persuade or inform

constituents about a topic of interest (Campbell et al., 2020; Churchwell et al., 2021; Rotarius & Rotarius, 2016).

The Purdue Online Writing Lab, as cited by Buckway (2020), suggested that the purpose of a policy paper may be to present the author's position on a subject or to solve a problem. Some policy papers provide authoritative information based on the author's expertise or knowledge gathered from research, but other policy papers are developed to persuade and assist others. Rodin et al. (2016) distinguished policy papers from position papers and reports that are also created to bring awareness of issues and to help generate solutions. Position papers present the organization's viewpoint on an issue when it arises without calling for any immediate action from the organization, and a report provides background information for a given problem and recommends a position paper be created or further research be conducted regarding the problem (Rodin et al., 2016). However, in addition to researching and analyzing the problem and positioning the organization regarding the issue, a policy paper offers a plan for the organization to take action to resolve the issue. Distinctions have also been made between policy papers and standard research papers concerning the components that are required for each. An essential component of the policy paper is criteria for judging policy choices (Bardach & Patashnik, 2015). Accordingly, it is important to state the reasons for recommending one alternative over others, and it is also useful to rank the criteria in order of importance in the policy recommendation, which was considered in the development of this project.

### **Academic Advising Policy and Policy Recommendations**

Several institutions of higher learning have documented, in various formats, policies that inform academic advisors of their expected roles and responsibilities and the

procedures that must be taken to comply with the standards set by these institutions. The Advising Resource Center of the University of Arizona, for one, published a written statement of policies and procedures that specifies the role of the University, the academic advisors, and the students in academic advising (University of Arizona Office of the Provost Advising Resource Center, 2021a). In this written statement, the role of the academic advisors was stipulated as helping students evaluate and realize educational and career possibilities (University of Arizona Office of the Provost Advising Resource Center, 2021b). To fulfill this role, the academic advisors at the University of Arizona are expected to approve the program of study for new students, provide accurate and consistent information to advisees, make program requirements, policies and procedures clear to advisees, assist students in locating appropriate resources that are available at the institution, link students with other individuals on campus who may be able to assist them, and follow the academic standards of the institution. The University of Arizona also provides basic advising policies and procedures for new academic advisors (University of Arizona Office of the Provost Advising Resource Center, 2021a). In addition to listing the basic guidelines for academic advising, it informs the advisors of where to go to gain additional information regarding university processes and explains the roles advising plays in helping students determine if they should take classes online or in the physical classroom. Information is included on evaluating in-state and out-of-state transfer credits; orienting first-year and transfer students; helping students work within deadlines for registration and other administrative processes; working with advisors in other departments when students desire to complete two programs sharing the same

credits; and reviewing students' records to ensure they have completed all general education, program of study, and university requirements.

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) has a policy and procedures manual that includes a section on academic advising policies. The policies that have been set by this institution include the purpose of academic advising, oversight and responsibilities for academic advising, academic advising expectations, and student responsibilities (Rochester Institute of Technology, n.d.). The purpose of academic advising at RIT is to assist students with understanding the requirements for the degree program in which they are enrolled and with identifying and being referred to campus resources and services that support the achievement of student success. RIT's manual identified department deans and their designees as those who have oversight of academic advising and ensuring that trained personnel and other resources are in place. Expectations of academic advisors are to ensure that every student is assigned an academic advisor; receives a documented academic plan of study; receives advisement on how to interpret degree requirements, related to academic standing and progress, how to navigate the course registration system; has access to their advisor each term, has the opportunity to provide feedback concerning satisfaction with the academic advising services they received,; is referred to the appropriate campus resources as necessary to increase probability of student success; and receives communication regarding the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors.

In the search for additional related literature, academic advising policy for several other institutions of higher learning was found including University of Maryland, Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Pennsylvania State University,

University of Tennessee, San Francisco State University, Schreiner University, Clemson University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Cambridge College, Texas State University, and Missouri State University. The academic advising policies of these universities accorded with one or more of the policies that were previously described. Only one of the institutions, Minnesota State Community and Technical College, was a community college like the research site. The academic advising policy of this institution, like most others, requires an academic advisor be assigned to each student to assist each student with academic planning and scheduling prior to registration each term. Additionally, it is stated as part of this institution's policy that academic advisors provide information and encouragement to students to guide them as opposed to making decisions for them (Minnesota State Community and Technical College Academic and Student Affairs, 2005). This is noteworthy because one of the main qualities of appreciative advising, the approach presented in the policy recommendation paper, is its emphasis on enabling students to make their own decisions (Bloom et al., 2013).

### **Academic Advising Policies and Practices at Community Colleges**

Institutional reviews of academic advising policy sometimes revealed their ability to mitigate barriers to student retention through advising practices. In such cases it can be helpful to train staff and disseminate written guidance that includes policies and procedures for handling academic suspension, confidentiality of student records, graduation, new student advising sessions, advisement of transfer students and other issues. As part of their role mentioned in the academic advising handbook, the advisors are required to help students define their educational and career goals, inform students of the nature of the advisor/advisee relationship, refer students to other sources when they

have problems that require the services of other professionals, proactively contact students on a regular basis, and maintain confidential information discussed with students during advising sessions.

Various academic advising practices and procedures have been set in place through policy implementation at other higher education institutions. In 2017, the execution of a bill that made developmental education courses optional and mandated academic advising be provided for all new students in the Florida College System was evaluated for effectiveness. In a study of 19 community colleges in the Florida College system, Woods et al. (2017) found that a variety of practices were being used to advise students at each institution. The advising protocols that Woods et al. identified included use of intrusive advising, consideration of non-cognitive factors, use of an early warning system, and use of transcripts, checklists, individual education plans, and degree maps. These practices were perceived by the college administrators to be effective overall at meeting students' needs (Woods et al., 2017).

The academic advising and other policies in place at many institutions of higher learning have changed over time to improve education for the students. Mintz (2019) explained several reasons for the need for these changes including an increase in non- or post-traditional students, shifts in students' priorities, higher expectations about the quality of teaching, increases in the range of student services being offered, and desired growth in persistence and completion rates of enrolled students. One occurrence at some community colleges that called for changes in policy was the expansion of their program offerings to include baccalaureate degrees. Martinez and Elue (2020) described specifically how this affected academic advising policy and practices based on a study

involving 62 participants from various public community colleges that offered baccalaureate degrees across the United States. The study consisted of faculty members, professional advisors, academic advising administrators, and administrators over other areas. From the analysis of the researchers' survey and interview data, several themes were identified including reorganization of academic advising, improved internal and external collaboration and communication between academic advising and other departments, development of an organizational culture where faculty members support baccalaureate degree programming, and an established need for ongoing professional development and training that would prepare the academic advisors to effectively advise degree-seeking students at their respective colleges (Martinez & Elue, 2020).

### **Participative-Based Professional Development for Advisors**

Professional development that uses participative-based learning has been found to successfully produce actionable strategies that increase positive outcomes for students; it has been referred to as *active learning* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and as *practice-based professional development* (Dysart & Weckerie, 2015). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) described how professional development that incorporates active learning allows educators to participate in the same style of learning they design for their students. During training sessions, the participants practice the strategies they subsequently use with the students to enhance achievement of academic goals. Practice-based professional development is a comprehensive approach that allows participants the opportunity for hands-on practice (Dysart & Weckerie, 2015). By applying participative-based learning, academic advisors would be able to reflect on the experiences they encounter when advising students in the same way that instructors reflect on the experiences they

encounter when teaching. Continued professional development is more likely to yield desired outcomes when this approach is used (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Dysart & Weckerie, 2015).

### **Collaboration Through Professional Development**

Colleges and universities frequently receive recommendations to enact new policies that require faculty to undergo professional development training to improve services or resolve issues. One example is the set of recommendations presented by researchers who analyzed the impact of mentor development on a group of associate teachers and faculty advisors to better support teacher candidates and build stronger partnerships between schools and universities (Palazzolo et al., 2018). Another example is the creation of the Green Zone Program which has been initiated at various campuses throughout the United States to help veterans more successfully transition to being educated outside of the military (Dillard & Yu, 2018). Dillard and Yu (2018) referred to this program as a best practice in student veteran education, and after studying the program in regard to faculty professional development, made recommendations to improve it.

According to Harper and Smith (2017), professional development that provides opportunities for academic advisors to build collaborative alliances is a very positive process. It allows participants to share experiences and learn from each other because the diverse group of advisors will offer multiple perspectives and strategies for approaching the academic advising process. Harper and Smith (2017) also presented some challenges to collaborative professional development, which include scheduling the appropriate time



for training so that all academic advisors can attend and encouraging continued motivation among participants.

The quality of professional development depends on how well it creates opportunities for participants to collaborate as they learn (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These experts affirm that collaboration works effectively in small group settings as well as whole group settings and those settings where training involves other professionals outside of the institution. Emphasizing collaboration in professional development has proven to be very beneficial at improving the value of services being provided to students as a result of the training (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Norander's (2018) best practices for facilitating communication-centered professional development at higher education institutions are much like the components of a policy paper that were previously presented. For one, professional development should be designed based on the needs of the institution and faculty (Norander, 2018). This corresponds to defining the problem and objectives of a policy recommendation and clearly setting out the issues to be addressed. Norander (2018) advised creating a flexible and personalized learning environment for development, which corresponds with identifying and remembering the audience. According to Norander (2018) professional development should create a sense of community that extends beyond a single professional development experience. This can be a means of emphasizing action and showing impact in the real world (Daniels et al., 2019).

Experts have reported that policy has been a barrier to successful professional development programs but can be revised or updated based on research to improve professional development of faculty at higher education institutions. A case in point is

research conducted by Wang et al. (2020), which showed that barriers to professional development centers at flagship universities were mainly due to compound issues with policy. According to Wang et al. (2020), the services of these professional development centers could be improved by implementing information and communication technologies training initiatives at these institutions. Newton et al. (2020), also identified policy as being problematic because it often does not connect educational practice with higher education research. Professional development programs could be enhanced if they are built upon research-based instructional strategies (Newton et al., 2020). Furthermore, policy that is intended to promote professional development that supports research as well as faculty succession through training improves research quality and student academic success (Jacob et al., 2019). This validates the use of the policy recommendation genre to influence leaders, administrators, and policy makers to implement the professional development program that was generated from this research.

The importance of evaluating professional development training programs was emphasized in several of the articles that were reviewed. Evaluating the success of a professional development training in order to increase its support for actual or further implementation is considered a key role (Eldridge et al., 2020). When professional development training is implemented without an evaluation plan, there is no way to determine if the intended results of the training are attained and/or the if the institution experiences the level of desired progress (Ryan & McAllister, 2021). Continuation of professional development programs is also essential to the programs' success. As the faculty continues to come together to work toward improving their services to students through professional development opportunities, they create a culture of teamwork

(Miguel-Stearns, 2020). As a means of continuation, the professional development program should spread to other faculty (inside and outside of the local community college) who were not participants in the initial training (Eldridge et al., 2020). Not only should the impact of the professional development be measured recurrently and changes be made persistently to improve effectiveness, knowledge of the tools and strategies used in the application of the training should also be accessible to faculty and other institutions to augment achievement of the objectives of professional development projects (Leslie, 2019).

### **Research Supporting Professional Development for Academic Advisors**

A qualitative study conducted by Houdyshell and Kirk (2018) revealed that all of the graduate students in a course on academic advising recognized the significance of academic advising for institutions of higher education and their students. Although they were at different points in their practice and understanding of the profession, they all were in agreement that foundational theoretical knowledge regarding academic advising was lacking and this lack of foundational knowledge was a weakness or obstacle to either comprehending the significance of being an advisor, examining the process of professional development as an academic advisor, or functioning as a new advisor already on the job (Houdyshell & Kirk, 2018). The perceptions that were identified most frequently among these trainees regarding advising in the profession included (a) viewing the advisor as a guide and a resource, (b) recognizing the negative perception students and the university community hold regarding the profession, (c) the way a course in advising could help in the creation of a new kind of advising and help build significant knowledge needed by a new or current advisor. Houdyshell and Kirk's study addressed

the need for improvement in the perception and development of new kinds of academic advising, a need also articulated by the advisors and nursing students in the current study.

In a recent study, McGill et al. (2020b) found that academic advisors require training and development in the following three crucial areas to be successful: conceptual, concerning the student and organizational setting; informational, regarding laws, policies, and procedures; and relational, about interpersonal skills. However, the authors found that the relational component is frequently ignored. According to McGill et al. (2020b), research regarding the existence of the relational component in training and professional development for academic advisors has been limited. Their two-phase study examined the relational component in professional development programs for academic advisors. They found that opportunities for relational learning were least frequent among the three components and did not affect evaluation scores of the advisors in the first phase. However, the authors concluded that themes appearing during the second phase concerning awareness of the relational component and factors affecting performance of the advisors indicated the need for greater focus on relational training, and evaluation of advisors' interpersonal skills was necessary. Thus, it seems that relational training is an important component of professional development for academic advisors (Dipre & Luke, 2020; McGill et al., 2020a). Vianden (2016) further proposed that academic advisors must assume the role of agents of student relationship management by constructing quality interpersonal relationships that strengthen their advisees' bonds with their institutions of higher learning.

### ***Appreciative Advising Approach***

Studies indicate appreciative advising has been successful with nursing students, especially when incorporated into professional development for their academic advisors and/or instructors (Opsahl et al., 2018; Read et al., 2017). Academic advisors at a community college in southeastern United States who transitioned from traditional methods of advising to the appreciative advising approach affirmed they learned improved techniques and became more confident while practicing appreciative advising, both of which made them more effective in the process (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). These advisors also claimed they developed deeply connected relationships with their students and their peers, and they became increasingly motivated compared to the level of motivation they had when using other models of advising (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). These strengths, including the propensities of appreciative advising to enable academic advisors to enhance their skills and talents, to become more effective, and to develop stronger relationships with students, co-workers, and others, were also identified in a study of the perceptions of academic advisors from three other postsecondary institutions (Howell, 2010). Based on their overall responses, training and implementation of the appreciative advising approach has been shown to have a positive influence on academic advisors.

Appreciative advising, a totally student-centered approach that is focused on the student's personal and academic growth, creates positive experiences for academic advisors trained in its use and this has been shown to carry forward to the students whom they assisted. Hande et al. (2017) referred to appreciative advising as an effective, efficient, and thoughtful method of academic advising, particularly for students in

nursing. Using this approach, academic advisors ask positive, open-ended questions that stimulate students to develop positive goals, promote engagement, and motivate students to make reasonable choices and learn more effectively (Bloom et al., 2008; Read et al., 2017). The positive questioning is a major strength that has been shown to aid students in identifying their personal strengths and helping them to align those strengths with institutional expectations as well as personal goals and plans. This was substantiated very soon after the model was introduced when the Student Academic Services Office at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro implemented the appreciative advising model to assist various student populations including prenursing students who had been unsuccessful at meeting entrance or continuance requirements for the nursing program. Through appreciative advising, 30% of the students were able to identify and change to alternative majors that aligned with their strengths. These students and other participants reported being empowered through the advising they received and having more control over their academic pursuits. Additionally, among those who received appreciative advising through SAS, retention rates significantly increased by 18% and the mean grade point average was considerably higher, 2.86 compared to 1.29 for non-participants (Hutson & Bloom, 2007). Based on its key elements, appreciative advising was deemed to be an approach that fit well with the goal of strengthening interpersonal relationships (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016) and was therefore incorporated into this policy recommendation paper for the professional development of academic advisors at the community college.

## **Summary**

The literature reveals a need for professional development for academic advisors to address student concerns, especially in the affective relational dimension of the process. The community college nursing student participants in this study indicated they wanted to feel cared about in their interactions with their academic advisors. In general, satisfaction with the advising experience is associated with student persistence and retention (Crocker et al., 2014; Holton, 2017). Although many advising paradigms are available, recent research suggested that appreciative advising increases the potential for students to be satisfied, persist, and be retained (Harrell & Reglin, 2018; Holton, 2017). Thus, professional development with an appreciative advising approach was recommended for the nursing student advisors at the community college that served as the research site.

## **Project Description**

The goal of this policy recommendation paper is to encourage implementation of professional development training to enhance the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of the academic advisors at the local community college so that they have better interactions with their students in the advising process, increasing the students' persistence in the nursing program and optimizing their potential to succeed. In alignment with this goal, a variety of activities and learning materials were identified that could be combined to deliver the training to the academic advisors. These activities would enable the academic advisors to actively participate so that they receive the best possible learning experiences from the training. For example, a suggested activity for promoting active participation is a role playing group exercise that would give each member of the group an opportunity to

express their views and ideas about academic advising. (See Appendix A for a broader description of the role-playing group exercise.) To further promote active participation among the academic advisors, it is recommended that a Group Chat be created in Google Teams, and email messages be sent to participants inviting them to join the chat. This would provide a platform for the advisors to communicate during the week about the training to share thoughts and information that might be helpful to each other. Upon approval of the policy recommendation, any pre-training preparation that will be required for the professional development training can begin.

### **Resources Needed for Project**

#### ***Individuals to Deliver the Training***

The method of delivery and who delivers the professional development training is a factor in its perception by trainees. Specifically, teachers view professional development that is led by teachers as optimal (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014). Moreover, trainees believe trainers who have comparable roles in their educational institution are more successful (Courtney, 2016). These findings suggested that training provided by another professor who also advises students as a part of their instructional responsibilities might be perceived more positively by the academic advisors at the community college than someone with a different role.

#### ***Funding for the Professional Development Training***

Estimated costs for the professional development training must be taken into consideration before the policy recommendation can be approved. Costs will depend on number of participants and whether the training will take place on campus or at another



facility, and how long the training will last. The training facilitator fee, cost of materials, cost of food served to participants, and travel and living expenses must be considered.

### ***Training Materials***

The research site will incur costs for any printed materials including paper-based handouts and manuals that are printed and issued to the participants during the training. Funding may also be needed for the technology that will be used during the training.

### **Existing Supports**

The local community college's mission and goals and the institution's changing needs necessitate the continued professional development of faculty; thus, the environment of the college is generally supportive of this type of intervention. The director of the nursing program had expressed concern with the program's high rate of attrition and desired to find ways to increase nursing student retention. Based on the findings of the study, the academic advisors seek and expect professional growth through professional development training, creating a potentially cooperative group of participants at the institution. The institution's administrative staff acknowledge that academic advising is pertinent to the success of all students and would likely support and be involved in the implementation of the project.

### **Potential Barriers to the Professional Development Training**

Although no major barriers are anticipated, one barrier to the professional development training could be the administration's lack of support for the policy recommendation and refusal to make the training a requirement for new and existing academic advisors. A second barrier would be lack of availability of the academic advisors for the training. It would be cost effective to train a group of advisors together

rather than train all of them individually. However, working the training into their teaching and advising schedules would be challenging. To add, many institutions of higher learning have an annual budget that includes costs for training of personnel. These budgets are approved at the beginning of a fiscal year and are strict concerning the application of funds. Consequently, the funding for a new training for academic advisors that would be initiated after approval of a policy recommendation might not be available immediately.

### ***Solutions to Barriers***

The main solution to the barriers is to present a policy recommendation that includes all of the required components necessary to persuade administrators of the seriousness of this issue and the need to act proactively to achieve the desired outcomes of increased persistence and retention. Scheduling the training sessions outside of the academic advisors' normal hours of working with the students could remove the barrier of availability once the policy recommendation is approved. Incentives for participation might serve as buy-in for the academic advisors. Facilitating the training on campus would require less funding and likely remove this barrier to implementation of the professional development training.

### **Implementation of the Policy Recommendations**

Full implementation of the policy recommendations is estimated at approximately 20 weeks, with training covering 5 weeks. February through May will provide sufficient time for the Department of Nursing chairperson to obtain approval from academic affairs, secure necessary resources, and schedule professional development for advising staff. Compliance with the new advising policy would begin in the first summer session.

**Table 7***Timetable for Implementation of Policy Recommendation for Appreciative Advising Professional Development Training*

Task	Implementation Dates
Presentation of policy recommendation at institution	January 2022
Review of current academic advising practices in consideration of recommendation	January–February 2022
Approval and adoption of policy	February 2022
Preparation of program budget	February 2022
Selection of location and acquisition of resources	March 2022
Creation of activities, handouts, and other materials for weekly training sessions	April 2022
Introduction of policy and training schedule to advisors	May 2022
Start of training	June 2022
End of training	July 2022
Participants' application of appreciative advising approach	August–December 2022
Summative evaluation of training	December 2022
Modification of training and application	Each subsequent term

***Roles and Responsibilities***

My role involved conducting the research, analyzing the data, and reporting the findings related to the problem of nursing student attrition at the local community college. It is my responsibility to effectively communicate the issue and the findings from the research to those who have the authority to accept my recommendation for implementation of professional development training for academic advisors.

Administrators at the local community college have the responsibility of reviewing and approving the policy recommendation, investing the resources that will be needed to

implement the professional development training, hiring or appointing facilitators and instructors, and setting up the training sessions. The department head's role is to notify the academic advisors of the scheduled training sessions and their mandatory participation. Academic advisors will be charged with attending the training sessions, evaluating the training, and applying what they learn from the training to the academic advising process. Lastly, the students' responsibilities include evaluating the advising system when they are requested to do so to help improve the process. This obliges students to schedule and keep appointments with advisors when required and as needed, so that the students will be able to provide an accurate evaluation.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

Although the project is a policy recommendation paper encouraging the development, implementation, and evaluation of a professional development program for academic advisors, evaluation of the document itself is best conducted through evaluation of the fully implemented professional development training program. Evaluation is essential because the results may be used to show administrators, academic advisors, and students that advising practices have improved which can bring in added support for the training activities. If the evaluation reveals that training did not result in improved advising, the results can help administrators and faculty to identify ways to improve design and execution of the training as needed. It can be determined through evaluation which activities are useful and should be continued and which should be changed to improve the professional development program. This training for the academic advisors will be evaluated using Kirkpatrick's four-level summative evaluation model (see Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016), which was selected because it is commonly used in

evaluation of the effectiveness of similar programs (Malik & Asghar, 2020). The four levels of evaluation in Kirkpatrick's model are reaction, learning, behavior, and results. Dalto (2014) described how these four levels can be applied in the iterative process of creating and evaluating an effective training program. To evaluate the *reaction* of the academic advisors who participated in the training, it is necessary to determine how well they liked the training which can be done with a brief survey similar to those that are commonly used to evaluate workshops. At the *learning* level, it is necessary to identify what the academic advisors learned from the training which is often accomplished using multiple-choice and similar types of quizzes. The *behavior* level is where the capabilities of the academic advisors to perform newly learned skills is measured; an instrument for this purpose is suggested below. Assessing the outcomes of the learning process is what takes place at the *results* level. In this case, this is when it would be appropriate to determine if the retention rate of nursing students has increased over time after implementation of the training program, for example.

The tool that is recommended to be used to evaluate performance of the academic advisors is the Appreciative Advising Rubric and Evaluation (Crookston, 2009). As indicated by the behavior level of Kirkpatrick's model that focuses on application of aspects of the professional development training, this rubric centers on the performance of the academic advisors after receiving the training and the corresponding reactions of their students. Academic advisors are graded using the 3-point scale of *good, better, best* based on how their advising flows through the six phases of academic advising. This rubric, according to Crookston (2009) has been used by several colleges and universities as an evaluation tool.

It would be necessary to observe the academic advisors over an appropriate period of time to determine if their advising improved as a result of the training and whether or not the desired outcomes for the institution were accomplished. However, sufficient indication of the immediate effectiveness of the professional development training can be gathered using Kirkpatrick's model for the evaluation process. In addition to answering the questions relating to how well the academic advisors liked the training and what they learned from it, this rubric will assist in answering questions regarding the academic advisors' intentions to implement appreciative advising as their approach to advising students and to seek further appreciative advising training.

### **Project Implications**

A decision to accept the policy recommendation will lead to the implementation of the professional development training to aid the local community college in achieving desired outcomes of increasing nursing student persistence and retention rates. Including the professional development training as part of the academic advising policy for the institution will enable the key stakeholders—students, faculty, and academic advisors—to see and understand the value that is being placed in the academic advising system and its influence on student success. This can send a positive message throughout the institution and develop a strong culture where everyone involved interacts and functions cohesively toward desired goals of achievement for the students (Shafer, 2018). As new students enroll in the nursing program, academic advisors will be better prepared to help their advisees understand the traditions, policies, and other expectations that make up the culture of the institution (Klein, 2012). Increases in the number of nursing students who persist to graduation through enhancement of academic advising services will improve

the public's view of the quality of the institution's nursing program, which may also increase enrollment in the nursing program. As more students graduate from the nursing program with the skills that constitute the appropriate level of student success, more nurses, caregivers, aides in hospitals, home health and direct care workers, and other aides will be available to meet the nursing and health care needs of the community.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The policy recommendation paper for an appreciative advising professional development training project has several strengths in addressing the problem of nursing student persistence. The training was proposed based on the responses obtained from a sample of academic advisors who reflected the general population of academic advisors at the local community college and a sample of first- and second-year nursing students who sought guidance or assistance from these advisors. The appreciative advising model coincided with what both students and academic advisors describe as being appropriate for effectively relating to students and helping them to persist and succeed in the nursing program (Crookston, 2009).

Time constraints constitute the primary limitations of the professional development training and the application of the appreciative advising approach. College professors work within limited amounts of time to build course curricula, create instructional materials, prepare syllabi, present lectures, assess and evaluate student progress, provide mentoring and advising services, and complete their other duties. To provide thorough training in the appreciative advising approach, the sessions would extend over a period of 5 weeks, necessitating cooperation from the academic advisor participants in fitting the training into their schedules. Implementation of the appreciative advising approach with the students at the local community college is also limited by time constraints. To be most effective, students should complete each of the six phases of appreciative advising with the guidance of their respective academic advisors, which means each student requires multiple sessions of advising. This necessitates rigorous



scheduling on the part of the academic advisors to be able to meet the needs of all their students.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Several factors other than academic advising affect the persistence of first- and second-year nursing students, allowing for various ways to view the problem of nursing student retention. Socioeconomic status, race, and age have been identified as some of the factors that influence student persistence. Fraher et al. (2010) indicated that attrition rates are higher among socioeconomically disadvantaged students, as well as racial and ethnic minority students and older students. Alternatives to addressing the problem based on these factors might involve researching ways to eliminate barriers to retention of nursing students who are disadvantaged and studying ways to improve retention rates for nontraditional nursing students. Admissions policies and educational level of faculty were also found to affect student retention. At institutions where admission policies tend to be more demanding and faculty members are better educated, students are more likely to persist (Fraher et al., 2010). As such, one alternative approach would be to examine the admissions policies of the local community college and their effect on student persistence or revising policy so that students have a greater chance of avoiding academic suspension from the nursing program. In regards to educational level of faculty members, instructors could be required to receive continuing education that would better equip them for their role in retaining nursing students.

## **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

### **Scholarship**

While conducting the research regarding professional development of academic advisors, I discovered numerous models and approaches that have been implemented at various colleges and universities targeting different student populations with the intent to advance the students academically and encourage them to persist to graduation. As I interviewed the participants in the study, I was excited to find that both the nursing students and the academic advisors viewed the academic advising process as being essential to student success at the local community college. As a scholar, I was able to identify my own strengths and weaknesses and to focus on the strengths to reach this point in pursuit of my own academic and personal goals. Through personal application of some of the elements of appreciative advising and other models, I have enhanced my literacy, communication, and research skills, and I am more capable of thinking critically and solving problems, which was expected to be achieved through this project.

### **Project Development**

The recommendations I received from my committee members were very helpful. For one, I began with the intention of completing a dissertation, but my chairs helped me to see that my topic served better to apply research to provide a solution to a problem rather than attempt to contribute new knowledge to an already highly researched area. The project deliverable was designed to improve academic advising at the community college, which may increase retention and graduation rates among nursing students. As such, I am genuinely looking forward to sharing the policy recommendation for the

professional development training with the academic advisors of the institution's Department of Nursing.

### **Leadership and Change**

As a result of this project study, I have improved upon my skills as an educational leader. I learned how to more effectively use data and resources to determine how improvements and better decisions can be made. I see more clearly the importance of establishing and communicating a vision and plan for accomplishing goals and objectives. I learned that leaders are not expected to make decisions and take actions alone, and that support is available no matter what task needs to be accomplished. As a leader, I will be more open-minded to new perspectives and take a collaborative approach to all my decision-making based on what I learned from conducting this research.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

Through professional development, academic advisors can increase their skills and capabilities which may lead to professional and personal growth for the advisors and added value in terms of student learning and persistence at the institutions of higher education they serve. Research on appropriate means of providing professional development training to academic advisors will likely continue in efforts to continuously increase this value. However, an increasing number of community colleges and other higher education institutions may realize the benefits of training their academic advisors using the appreciative advising approach that was recommended for the professional development training for this project. As students continue to enroll in the nursing degree program at the local community college, the need for effective academic advising that will promote persistence and academic success continues as well. Consequently, the

findings of this study and the resulting project deliverable will continue to be relevant to academic advising at the local community college.

### **Implications, Applications and Directions for Future Research**

Positive social change may result from this project study as academic advisors use the appreciative advising techniques to develop stronger relationships with their peers and their students which will improve social conditions at the college and will extend to the community. The institution could choose to adopt the appreciative advising approach and make the professional development training a continuous process for preparing academic advisors to meet the needs of their students most effectively. Institutional researchers should look for ways to continuously improve the professional development training that was proposed as this may further improve retention and graduation rates at the community college.

The establishment of policy is important, but it must be coupled with effective implementation to yield change. Therefore, it may be beneficial to first explore what measures have been taken to ensure the fidelity of implementing the policy changes recommended by the initial study. Once fidelity is established, a study can be conducted to determine the efficacy of those changes on student retention. Further research might entail a follow-up study of academic advisors' and students' perceptions of the efficacy of advising and its relationship to student persistence after the appreciative advising model has been in place for an extended period of time.

### **Conclusion**

The project study provided the opportunity to investigate perceptions of the influence of academic advising on the retention of first- and second-year nursing students

and to create a project deliverable that could serve as a solution to the problem of student attrition in the community college nursing program. The knowledge and experience gained from conducting the study goes beyond the recommendation for a professional development training process that could be put into practice at the local community college and other institutions of higher learning.

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Appendix A: The Project

**Policy Recommendation for Implementing  
Appreciative Advising Professional Development Training  
for Academic Advisors**

by

Shelia Holmes Carter

## Executive Summary

Nursing student retention continues to be a challenge at many colleges and universities (Kubec, 2017). Although a nursing shortage already exists, there is a projected need for even more nurses throughout the United States (Farley, 2017). Many community colleges prepare students to obtain certification and licensure as registered nurses directly upon completion of the institutions' two-year nursing degree programs which equips the graduated students for immediate employment in the nursing field. However, this does not amply reduce the nursing shortage due to the high attrition rates that these community colleges experience among first- and second-year nursing students (Kubec, 2017). Academic advising is one of several factors that have been found to significantly influence student retention in nursing degree programs and community colleges (Caballero, 2020). Because it has such a strong impact on student success, efforts have continuously been made to improve academic advising, evolving and expanding the roles and responsibilities of the academic advisors in various ways. One useful approach to finding ways to improve academic advising has been to assess students and faculty to determine if they perceive the academic advising system to be effective at meeting the needs of the students and what they believe will make it better (Pennamon, 2018).

A qualitative descriptive study was conducted at a community college located in the Southeastern region of the United States to understand nursing students' and nursing faculty academic advisors' perceptions of the role of academic advising in students' persistence and the experiences that helped students continue to complete their degree. The data that were gathered from the participants and analyzed during the study showed

that both groups of participants believed that the academic advisor-student relationship has a compelling impact on nursing student retention. These findings were in accord with the literature that was reviewed in regard to this issue. The review of literature identified various approaches that could be used to improve academic advising. Appreciative advising, in particular, was shown to be a student-centered approach to academic advising that emphasizes the building of emotionally beneficial relationships that enable students to recognize their strengths that can lead to their success (Read et al., 2017). Based on findings from the study of the local community college, and in response to the Department of Nursing chair's desire to see retention rates increase at the institution, I am making the recommendation for implementation of a professional development training using the appreciative advising model to equip academic advisors with effective strategies to provide enhanced advising services. This policy paper describes how academic advisors who become trained to follow the appreciative advising model can empower their advisees to interconnect with their academic community, identify useful strategies to surmount obstacles, and use effective strategies to obtain success, which will intensely increase the likelihood of the students persisting to graduation (Bloom et al., 2008). This policy recommendation addresses the concerns of both the nursing students and the academic advisors who participated in the study.

### **Persistence Among First- and Second-Year Nursing Students**

Student retention has been an enduring issue at colleges and universities across the United States for many years. This is especially applicable to first- and second-year nursing students, according to Hanson (2021), who reported that 40% of undergraduate students drop out of college before completing a degree program, and 75% of those who drop out are college freshmen. Attrition rates are highest at community colleges, compared to 4-year institutions, irrespective of which program of study the students are enrolled in (Hanson, 2021). However, retention in the nursing degree programs at colleges and universities throughout the country is of immediate concern because a sizeable increase in the number of nurses is needed to address the current and forthcoming healthcare demands (Farley, 2017). More needs to be done if those demands are going to come closer to being met.

#### **Low Retention Rates Among Students in the Nursing Degree Program at the Local Community College**

The demand for nurses to meet the growing health care needs of the population in the United States transcends the number of nurses who are currently employed and who are expected to become certified to practice nursing after completing degree programs in the near future. This is due, in part, to the high attrition rates experienced in nursing programs and community colleges throughout the nation. The most recently reported attrition rate for students enrolled in associate degree nursing programs throughout the United States was 47% (Ridley, 2019). There is added evidence indicating that attrition rates are higher among minority nursing students and non-traditional nursing students. At this local community college, at least 32% are non-traditional students and over 62% are

minority students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The attrition rates at this institution correspondingly exceeded the national rate during both the fall 2017 term (over 50%) and the Spring 2018 term (50%), as reported by the chair of the Department of Nursing. This makes it crucial to implement new ways to improve nursing student retention at the local community college.

### **Need for Policy to Implement Professional Development Training**

Policymakers and administrative leaders are responsible for ensuring that educators engage in continuous professional development to stay prepared to do what is necessary to increase student achievement. Results from the study that led to this recommendation show that the academic advisor is one of the most significant resources for making sure students are academically successful. The faculty advisors employed at this local community college serve in the capacity of professors who, in addition to advising students, instruct students and assist with conducting research and developing curricula. It has been well established at colleges and universities throughout the United States that professional development is vital to the support of these roles, so continuous efforts are made to remove barriers and provide opportunities for professional growth in these particular areas (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018). Like those at most other institutions of higher learning, faculty at the local community college participate in activities that provide enrichment in these areas on a continuous basis, and this is done in partial fulfillment of the institution's policy. However, a similar level of effort toward professional development for their role as academic advisor has yet to be made through any formal policy implementation. In consideration of the evidence presented from the study that indicates effective academic advising positively impacts student persistence,

the lack of student persistence at the local community college, and the expressed need for the academic advising services at this institution to evolve, this imposes the need to put into effect a continuous professional development program for their role as academic advisors to raise their performance.

### **Importance of Professional Development**

There is disagreement among college teachers as to what professional development is and how it should be offered to faculty. According to Haras (2018), senior director of the California State University, Los Angeles Center for Effective Teaching and Learning and teaching and learning adviser for the American Council on Education, some contend it is focused more on research and delivery of information than on teaching and enabling college teachers to learn and make improvements to their professional practice. Haras (2018) also mentioned that professional development is not an expectation or an obligation for college instructors who are already considered experts in this field. However, professional development for teachers in higher education has proven to be an effective professional practice because college instructors who recurrently participate in programs aimed at developing their teaching skills become increasingly effective instructors which improves the likelihoods of their students being successful (Haras, 2018).

Parallel studies were conducted by two distinct institutions of higher education, Carleton College in Minnesota and Washington State University, to determine how professional development affects student learning when college instructors seek to become better teachers. Condon et al. (2016) reported similar outcomes for the two schools resulting from these studies. Relevant findings indicated that faculty with more



extensive professional development experiences showed larger changes in their teaching than those who slightly participated in professional development, college instructors who were self-directed or self-motivated to improve their teaching through professional development showed larger changes than those who were motivated by external pressures, and faculty who had not participated in formal professional development profited from their colleagues' professional development. Participants in these studies made changes to their teaching practices that were evidenced in portfolio reviews of their syllabi and other course materials. As a consequence, their students showed improvement as ratings on their assignments and papers were consistently higher (Condon et al., 2016).

### **Why Use the Appreciative Advising Model?**

Jennifer Bloom, Director of Student Affairs at University of South Carolina, and Bryant Hutson, Director of Student Academic Services at University of North Carolina, designed the appreciative advising paradigm in 2002 by building on the concept of organizational development of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). According to Cooperrider et al. (2008), the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry is the supposition that all organizations have an element that is effective. These kinds of strengths can be the beginning of positive transformation. Bloom et al. (2008) applied this concept to academic guidance and converted the Appreciative Inquiry stages of change to the following: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't settle. The goal is to encourage advisees to engage by emphasizing their strengths (Bloom et al., 2008; Hutson et al., 2014). Appreciative advising enables advisees to view their problems as opportunities rather than obstacles; the method inspires them to become innovators (Bloom et al., 2013).

The six phases have been applied to academic advising in a nursing program with positive findings (Read et al., 2017). The Disarm phase of the appreciative advising paradigm consists of the advisor presenting a safe, welcoming atmosphere for advisees, cognizant of the significance of the first impression (Holton, 2017). During the Discover phase, the advisor guides advisees on the path to finding themselves, by recognizing their strengths and desires. During the Dream phase, the advisor assists advisees to create a vision of their life goals, including professional goals. The Design phase follows as the advisor helps the advisee develop tangible, attainable goals. During the Deliver phase the advisee executes plans with the support and encouragement of the advisor. Finally, during the Don't Settle phase, the advisor encourages the advisees not to give up on their goals but rather to expect more. Although these six separate phases seem to follow a logical progression, it is not uncommon to switch back and forth among the phases. According to Bloom et al. (2008), it is necessary to be flexible throughout the movement through the phases.

According to the appreciative advising approach, academic advisors need to do more than traditionally expected in a prescriptive advising paradigm. They need to be innovative. By challenging advisees to aim higher and asking insightful questions, they can develop a caring relationship while helping their advisees to grow. Academic Advisors empower their advisees to recognize their own valuable qualities that they contribute to the academic community and to comprehend the way they can ally their own hopes and dreams with the mission of their school (Bloom et al., 2013).

In the process, appreciative advising increases self-confidence, inspiring the advisee by means of "Socratic dialogue" (Truschel, 2015, p. 62). In this way, it supplies

a structure for enhancing cooperative advisor-advisee communications intended to stimulate and produce desired achievements for the advisee, infused with a positive spirit and beneficial opportunities (Read et al., 2017). In general, the best advising approach encompasses engagement, discussion, and encouragement of advisees, in particular, engaging them in thoughtful analysis of their goals, attention to their individual educational aims and helping them to comprehend their future role in the broader community (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2010).

The emotional component of appreciative advising is likely paramount because it directly affects the motivation of advisees (Holton, 2017). Advisees' emotional experiences affect their feelings of being part of a community, their feelings of competence, goal setting, and striving to succeed. According to this model, advisors aim to cultivate partnerships with their advisees, produce paths to success, and supply personal schedules with tools for individual growth (Hutson, 2010). Increasing the motivation of students increases the likelihood that they will persevere and accomplish their goals (Hutson, 2010). Similar to the expressed desires of the nursing students in the present study, research findings indicated that students want to feel their advisors care about them and can spend time and effort to assist them in achieving their individual and professional goals (Holton, 2017).

Moreover, the appreciative advising model can be combined with other approaches. For example, Opsahl et al. (2018) outlined the application of a virtual coaching program employing appreciative advising and emotional intelligence as a combined teaching approach to increase the educational success for students at a university in the U.S. Midwest. These nursing students expressed satisfaction with the

novel approaches of appreciative advising and emotional intelligence. Their rates of passing the NCLEX-RN licensure exam increased significantly following the joint application of online coaching and academic supports.

Due to the fact that communication is the primary method of advising students, appreciative advising emphasizes particular kinds of verbal and nonverbal methods (Bloom et al., 2013;). For example, the following advice may be given to the advisor for the Disarm phase of the process:

- Welcome students individually
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication, such as gestures; be sure to smile; make eye contact; focus on your advisee.
- Be aware of your verbal communication, address advisees by name; make sure the advisee knows your name; employ inclusive pronouns, such as, “Let’s consider this together,” “We can find the answer to this.” Also, engage in small talk; provide feedback to students, such as, “That’s wonderful!” and “You are making great progress” or “You’ve had some interesting experiences.” In turn, request student feedback. For example, ask, “Am I going too quickly?” “Can I help you with that?” “Do you have any questions?” (Adapted from Bloom et al., 2008).

These kinds of verbal and non-verbal methods would address the needs expressed by several of the nursing students at this community college.

Nursing students believed that their advisors supported them more and were more devoted to them than in prior academic programs after experiencing application of the

appreciative advising model (Read et al., 2017). The academic advisors indicated that they were helped by the model, expressing empowerment to achieve their aspiration of facilitating advisee success by using creative and proactive methods. They also felt they achieved deeper empathy whereby they were able to appreciate advisees' points of view, strengths, and challenges (p. 84; Holton, 2017). After thorough review of appreciative advising, this appears to be the best model apply to the training of the academic advisors who were studied for this project.

### **Alternative Solutions to Addressing Nursing Student Persistence at Community Colleges**

Martinez and Elue (2020) recommended including academic advisors on curriculum review committees in order to draw from their knowledge and experience to help review and make recommendations for program and course modifications. At some institutions, academic advisors are not included in the decision-making process unless issues directly concerning academic advising need to be addressed. However, when they are conferred with on many other issues, such as adding or eliminating prerequisites or making other changes in course requirements, they often contribute effectually to the resolutions that are made. Martinez and Elue (2020) suggested that including the academic advisors on the curriculum review committee would boost collaboration and communication among academic advisors and faculty and would ensure that academic advisors stay abreast of curriculum changes for which they are responsible for communicating to their students.

### **Other Professional Development Alternatives**

Haras (2018) recommended integrating professional development with authentic professional learning. She identified techniques that can be undertaken to support the augmentation of professional development in the way that she suggests. As a start, she proposes that college instructors put into practice repeated exercises and actual application as they are learning in the place where they are accustomed to teaching. Haras also mentioned scaffolded faculty development as an effective approach to achieving authentic professional learning and provided examples, which include the following:

### ***Andragogic Model***

A group of 25 college instructors unite during each semester at California State University, Los Angeles, Center for Effective Teaching and Learning to serve as peer mentors for one another. The instructors follow repeating patterns of observation, critique, practice, and reflections while recording themselves in the classroom. They use opportunities to debrief one another and to reflect and act on what they learn in the process to make improvements to their teaching skills (Haras, 2018).

### ***Blended Professional Learning Program Model***

Every 2 weeks, instructors participate in a series of interactive online workshops that are offered synchronously through the Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning Transforming STEM Teaching Faculty Learning Program. The workshops, along with reflective discussions shared among participants in the program, help the faculty to change their teaching as they gain greater understanding of how to facilitate and support learning (Haras, 2018).

### ***Mentoring Network Model***

During a semester at the University of Georgia, their Center for Teaching and Learning established faculty learning communities where college instructors observe each other in the classroom and practice their teaching collectively. Each member in the faculty learning community receives two classroom observations. One is performed by an assistant director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the other one is performed by a peer (Haras, 2018).

### ***Clinical Teaching Program Model***

College instructors in the Stanford Faculty Development Center for Medical Teachers' Clinical Teaching Program participate in a training program for the duration of one month. During this time the instructors practice teaching and develop leadership skills by delivering a series of seminars to colleagues and residents (Haras, 2018).

### **Alternatives to the Appreciative Advising Model**

Two alternative types of academic advising identified in research as being commonly used in colleges and universities were prescriptive advising and developmental advising. Crookston (2009) used several terms (initiative, control, responsibility, relationship, etc.) to contrast these two approaches. In doing so, he demonstrated how differently each would address the problem of student persistence. Several other advising approaches were identified that could effectively address the problem of student retention as well. These included strengths-based advising, proactive advising, coaching, group advising, and peer advising.

### ***Prescriptive Advising***

In prescriptive advising, the academic advisor normally took the initiative on fulfilling the requirements but left the rest up to the student. The academic advisor

prescribed a regimen for the student to follow, and the student relied on what the advisor prescribed without any involvement in decision making. The academic advisor also maintained control and was fully responsible for guiding the student through the curriculum. When this approach was used, a low level of trust was established between the student and the academic advisor (Crookston, 2009). Many researchers viewed prescriptive advising as a negative and outdated approach (see Kelly, 2018). However, advantages to this approach had been noted, specifically, several activities required of academic advisors when using the prescriptive advising approach are highly rated by most students. These included explanation of registration procedures, discussion of course selection, planning courses of study, and explanation of graduation requirements. Students who had not been exposed to other types of advising, namely racial and ethnic minority students, expected academic advisors to be directive, perceiving this as competence and leading them to be more responsible for their own actions (Crookston, 2009). Institutions where this student population is prevalent may still benefit to some degree from prescriptive advising.

### ***Developmental Advising***

Unlike prescriptive advising which focused on students' limitations, developmental advising focused on students' potentials. Students fulfilled more active roles in and had more control of and responsibility for what they gained from their college experiences (Crookston, 2009). The objectives of professional development training for developmental advising were to facilitate the conception of better relationships between colleagues, to enhance the ability of academic advisors to function in a complex organizational structure, to ensure they received what are considered the



essential tools of academic advising, to introduce them to the theories of student development, to help the academic advisors become familiarized with the necessary procedures for counselling students (while giving them the opportunity to practice those procedures under supervision prior to working with the students), and to ensure the advisors became acquainted with the resources being offered by their respective institutions (Crookston, 2009). Academic advisors who received professional development advising began to view their students in individual contexts, allowing them to develop relationships with the students and communicate with them about career goals, co-curricular activities, and other concerns in addition to their academics (McDonald, 2019). The developmental advising training proved useful in enabling academic advisors to consider the personal needs and well-being of students in conjunction with the curriculum so that they more productively aided students in setting realistic educational and personal goals and in persisting to graduation.

### ***Strengths-Based Training***

As opposed to viewing educational and personal goals from a perspective of failure prevention and a survival mentality, strengths-based training focused attention on success promotion and thriving. Using this approach, academic advisors identified and affirmed students' talents, increased students' awareness of their strengths, aided students in visualizing their futures, assisted students with planning the steps to reach the goals they envisioned, and enabled students to apply their strengths to any challenges they encountered (Kelly, 2018). The strengths-based advising approach was shown to facilitate better advising relationships that supported students' engagement as well as to increase students' levels of confidence and self-awareness while augmenting academic

advisors' professional development (Kelly, 2018). Retention and graduation rates for first-year students who experienced strengths-based advising were significantly higher compared to those rates of students who did not experience this type of advising (Soria et al., 2017).

### ***Proactive Advising***

When using the proactive advising approach, academic advisors made efforts to reach out to students as an onset to intervention before the students seek their assistance (Kelly, 2018). This method was also referred to as *intrusive advising*. Similar to the developmental advising model, this approach helped students to take responsibility for their educational pursuits and plan their career and life goals. However, students were targeted by the advisors who initiated the advising sessions during a student's first year of undergraduate studies, during registration for new sessions, when students were close to graduating, and during other critical periods. Although some students viewed proactive advising as being invasive, some students who have benefited from the assistance of academic advisors would not have sought advising on their own (Vander Schee, 2007). The proactive approach proved to enhance academic achievement for these students and many others who were at-risk and/or needing assistance. Grades were improved among students and an increasing number of first-year students enrolled in 15 or more credits per semester, which increased their chances of graduating in a timely manner (Patel, 2019).

### ***Coaching***

Coaching as an advising approach shifted personal responsibility and accountability to the student. The role of the academic advisor was to help the student create an action plan that would take the student where they desired to go (Kelly, 2018).

As coaches, academic advisors were expected to be empathetic and proactive. The steps in the coaching as advising approach were similar to those followed in the appreciative advising approach. These included building relationships, assessing student needs, providing frequent feedback, planning, implementing the plan, and evaluating and following up after implementation (Kelly, 2018). McClellan and Moser (2012) suggested that this approach also proved to be very effective. Academic advisors with professional development in coaching students have successfully reinforced team building efforts, increased self-awareness, heightened their performance, and improved interpersonal skills and relationships with students and peers (McClellan & Moser, 2012).

### ***Group Advising and Peer Advising***

The remaining two approaches that were identified as alternatives for the project were group advising and peer advising. These enabled students from different backgrounds and cultures to interact and connect with one another while giving and/or receiving insight regarding academic and personal goals and plans (Kelly, 2018). Group advising was more effective when there was information that needed to be shared with a large number of students (Kelly, 2018). Group advising was a student-centered approach that promoted active engagement from students; it was also an extension of teaching where the academic advisors facilitated the process. Peer advising involved students advising other students (Kelly, 2018). Thus, peer advisors were not professional advisors and were limited in responsibilities toward advising other students. Like professional academic advisors who familiarized themselves with different resources that were available to students to be able to make referrals, peer advisors were good sources for referrals to other resources who were qualified to assist the students appropriately (Kelly,

2018). Peer advising improved students' problem-solving, leadership, and communication skills as they contributed to one another's educational and personal growth (Kelly, 2018). As Kelly (2018) suggested, academic advisors should be able to use various advising approaches and styles to accommodate different student populations as well as the different situations that students experienced. Academic advisors should be flexible, keeping in mind that students have different learning needs and learning styles (Kelly, 2018).

### **Recommendation for Implementing Professional Development Training**

To encourage persistence and improve the retention rate among first- and second-year nursing students at the local community college, a professional development training built upon the appreciative advising model should be implemented for the academic advisors who service nursing students enrolled at this institution. Keeping in mind the expectations of the academic advisors and nursing student participants that led to the formation of this policy recommendation, various learning materials, activities, tools and resources can be integrated into a professional development/training curriculum that supports the appreciative advising model (Opsahl et al., 2018). Following is an agenda of activities that was drawn from the resources found regarding appreciative advising for the formation of the professional development training for the academic advisors at the local community college.

## Appreciative Advising Professional Development Training Agenda

<b>Week 1:</b>	Session 1: Introduction to 5-Week Training Program Myth Busting: 5 Myths about Appreciative Advising Participants' Input: What Do You Expect to Gain from Training
	Session 2: Set Up Teams Group Activity: Challenges & Strategies for Academic Advising
<b>Week 2:</b>	Session 3: Meet & Greet Practice and Observation Activity Guided Imagery Exercise
	Session 4: Social Identity Circle Activity Appreciative Advising Inventory and Discover Questions
<b>Week 3:</b>	Session 5: Team "Dream" Exercise Appreciative Inquiry Advertisement Exercise Appreciative Advising Dream Questions
	Session 6: Matching Resources and Services to Directory Listings Activity Appreciative Advising Scenario and Analysis Table Appreciative Advising Design Questions
<b>Week 4:</b>	Session 7: Dos and Don'ts of Appreciative Advising in the Deliver Phase Helping Students Build Self-Efficacy Appreciative Advising Deliver Questions
	Session 8: Role Play Group Exercise – Student & Academic Advisor Roles Appreciative Advising Don't Settle Questions How Can I Help Me – In Order to Help My Student
<b>Week 5:</b>	Session 9: Scenario Advising Nursing Students in Special Circumstances Reflections on Professional Development Training Appreciative Advising Professional Development Opportunities
	Session 10: Review of Appreciative Advising Skills Rubric

The training sessions are set up to span over a period of 5 weeks, during which academic advisors will receive in-depth training on each of the six phases of appreciative advising. The professional development training for academic advisors is designed to provide a total of 30 hours of training to the participants. The academic advisors would meet one day each week. Each meeting would be divided into two sessions that last 3 hours each, and between the two sessions would be a 1-hour lunch break. Using the suggested activities from the agenda, a location on the campus could be reserved for the training. It may prove beneficial to send emails to the participants 3 days prior to the meeting dates each week, reminding them of the upcoming sessions and letting them know what will be covered during those two sessions for the week.

### ***Components of Professional Development/Training Program***

Bloom et al. (2008) provide a guide for understanding how to apply the six phases of appreciative advising, the *Appreciative Advising Revolution Training Workbook: Translating Theory to Practice*. The Workbook provides an overview of each of the six phases of appreciative advising and then breaks them down into individual chapters to demonstrate what academic advisors should learn to do during each phase. The recommended training sessions follow the same outline as the Workbook, with the first one being an introduction to the topics to be covered during the following sessions. Two sessions would take place on the same day and be separated by a lunch break.

### ***Week 1 Training: Sessions 1 and 2***

Suggested handouts for Session 1 and Session 2 include the following:

- The agenda of the scheduled meetings for the 5-week period that provide a sequence of the planned activities and a listing of each topic that is to be covered
- An overview of appreciative advising, which could be drawn from the book, *The Appreciative Advising Revolution* (Bloom et al., 2008).
- 5 Myths About Appreciative Advising, which are included in the book, *Appreciative Advising Approaches: Strategies That Teach Students to Make the Most of College* (Drake, 2013).
- Principles of Appreciative Advising  
([https://oacuho.com/cgi/page.cgi/Presentation\\_Recordings.html](https://oacuho.com/cgi/page.cgi/Presentation_Recordings.html))
- Benefits of Using the Appreciative Advising Approach  
(<https://uwosh.edu/oce/wp-content/uploads/sites/75/2019/02/ASRR-18.pdf>)

Recommended activities for Session 1 and Session 2 include allowing the academic advisors to volunteer to explain what they expect to gain from participating in the professional development training, a myth busting exercise, and a group activity where the participants would assemble into individual groups to confer on their roles and expectations after answering four questions regarding the challenges they face in advising first- and second-year nursing students and the strategies they use to help the students. One of the interviewee suggestions for making academic advising services more effective for students in the nursing program was to initiate professional development through collaboration among peer advisors, so this serves as a first step in the implementation of what Fountain (2021) identified as one of several best practices, which is encouraging the

academic advisors to work in groups to form networks and exchange information. The goals of grouping the advisors into teams in addition to enhancing collaboration are to increase engagement during the training and to create opportunities for them to connect with one another on a regular basis. For the last 30 minutes of Session 2 (and the second sessions that take place during the following meetings) the academic advisors should be given the opportunity to share any thoughts and comments they may have.

### ***Week 2 Training: Session 3 and 4***

Assuming the institution will follow the 5-day training schedule, two of the six phases of appreciative advising would be covered on Day 2, Day 3, and Day 4. During the second week's meeting, the first two phases of appreciative advising, "disarm" and "discover", would be covered. As part of the dream phase of appreciative advising academic advisors are encouraged to be mindful of their verbal and nonverbal communication, so an exercise that would be appropriate for participants to complete during Session 3 would be practicing greeting different types of people who approach them hypothetically with various motives and attitudes, some positive and some negative. A description of an individual would be provided, and an academic advisor would be asked to greet that individual based on what is said. For example, one person may be described as a homeless person who is asking for money to buy food, another person may be the participant's long-lost friend, and a third person may be the participant's supervisor who is upset about an incident that the participant had nothing to do with. Each academic advisor would have the opportunity to greet someone while the others observe their gestures, facial expressions, and verbal expressions. This could be followed by a guided imagery exercise where participants are asked to think back to when they



were first- and second-year students at the colleges they attended or to their first day of employment as instructors at this institution. They would be asked to focus on what they expected, what they experienced, and what led them to continue their studies/teaching.

Suggested handouts for Session 4 include the following:

- Social Identity Wheel Worksheet (<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/sample-activities/social-identity-wheel/> )
- Appreciative Advising Inventory
- Appreciative Advising Questions for the “Discover” Phase from the book, *Faculty development and student learning: Assessing the connections* (Condon et al., 2016)

The Social Identity Wheel Worksheet could be used in a group activity that would help the academic advisors to consider how they perceive themselves in terms of various social identities (University of Michigan College of Literature Science and the Arts, 2021). The participants would review the social identities that are listed on the wheel and categorize them according to which are most important to them in their self-perception and which are most important in others’ perceptions of them. As a group, the participants would answer the listed questions, which will help them to know each other better and better understand the influence that these identities have in society. This exercise has been used successfully by small and large groups to encourage inclusion. It would help to build community among the academic advisors and to encourage empathy, one of the perceived roles of effective academic advisors (“be empathetic”) based on interviews with nursing students.

The Appreciative Advising Inventory was developed by academic advisors as part of the Appreciative Advising Revolution to help students begin the Discover phase of appreciative advising. It includes a chart that breaks down the inventory questions into subcategories to show how the questions are constructed and to indicate whether each question is contingent on the students' beliefs and attitudes (internal) or on the students' (external) environment and relationships (Bloom et al., 2008). The list of appreciative advising questions for Session 4 includes questions that were also developed by academic advisors for the Discover phase. Either or both of these can be used by the academic advisors to transition students from the problem-focused Disarm phase to the Discover phase where students highlight their strengths, assets, and successes in an effort to show their potential for success (Bloom, et al., 2008).

### ***Week 3 Training: Session 5 and 6***

The third week's meeting would cover the next two phases, "dream" and "design." The tenet behind this training is to prepare academic advisors to direct their students through each academic advising phase by practicing these phases themselves. For the Dream phase, this involves reflecting on their own lives, career goals, hopes, and dreams. Like the Discover phase, appreciative inquiry for this phase requires asking a lot of questions about what already exists and getting answers about where participants desire to see themselves in the future (Olsen, 2009). To begin Session 5, it is recommended that the participating academic advisors perform a *Team "Dream" Exercise* with members of their team. This exercise was proposed by Chowdhury (2020), to be an effectual appreciative inquiry exercise that enables participants to practice what they preach. Next the participants would complete an *Appreciative Inquiry Advertisement*

*Exercise.* They would be provided paper and pencils and asked to sketch an advertisement that depicts an aspect of a dream they desire to achieve. The sketch will include words, pictures, and graphics. Each participant would present their advertisement one-by-one as they are scanned by the facilitator and projected on a screen so that every participant would be able to see them. They would be invited to provide responses and feedback to one another that will advise them on how they might achieve their dreams in real life (Chowdhury, 2020). During Session 5, the facilitator could go over a handout listing the appreciative advising questions for the Dream phase (Condon et al., 2016).

Session 6 would cover the Design phase, during which the academic advisors would be given a handout outlining the resources that are available at their institution to help the students achieve success in their academic and career pursuits. The outline also lists the various services that students can obtain from the resources. At the meeting, the participants would also receive directory information that shows who to contact and how to reach them by phone and email. Members of each group would work together to match the resources and services with the appropriate listing from the Directory. This would help the academic advisors to familiarize themselves and/or become reacquainted with everything that is available so that they make effective referrals to their students. The participants would be challenged to identify and add people and agencies in the institution's local community to the list of resources and services that may further assist their students at some point after the training. This exercise would be applied during the Design phase because this is the phase where students will likely need to make any adjustments to their plans in order to accomplish their goals. The resources and services will help the students to make these adjustments (Propst-Cuevas et al., 2011). Upon

completion of this exercise, the facilitator will go over a second handout with the participants. The *Appreciative Advising Scenario and Analysis Table* can be used to demonstrate how an advisor walks a student through the phases and helps the student plan the achievement of his/her goals. It will illustrate how the appreciative advising framework can be used in daily advising with students. This activity will aid the academic advisors in the process of co-creating plans with their students as the students share what they have discovered they need to do to accomplish their dreams. It will also reiterate the importance of allowing the students to create their own plans for accomplishing their dreams so that it is congruent with what they desire for themselves instead of what the academic advisor thinks is best (Drake, 2013). Following this activity, the participants will review the list of appreciative advising questions developed for the Design phase.

#### ***Week 4: Sessions 7 and 8***

The last two phases, “deliver” and “don’t settle”, would be covered during the fourth week’s meeting according to the agenda. The training during Session 7 would prepare participants to actively support their students during the Deliver phase of appreciative advising. This is the phase where the student executes the plan that has been co-created with the academic advisor. To encourage participants to continue to work with their students beyond the development of the plan, I suggest giving the participants a list of *Dos and Don’ts for Appreciative Advising in the Deliver Phase* (Chowdhury, 2020; Forche, 2019; George, 2011; Olsen, 2009; and Propst-Cuevas et al., 2011). This list was developed using various sources who advise academic leaders to continue to work with their students because they have a responsibility to the students to do so even after the

plan is finished (George, 2011). Another handout during this session illustrates how and why they should help their students to build self-efficacy. This document is an excerpt from presentations by the Regional Educational Laboratory Program of the Institute of Education Sciences. The presentations were published to provide specific examples and detailed explanations of strategies that strengthen students' self-efficacy for ongoing learning (Suarez, 2019). A list of questions for the Deliver phase of appreciative advising will be the last handout that the facilitator reviews with the participants for this session.

Session 8 would be initiated with a Role Play Group Exercise where one person will play the student, a second member of the team will play the academic advisor, and the others in each group will serve as observers who will give feedback that supports the advisor and challenges them to strive for excellence. The participants would receive the handout of the Appreciative Advising Questions for the Don't Settle Phase, which may help to guide them through the exercise. After completing the group exercise, the participants would be given a worksheet called *How Can I Help Me –In Order to Help My Students* with four questions they will be asked to answer relative to the Don't Settle phase.

Participants can volunteer to share anything they learned that may also be helpful to others. Olsen (2009) suggests that academic advisors go through the Don't Settle phase themselves in order to gain the optimum level of understanding to best serve their students. The participants are more likely to be able to help their students celebrate their accomplishments and strive for greatness if they acknowledge their own contributions as academic advisors and the differences they have made in their students' lives and make it a continuous effort to strive to contribute more. Training in this session will help participants in these areas.

***Week 5: Sessions 9 and 10***

Session 9 of the last week's meeting would involve scenario analysis for applying this training to advising students enrolled or seeking enrollment in the nursing program and reflection on the training itself. Albright et al. (2012) provide two scenarios concerning foreclosure students (students who have bound themselves to a single choice of major or college program without fully regarding their interests and or strengths and abilities and/or without taking into consideration alternative career options) and nursing programs. These scenarios align with some of the responses given by the first- and second-year nursing students who were interviewed for this study when they were asked why they chose to enroll in the nursing degree program. The scenarios explain what the advisors in each of these cases did to assist the students, and they include suggestions for questions that could be used in the advising process for both cases as well. The participants in this training could be asked to do the following:

- Explain how the steps that each of the academic advisors took in the scenarios relate to the steps of appreciative advising.
- Explain why you agree or disagree with the steps taken by the advisors in these scenarios.
- Add two more questions from the appreciative advising questions lists that you can ask students in each scenario to help direct them to modify their dream, revise its design, and/or deliver it successfully.

Then, using a list of professional development reflection questions published by the Dalhousie University Centre for Learning and Teaching, the participants would reflect on the professional development training they received during the past 4 weeks.

During Session 10, the academic advisors would learn about opportunities to receive additional training for appreciative advising and how they can become certified appreciative advisors. They would also be briefly introduced to other types of academic advising training they might consider. Information about Appreciative Advising Institute, the alternative Appreciative Advising Course, and the guidelines for becoming certified in appreciative advising that are offered by Florida Atlantic University could be discussed with the participants.

### **Conclusion**

As the academic advisors at the local community college receive this training, they should become more prepared to build improved relationships with their students, helping the students achieve academic success and improving retention rates in the school's nursing degree program. In the same way that improvements in teaching skills among instructors of higher education has proven to increase students' performance and chances of succeeding (Gomendio, 2017), augmentation of academic advising services has been confirmed to increase student success and retention rates (Fountain, 2021).

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## Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Nursing Students

Possible preliminary questions to put the students at ease and provide background information as well as ensure their rights as study participants:

- How did you become interested in nursing as a career?
- What interested you in the nursing program at this college?
- Do you have any questions about the informed consent form?

As you know from our previous communications, the topic of this study is nursing students' and nursing student advisors' experiences and perceptions of academic advising at this college. In order to explore the topic I will ask you several questions about your goals and coursework as well as your experiences with academic advising at this school.

1. First, have you met with an academic advisor? If so, tell me about your experience?

If not, why not?

Possible probe: Did anyone suggest you meet with an academic advisor prior to registering for classes or planning your course of study?

Possible probe: How many times have you met with an academic advisor?

2. If you have not yet met with an academic advisor, do you plan to in the future? If so, when? If not, why not?

3. If you have met with an advisor, tell me about your experience.

Possible probes: Do you feel the session answered all your questions? Were you satisfied with the result? If not, why not?

4. If an academic advisor asked you for suggestions on how to conduct a successful session, what would you tell her or him?

5. Have you ever had a negative experience with academic advising? If so, please explain what happened.
6. Has an academic advisor helped you with personal issues related to your studies or campus life? If so, how did the advisor help you?  
  
If not, would you like this kind of assistance from your academic advisor? In particular, with what issues could the advisor help you?
7. What types of questions do you think an academic advisor could help you with?
8. Do you believe that an academic advisor could help you if you were having difficulty with your grades, balancing work and school scheduling, or meeting school financial requirements? If so, how could the advisor help you?
9. What was the atmosphere in the advising office like when you were there?
10. Do you feel like you were adequately prepared for the nursing program when you enrolled? If not, why not? In what areas do you feel a lack of knowledge?
11. Have you been experiencing any difficulty with your classes? If so, what kinds of problems have you encountered?
12. Have you ever felt like dropping out of school or the nursing program? If so, why? If you contemplated leaving but decided to stay, what changed your mind?  
  
Possible probe: Has your academic advisor helped?
13. Do you plan to continue in the program until you receive your degree? If so, what has encouraged you to stay?
14. When you registered for classes, was your goal to obtain a degree? If yes, why did you feel it was important to obtain this particular degree? If not, what was your reason for enrolling in the nursing program?

15. Did you register for more classes after receiving academic advising? If not, why not?

If so, why do you think you registered for more classes?

Do you have any additional questions or comments you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation.



### Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Nursing Faculty Academic Advisors

Possible preliminary questions to put the advisors at ease and provide background information as well as ensure their rights as study participants:

- How long have you been advising nursing students?
- Why did you decide to become an academic advisor?
- Do you have any questions about the consent form?

As you know from our previous communications, the topic of this study is nursing students' and nursing student advisors' experiences and perceptions of academic advising at this college. In particular, this study concerns how academic advising affects the decision of first and second year students to persist in the nursing program at your school. In order to explore the topic I will ask you several questions about your views regarding academic advising and your experiences advising nursing students at this school.

1. Do you believe that the nursing program supports your requirements in the role of academic advisor at this school?
2. How often and when are nursing students required to see an academic advisor?
3. Is your entire student advising face-to-face in a physical office or is some advising online, via e-mail or phone? If more than one of these modes is used, do you have a preference? Why?
4. Have you received training related to your role as an academic advisor? If so, what did it consist of?
5. Do you have a favorite theory or approach to advising that you follow? If so, which approach and why?

6. Have you ever had a negative experience advising a nursing student? If so, explain what happened.
7. Are there any requirements or practices you believe hinder effective advising of nursing students in your current assignment as an academic advisor? If so, what are they?
8. Do you feel that your student advisees are adequately prepared for the nursing program at this school? If not, in which areas are they underprepared?
9. Do nursing students ever ask for advice regarding non-curricular issues that might affect their studies, such as financial issues, childcare options, and so on? If so, what do they ask about most frequently? Do you think you could help them with these issues?
10. Do you believe that as an academic advisor it is necessary to help nursing students in non-curricular spheres, such as time management, work, locating childcare, or financial aid? If so, how would you do this?
11. Have any of your advisees ever told you they felt like dropping out of the program? If so, did they tell you why and what advice did you give them? Do you know if they dropped out or decided to stay in the program? If they stayed, did they share their reasons with you?
12. Do you believe that the relationship between a student and academic advisor in the nursing program can affect the student's desire to remain in the program?

Do you have any additional questions or comments you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation.