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African American Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising Support Services at a California University

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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MBA, Regis University, 2016

BS, Long Beach University, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Academic advising support services play a significant role in a student's college experience from enrollment to graduation. The various services they offer can be instrumental in student persistence and graduation rates. However, the graduation rates of African American students continue to lag behind other ethnicities at a local university in California. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of African American students with academic advising support services at a California university. Tinto's model of student persistence served as the conceptual framework. The research question focused on the perceptions of five African American students with academic advising support services while attending the study site. The data were analyzed using open and axial coding and the application of the NVivo 12 software package. Findings indicated that a sense of belonging, a lack of advisors, advisor training, and comprehensive academic advising were reasons participants were not satisfied with academic advising support services. The findings may promote positive social change by encouraging higher education institutions to provide support programs, additional advisors, enhance advisor-training programs, and provide comprehensive advising opportunities that increase student involvement and contribute to student persistence and graduation rates.

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Dedication

This document does not contain enough room to list all the individuals that have been influential in my life, and instrumental in my journey. Let me start by thanking my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gives me life, wisdom, and knowledge to move forward in my quest for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. My biggest cheerleader and mentor has been my loving husband who continues to cheer and challenge me to reach my highest potential. My son has also been a positive force saying, "Mom you got this." I would be remiss if I did not thank my mother who has always been a rock and a strong presence in my life. Who raised me to always believe that "where there is a will, there is a way and your job is to find that way." I cannot forget my dad, who was a loving and supportive father who made sure his daughter had what she needed to make another step towards her dreams and aspirations. My stepmother, who always stood as a pillar of inspiration and encouragement. All my parents, who only had a partial high school education themselves, made sure that this first-generation college student had a fighting chance against all odds.

I hope that I can in some way be a beacon of light that encourages others to run after their dreams. Additionally, I hope that the light shines on the spirit of my parents, aunts, uncles, and other family members who were denied access to higher education. I hope that through their sacrifice, hard work, and denial of basic rights I can express the heart of their souls in all that I do. And not to forget my friends, a host of mentors, and well-wishers without whom this moment would not be possible.

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Table of Contents

i

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Globally, there is an expanding need for knowledge-based college graduates and a consistent reduction of skill-based jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). *Knowledge based* refers to those individuals who are college graduates versus *skill based*, which refers to those who have acquired a skill through trade school or on-the-job experience. This has created a sense of urgency to make sure the United States increases graduation rates. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) showed California's Blendenburg University's (BU, a pseudonym) graduation rates for African American students was 60%, while Asian, White, and Hispanic students had significantly higher rates at 80%, 77%, and 70%, respectively. It is concerning that these trends indicate African American college students are not graduating like their peers of other ethnicities. African American students have graduation rates noticeably lower than other ethnicities and it is important to determine why this disparity exists and what institutional resources can help increase graduation rates.

Researchers have frequently identified academic advisement as a focal point of increase retention and persistence on college campuses (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 60, as cited in Braun & Zolfagharian, 2016; Mu & Fornacht, 2019). In spite of the accolades for the value of academic advising, it is unclear if the African American student population is benefiting from the services, but they are often dissatisfied more than their peers with their perceptions of academic advising support services. This study contributes to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of best practices for academic advising and how they might benefit the African American student population at BU, located in

California. The literature review offered very limited research on African American students and their satisfaction with academic advising. Cook (2009) stated that academic advising has existed in some form in higher education since the 1600s and became professionalized in 1979 with the creation of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). Navigating the pathway to graduation is an important aspect of academic advising support services. African American students have often experienced a lack of access to academic professionals and rely heavily on academic advisors who, in their strained work environments, may not be able to accommodate their needs (Lancaster & Yonghong, 2017). Additional research on African American students and their perceptions of their experiences with academic advisors is needed to find out if they are using the services and if they satisfied with the services and how they are being provided.

Academic advising support services can be instrumental in student persistence and graduation through early identification and selection of a major and maintaining a proactive connection to students throughout their academic careers (Spight, 2020). Early selection of a college major can ensure students direct their focus on a prescribed pathway to graduation. Nichols and Schak (2018) concluded that, as the economic workforce becomes more global and requirements for a knowledge-based society continues to escalate, colleges and universities must ensure successful outcomes for all students. Academic advisors who are knowledgeable about the offerings and resources of the university can provide effective services for the students who attend. Loucef et al. (2020) postulated that student retention and persistence can be increased through an

interactive process coupled with the students' satisfaction with advising services. Academic advising support services can add value to the student experience and are an important and needed service to help increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

The problem investigated in this study was the disparity in graduation rates for African American students versus other ethnicities who attend BU. It is also important to know that this problem is reflected statewide. Even though California has experienced a small increase in 4-year university graduation rates, a 20% disparity in graduation rates continues to exist between African American students and their White counterparts (The Campaign for Californians, 2021). The findings and recommendations from this study may serve as tools to address retention and graduation issues for institutions related to their African American student populations. Millea et al. (2018) noted that institutions can make purposeful commitments to their students when they are cognizant of the factors that are critical for their success.

The support that students often need to navigate the university and to discover how their career path srelate to their academic programs and coursework is reflective of quality advising programs (Hart-Baldridge, 2020). Quality advising programs help students navigate the university, make connections between their studies and various career paths, and create a sense of belonging or connectedness. Student success can be influenced by these types of quality academic programs which can increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates. In fact, Loucif et al. (2020) supported the idea that the primary focus of academic advising is to ensure students develop and progress to graduation. The advising process requires participation on behalf of the advisor and the

student. It is also imperative that leaders of advising programs recognize that each student is unique and may have varying needs that require different types of interactive contact. For the students who need support services, an academic advising program that lacks quality and effectiveness could adversely affect retention, persistence, and graduation rates. The effectiveness of an academic advisor is directly affected by the students' perceptions and confidence in their abilities and job performance (McConnell, 2018).

Researchers (e.g., Gordon, 2019; Museus, 2021; Perez-Cancino, 2022) have focused on academic advising; however, little is discussed about African American students' satisfaction levels with the services. Lancaster and Yonghong (2017) discovered that academic advisors often lacked programmatic knowledge, resulting in some students' lack of progress. Issues that fall into this category are areas that an institution can and should address with its internal resources. There are several reasons why African American students may have lower graduation rates. However, I focused on academic advising support services and how they can provide additional assistance.

Background

It is not an uncommon practice for colleges and universities to offer academic advising services as part of a suite of student support services aimed at student success. Academic advising has the potential to benefit students with their higher education and graduation goals. Equally, studies support the fact that academic advising positively impacts graduation rates (Tippetts et al., 2020). African American students can experience increased graduation rates when aggressive advising is institutionalized (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Aggressive advising is advisor-driven and involves a more

hands-on approach, which uses frequent in-person meetings and is more mentoring and/or coaching in nature (Mooring, 2016). By and large, the programs offered at BU involve student-initiated contact with the advising support services versus advisor-initiated contact.

Despite the successes, the role of the advisor is often influenced by the needs of the institution versus those of the student (Larson et al., 2018). When asked why the graduation gap exists for African American students, a BU administrator emphasized the importance of academic advising. He also noted how overburdened advisors are with extremely high caseloads that create a disconnect between students and the services they need most (Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Chief Diversity Officer, personal communication, August 29, 2019). A campus-wide student survey of students attending BU revealed African American students' dissatisfaction with the academic advising support services. The dissatisfaction rate signaled the need for a process change and the existence of a gap in what services are offered or how the services are provided to African American students at BU.

Problem Statement

The National Labor Statistics for 2018 showed 31% of African Americans earned a 4-year degree or higher, compared to 63% of Asian workers, and 41% of Caucasian workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). California has the fifth largest African American population in the nation, which equates to almost 2.2 million people. While the number of African Americans who attend college in the state has increased, the graduation rate is 19% lower for African Americans than for White students (The

Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). The problem I explored was the dissatisfaction of African American students with academic advising at the local university.

The problem that I explored was the perceptions of African American students with academic advising support services at BU. The university surveys the student population annually to obtain feedback on their college experience. The feedback from African American students who opted to take the survey at BU expressed a lower satisfaction rate with academic advising support services than their peers from other ethnicities. The lower satisfaction rate for African American students with academic advising support services at the local university may indicate that there are areas that can be improved to increase their satisfaction level. Therefore, further exploration of African American student's perceptions of academic advising support services at the local site was needed to determine how best to serve the African American student population. Additionally, this exploration may offer insight into best practices that may be implemented to increase persistence, retention, and graduation rates for the African American students at BU.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of African American students with academic advising support services at BU. I designed the study to provide a deeper understanding of African American students' academic advisement perceptions and how those perceptions can be improved to better support and increase graduation rates for this population.

Research Question

RQ: What are African American students' perceptions about academic advising support services at BU?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Tinto's (2012, 2017) model of student persistence and the link he made between a student's engagement and their ability to persist to graduation (Nicoletti, 2019). The model of student persistence has been used to better understand the institutional factors that can hinder a student's progress toward graduation (Tinto, 2012, 2017). Tinto's model emphasized a link between a student's ability to engage in the campus community and their ability to persist to graduation. In earlier studies, Tinto focused on academic and social integration as the main aspects of his persistence model (Nicoletti, 2019). Academic advising assists students in their quest to understand the university and the resources it offers and provides information on program requirements and other information to promote graduation. The Tinto model has been used extensively to explore the student's social environment, the concept of institutional fit, and the institution's role in the intentional inclusion of a student into the campus community (French, 2017). In 2017, Tinto's model of student persistence was tested in a case study conducted at a large residential 4-year university. The researchers noted that student engagement tends to be a significant indication of student success and sense of belonging (Knekta & McCartney, 2021). Tinto's thoughts on student engagement, student integration into the campus community, and the student's ability to persist to graduation are components of academic advising support services (French,

2017). In other words, academic advising support services can offer resources that connect students with the campus environment and are instrumental in student success.

African American students are often first-generation, underrepresented students who lack the traditional support of family college graduates, which assist in the assimilation into the campus environment (Daniels et al., 2019). As a result, African American students rely heavily on the university's support services such as advisement services to guide them along the pathway to graduation. Boettcher et al. (2019) suggested that there is a relationship between the university's leadership and the institutional support provided for students and their persistence toward graduation. The leadership of a university displays its support for student services by providing institutional resources.

French (2017) suggested that institutions have a responsibility for the social integration of African American students and should strive to understand how to best acclimate them into the campus community. Tinto's (1997, 2012, 2017) model has also suggested that institutional programs should be focused on the specific needs of underrepresented students to help promote graduation rates. Tinto's model of student persistence was significant to this study as it provided more in-depth knowledge into institutional influences on African American decisions to persist toward graduation.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I focused on the perceptions of African American college students that used academic advising support services at BU. A basic qualitative methodology was used in this study. Semistructured interviews of African American students that attended BU comprised the sources of the data used to explore common themes that emerged

during the interviews. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that careful attention should be given to the themes that emerge during the participant interviews and they should be well documented as they often become a vital source of discovery material to be used in the study. The interview transcripts and my field notes helped to provide greater credibility and allowed for an unbiased approach to the presentation of the material. It was also important to be reflexive during the data collection and analysis. Harding (2018) found that exercising reflexivity during the research process provided information on the researcher's decisions that occurred and how those decisions may have impacted the research. This research strategy provided a means to gather information related to academic advising services at BU and the perceptions of the African American students who have used these services.

Definitions

The following common definitions were included for the reader to have a better understanding of the content.

Academic Advisor: Employees of colleges and universities who assist students in selecting the proper courses that lead to graduation. Advisors often assist students in learning about other aspects of the campus life experience such as career pathways, internships, roommates, et cetera (Lee, 2018).

Achievement Gap: The gap that exists between those that are persisting to graduation and achieving academic degrees and those that are not. It often refers to those who are from underrepresented minorities who have systemically been denied access to education. Additionally, it represents the academic performance between two races and

also the lack of social economic constructs and quality of life that is not available to lower-performing individuals (Toldson, 2018).

Persistence: This term is used to describe a student's continued progress in terms of course completion that will eventually lead to a degree in their chosen program of study. Success in the classroom is the key to the student staying on course to complete a program as prescribed in the curriculum (Miller et al., 2019).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in conducting this study. The first assumption was that all participants honestly answered the interview questions. Another assumption was that all the participants engaged with academic advising in similar ways. There was also an assumption that interviewing the students using a qualitative approach would reveal common themes inherent to African American students. Additionally, I assumed that participation in the study was voluntary with no underlying motives for students thar participated in the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study was focused on African American students' who currently attended and those who recently attended BUand their perceptions of academic advising support services. The selection of students who had completed at least 24 units which was the minimum amount to be considered a full-time student for 1 year of college coursework. The 1 year of coursework criterion was set to ensure participants had an opportunity to interact with academic advising personnel and would be able to provide meaningful impressions and reflections of those interactions. Due to the limited

number of African American students who attend or have attended BU, the coursework criterion was the only additional criterion used for participant selection besides ethnicity.

California has the fifth largest African American population in the United States and is home to many colleges and universities (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). However, this study was limited to a small group of African American college students who have been in attendance at BU located in California. The parameters based on the delimitations used in this study helped to clarify the scope of the research and to amplify the focus (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A better understanding of academic advising support services at BU and how their interactions with African American students may positively increase the persistence and graduation rates for these students.

Limitations

The decision to use a basic qualitative research method had its limitations related to smaller sample sizes (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One limitation of this study was that the overall population of African American students at the local institution was relatively small. Comparatively, the university has one of the highest graduation rates for African American students in the state. The rich detailed descriptions of the perceptions of African American college students who have attended BU provided by the participants helped to provide validity and dependability to the study (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Academic advising serves as a connection for students to the greater campus, especially for those who may not have relationships that provide this type of information. There is also not a lot of research on African American college students and their perceptions of academic advising support services.

Another limitation could have been my roles as a university administrator and a mentor for African American college students. These roles may have interfered with my ability to be objective as I interpreted the perceptions of African American college students with academic advising support services. In an effort to reduce bias, my only affiliation with the study site was as a researcher. Additionally, I used journaling and member checking to decrease bias and ensure the students' perceptions of academic advising support services were accurately captured during the interview process. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that reflective journaling is the process of keeping a written journal of thoughts during the research process, and it helps to deepen the researcher's understanding of their thoughts and feeling throughout the process. As a result, I journaled and kept notes throughout the interview process to capture the participants' perceptions as they responded to the interview questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that having the participants review their transcripts for accuracy helps to add validity to the research process. Therefore, after each interview was transcribed, the participant was sent the final version to review and make revisions as they deemed necessary.

There was also a limitation related to the geographical location of the local site, which may not be representative of all African American university students nationwide. By limiting a study to one geographical area, the generalizability of the results may have been altered and could affect how other institutions implement programmatic strategies (Yin, 2017). Lastly, I may have had preconceived ideas due to cultural familiarity with the African American heritage. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained how important it

is to acknowledge how the researchers' interpretation of the findings can be influenced by their cultural experiences. However, despite the limitations, transferability was accomplished when the themes were captured during the data analysis process.

Significance

BU has some of the highest graduation rates for African American college students, yet a significant graduation gap exists between African Americans and Asian (20%), White (17%), and Hispanic (10%) students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). I addressed a local problem and focused on the dissatisfaction of African Americans students with academic advising and their decisions to persist toward graduation. Perkins-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018) posited that academic advising is a known pathway to help create relationships between academic advisors and students, and these relationships have been identified as a positive contributor to student success. A student's ability to complete their chosen academic program and persist to graduation is an indication that they have successfully completed the college experience.

Students' perceptions of their interactions with academic advising support services can serve to inform BU's leadership about the programmatic and operational support needs for African American students. The institutional leaders include those administrators who are responsible for academic advising support services or other educational leaders who can influence these services. Advisors can effectively empower this population of students and researchers have shown a connection between effective academic advising and student success rates (Lee, 2018). Transformation of academic advising support services within institutions could affect student success for African

Americans. Soria et al. (2019) suggested that additional research on strength-based tools could be used by advisors to further the transformation of advisement services to encourage students' confidence, engagement, and successful graduation.

There are positive social change implications to supporting African American students' persistence to graduation from college. The study provides some background on advising and the perceptions of African American students at BU. Understanding the goal of advising and the perceptions of African American students at BU can provide greater insight into what types of support are needed for the African American student population at BU. This study may inform academic advisors at BU on what support services have the greatest positive impact to assist African America students academically and towards graduation from their respective programs. African Americans who do not earn an undergraduate college degree are more likely to be unemployed and become dependent on publicly supported programs, which can diminish state healthcare resources, lower tax revenues and negatively impact society (Chen et al., 2017). Likewise, this study may help to further support African American students at BU and positively impact their persistence and graduation rates. Therefore, it is important to understand the supports African Americans need to be successful contributors to society.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the problem to be explored, which was the dissatisfaction of African American students with academic advising at the study site. Additionally, Chapter 1 included the background of academic advising in higher education. Although African American college student enrollment and attendance has increased throughout

the United States, the graduation rate remains the lowest compared to other student populations (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019, 2021). Moreover, African American students' dissatisfaction with academic advising is the highest of all their peers at BU. The purpose of this study was to explore African American students' perceptions about academic advising support services at BU. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review and analysis of relevant academic and professional literature to identify what scholars know about academic advising and what future research is needed to address academic advising services to support African American university students at the study site.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the perceptions of African American students with academic advisement at a local California university. A deeper understanding of how academic advising support services can positively impact the persistence and retention rates for African American students is needed. A positive impact in this area could serve to increase graduation rates and the number of college degrees for African American college students at BU.

Literature Search Strategy

To obtain relevant sources to review, I searched the following databases: ERIC, ProQuest, College Navigator, Education, Educational Foundations, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, Tableau, Walden Library. The following keywords were used to search these databases: *academic achievement, academic advising, academic advising and retention, academic advising and student success, academic advising approaches: strategies that teach student to make the most of college, academic advising first generation, academic advising first-generation, academic advising in college, academic advising in higher education, academic advising models, academic advisors, academic performance, academic success, achievement gap, achievement gap African American, achievement gap in education, achievement gap in higher education, achievement gap and minority students, achievement gap in america, achievement gaps, achievement gaps in education in USA, advising, advising models, advisor, African Americans, Bean, black americans, blacks, civil rights movement, college, college and university students, graduation, graduation rates, higher education, history, history of academic advising,*

history of advising, history of academic advisor, history of higher education, Kamens,

learning gap, opportunity gap, Pascarella, persistence, persistence rates, persistence

rates postsecondary, postsecondary, student engagement, student involvement, retention,

retention rates, Tinto, university students, undergraduates, and *university.* Due to shifts

and trends in terminology, I used various search terms and keywords to obtain

information related to African American students' perceptions and interactions with

academic advising support services.

Initially, I began searching ERIC, ProQuest, College Navigator, Education,

Educational Foundations, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, Tableau, and Walden Library

using the keywords *academic achievement, academic advisors, academic advisors and*

student success, achievement gap, African American, graduation rates, persistence,

retention rates, and *higher education.* Many of the articles and dissertations did not relate

to African American perceptions in a 4-year university with academic advising services

and were over 5 years old. In many cases, the research provided more in-depth insight

into areas of concern for African American students and the various types of academic

advising that have been known to positively affect student success.

In some instances, the research focused on diversity and underrepresented

minorities in higher education. I continued to search ERIC, ProQuest, College Navigator,

Education, Educational Foundations, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, Tableau, and

Walden Library using the keywords *diversity* and *underrepresented minorities* and

obtained additional research articles. The limited research related to African American

student's perception of their experiences in a 4-year university with academic advising services supported the need for additional research in this area.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1975) early work related to retention and persistence; he focused on the distinction between academic dismissal and student withdrawal because the reasons for each were very different . Academic dismissal often involves underrepresented groups with lower incomes who may not have been as academically prepared as those who dropped out, but who were often academically sound and from higher income families (Tinto, 1975). Much of Tinto's work focused on students and their relationships and involvement with the university.

In 2012, Seidman clarified that Tinto's theory of student departure centered on the students' commitment to their educational goals and the institutions' commitment to continually support the student in reaching their goals (p. 504). He acknowledged that additional research should be conducted to further delineate the data by race to better understand different perceptions by race, by institutions, and so on (Tinto, 1975). However, social involvement is a common thread for both reasons for departure from an institution.

Astin (1984) published the theory of involvement, which has three elements related to students: (a) inputs, (b) campus experience, and (c) outcomes. Astin found that a student's involvement in cocurricular activities positively affects retention and persistence. Student inputs involved the effort put into their coursework to successfully complete the courses. Involvement in campus activities provided the student with a

connection to the campus and creates a sense of belonging in the campus community. Hence, a student who maintains good academic standing and is involved in campus activities outside of the classroom is apt to persist to graduation.

Tinto (1997) discussed the positive impact gained from social learning communities and how they assisted students to find resources and create a sense of belonging at an institution. The creation of a social network to learn as well as socialize with has been an effective tool for retention and persistence. Socialization in the academic environment, which can also be referred to as "student engagement," often begins with the academic advisor, who most impacts student retention and persistence (Tinto, 1997). Both Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975) stated that the role of academic advising is instrumental in student involvement and student engagement, respectively. Academic advising is an important resource to connect a student to the campus community, the curriculum, and other campus resources. Academic advising serves as a vehicle to facilitate student engagement and has been shown to positively contribute to retention and persistence.

Pascarella (2006) acknowledged the changing demographics of the typical college student and how their needs and experiences, though at the same institution, may differ immensely. Higher education's push for diversity on campuses increased learning and the ability to critically view topics from various perspectives, but with that comes students from various backgrounds who have varying needs (Pascarella, 2006). As a result, academic advising support services must adopt advising models that consider the diverse needs of their diverse student populations. Pascarella suggested a thorough investigation

of how diverse experiences and relationships in the college environment affect students and their future outcomes. Not only should the academic advising model chosen by a university be a holistic approach to conquering the challenges of college life, but academic advisors should be trained to address and understand the intricacies of diverse students in a diverse environment to increase student success and graduation rates.

Based on the various theories and research by the authors listed in this conceptual framework, the characteristics of individual students and the institutions they attend are important. Academic advising services have the ability to affect student outcomes and help connect them to the university (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). The academic and social experiences of college students and the institutions' commitment to support these aspects of the student experience are instrumental in their retention, persistence, and graduation. Astin (1984) agreed with Tinto (1975) that strengthening student involvement and engaging them in the activities of the institution are instrumental in the student experience, contribute to social engagement, and further connect the student to the institution. Advising services typically aim to develop the whole student by assisting with majors and curriculum planning, but also connecting students to various resources that the university has to offer (Gordon, 2019). Therefore, institutional leaders must be cognizant of how impactful their role is in the student experience and ensure they provide the appropriate support for a diverse student body. Manyanga et al. (2017) acknowledged that institutions use Tinto's theories related to persistence and retention to assess their student population, demographics, and the quality of the education they offer. As colleges

and universities assess themselves and their efforts to support student success they have to be conscious of their institutions student populations.

Impact of Advising on Persistence and Graduation

Lynch and Lungren (2018) asserted that increased pressure from higher education has been placed upon institutions and advisors to shorten the time to degree completion. As public funding has decreased and public scrutiny has increased, institutions scramble to maintain their importance by increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Zhang et al., 2017). The use of data analytics has been identified as a resource to provide advisors with efficient, proactive solutions to ensure student success by easily identifying areas that need attention (Jones, 2019). The use of technology could help advisors counteract the reduced financial support and case overload and assist them in offering a more holistic model for greater student success.

Technology offers the ability to respond quickly when students have academic challenges, which can affect their overall performance and is one of the many indicators linked to retention and student success (Farruggia et al., 2018). Advisors who are culturally sensitive through experience or learned through training can create a stronger more effective bond in the advisor–student relationship for African American students (Williams et al., 2018). This relationship is helpful as it serves to create a connection between the advisor and the student and allows the advisor to have more influence on student behavior as they use the data to inform them. Farruggia et al. (2018) stated that interventions by advisors aimed at assisting students with issues that arise in a culturally sensitive fashion can positively affect how African American students perform

academically, which increases their retention and success rates. The college experience

for African American students and their academic performance can be positively

impacted by culturally sensitive advisors.

<div align="center">**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables**</div>

History of African Americans in Higher Education

African American refers to Black people that reside in the United States of

America with a heritage rooted in African culture (Sotiropoulos, 2017). Their history in

the United States began with hundreds of years of slavery and the denial of access to

education at all levels (Bracey, 2017). After slavery ended, African Americans endured

segregation, academic inequities, and racism (Logan et al., 2018). Largely, due to

legislative action ignited by the civil rights movement and the outcry of African

American communities for equal opportunity and access to higher education became

available (Yeboah, 2018). Access to education has grown significantly; however, though

the enrollment numbers of African American students have grown, the graduation rates

have not kept pace with the enrollment rates or with graduation rates for other races (The

Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Hence, further investigation is needed to

understand why enrollment growth has not equated to increased graduation rates.

Affirmative action was enacted to diversify higher education and the workplace

by allowing race to be considered in college admissions and in employment hiring

practices (Reardon et al., 2018). Holfester (2021) stressed the importance of, the

historical case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 and how it contributed to

predominantly White educational institutions allowing access to African American

students. The *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 represented a defining moment in history for African American as it represented the end of Jim Crow laws (Holfester, 2021). Much of the act protected voting rights, discrimination in places of public accommodation, and desegregation of public schools (Civil Rights Act, 1964). *Proposition 209* was passed by California and Texas voters in 1996, banning affirmative action programs that allowed race to be considered in the admission processes. African American students and other underrepresented minorities were negatively impacted by this legislation and enrollment plummeted at UC schools.

Subsequently, by 2012, Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Washington followed with similar legislation. *University of California versus Bakke* was a 1978 Supreme Court decision regarding UC Davis Medical School's practice of withholding 16 of its 100 seats exclusively for minority students. Bakke was a qualified student who had been denied admission twice and attributed this denial to the seats held for minority students. Legislation has been instrumental in allowing and denying access to higher education for hundreds of years for African American students. This represents only a partial list of cases that have continued to shape the educational experience for African American students.

Barriers to Academic Success Among African Americans

There are several reasons that African American students find it challenging to continue and persist to graduation. Davidson et al. (2020) found that, inadequate academic preparation and financial issues can be barriers to retention, persistence, and graduation for African American students. There is a need for African American students

to have rigorous middle and high school preparation to succeed in most academic environments. African American students scored the lowest of all ethnicities, at 59% on the college board standardized SAT, which indicates a lack of knowledge or preparation to enter college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Green and Wright (2017) also acknowledged that college-ready K-12 students who have also attended career development programs would provide the background and knowledge needed to excel in rigorous college programs. The proper preparation and exposure to the rigors of college before entrance into higher education can promote retention, persistence, and increased graduation rates for African American students.

Academic Preparation

Teasley (2019) stated that poorer African American neighborhood schools often lack a college preparatory curriculum and the proper learning materials available in many K-12 districts. These types of problems can make it difficult to properly prepare for standardized testing used for college admissions, and there is a lack of proper counseling on courses used in college admissions in California and necessary preparation to handle the rigors of college should students obtain admission. African American students who are high achievers often find insufficient offerings of advanced placement (A/P) courses or programs specifically for them or gifted students, unlike K-12 districts in communities with higher income levels (Monaghan, 2019; The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Academic deficiencies, insufficient counseling, and few if any A/P courses can cause students from poorer communities to lack the appropriate academic preparation for college. African American students in California are more likely to attend high schools

where these types of systemic issues exist (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Additional resources or different funding models to better meet the learning needs of children from low-income neighborhoods need to be explored.

Sense of Belonging for African American Students

A sense of belonging is accomplished when students are socialized, engaged, and accepted by their surrounding community. For African American students, this is important and is instrumental in their retention, persistence, and increased graduation rates. Banks and Dohy (2019) indicated the importance of minority peer programs that increase a sense of belonging and help students feel a greater connection to their university environment. Other positive contributors help students feel a sense of belonging such as higher academic engagement and provisions for a community of belonging (Green, 2017). O'Meara (2017) stated that many of the same factors that positively affect an undergraduate's sense of belonging, such as having support networks and mentorship as well as supportive academic advising, also affect graduate students. Support systems that are integrated into the university environment can all have an impact on student engagement and a sense of community.

African American students often feel disconnected on university campuses and suffer from a sense of not belonging (Lewis, 2019). Diversity has been strongly supported in today's institutions of higher learning and African American students have been actively recruited. However, their graduation rates remain among the lowest (Thelamour, 2019). Daoud et al. (2018) suggested that understanding the complexities of African American experiences can help universities provide the support services that are

needed. Further thought must be given to the experience that happens on campus between recruitment and graduation. Therefore, an exploration into how advising services can create a higher level of connectedness and sense of belonging and can contribute to increased graduation rates for African American college students is of interest.

Financial Issues

Financial issues can also have an impact on African American students and their ability to persist to graduation. It is important to realize that African American students as part of underrepresented minorities often come from low-income families and may experience financial limitations that may hinder social integration and reduce their institutional commitment (Yonghong & Webber, 2018). When African American students are offered financial aid they are more likely to attend college (Eller & DiPrete, 2018). Davidson et al. (2020) suggested that African American students often wonder if the increased cost of education warrants the burden of increased loan debt. A major effort is needed to educate African American students from low-income families on other sources of funding outside of loans and overall financial management to increase the opportunity for student success.

Importance of an African American Student Community

African Americans, as a marginalized ethnic group in the U.S., often feel isolated without friends and family for support, especially on college campuses. A study of over 3,500 African Americans supported the notion of how important family support and solidarity are to the psyches of members of this ethnic group (Cross et al., 2018). Taylor et al. (2020) asserted that this type of social support serves as a coping mechanism for

African Americans to deal with the stress that comes from being regularly marginalized. Institutional leaders must realize that with diversity comes an obligation to ensure these populations feel welcomed and connected to the campus (Thelamour, 2019). Support for a social network within the campus community that can relate to the unique needs of African American students is essential.

Academic Advisors

Academic advisors provide academic guidance for students related to courses and pathways to graduation. Advisors also provide advice on career, personal growth, and other areas that are of interest to students (Chan et al., 2019). An advisor's main responsibility is to advise students on courses and programs and provide a connection to the university through their knowledge of student resources. In addition to being knowledgeable in these areas, an advisor should display soft skills to further help students navigate their path (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017). Mu and Fosnacht (2019) maintained that advising support is connected to learning outcomes. Interestingly, some institutions find the frequency of student–advisor meetings to have minimal impact on student outcomes while othersfind more effective institutions to have a positive impact on student outcomes (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Academic advising support services offer vital academic support and opportunities for students to connect to campus resources.

Academic advising programs are critical to assist students in persisting to graduation but the assessment of these programs is essential to ensure students are receiving a quality advising experience (Zargas et al., 2019). Institutions must be sensitive to the needs and cultures of their student populations. Student body culture

refers to more than the dominant or traditional type of student but also includes students who are from underrepresented groups. Individually, the groups may be rather small but collectively become a larger part of the student body. Sometimes it can be a mental burden when students exist in an environment where they appear to be alone with few role models or the support of advising (Basile, 2019). The significance of academic advising in higher education led to the designation of funding in some states (Woods et al., 2017). The role and positive contributions to student learning outcomes and the perceptions of African American students of their advising experience is an important aspect to explore.

Academic Advising Models

Academic advising traditionally guided students through the course selection process needed for degree completion. A traditional method like the prescriptive model allowed advisors to operate as informational resource providers (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). However, based on the diverse needs of student populations that have continued to evolve, it is apparent that advisors need additional skills to employ more holistic advising models (McDonald, 2019). It is necessary to review the various types of academic advising models to ascertain their advantages and disadvantages. These models are (a) developmental, (b) prescriptive, (c) advising as teaching, (d) proactive or intrusive, (e) strength-based approaches, and (f) appreciative advising.

Developmental Model

Crookston (1972) has been attributed with recognizing the need to assist students in developing their life plans and creating a roadmap to achieve their goals, referring to

this process as developmental advising. BU uses a similar technique and approach to student academic advising with an emphasis on the students' development and their ability to seek out the services and opportunities that are available to them. The developmental model of advising can be successful, as it uses a holistic approach and addresses the needs of the whole student. Academic advising is often not equipped to handle the personal attention required by this model. Gordon (2019) shared several reasons why this method is difficult to implement such as heavy advisor caseloads, lack of advisor training, minimal or no institutional support, and additional skills that are needed to address cultural and diversity issues. The developmental model is a traditional model that assists students with academic, career, and life exploration (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). In other words, it assists the student with the on-campus development process and adds context to how the education obtained applies to their future endeavors.

Prescriptive Model

The prescriptive model is considered the traditional model and was developed by Crookston in 1972. The prescriptive model is informational and assists the student in navigating the pathway of courses to completion. This model focuses on the completion of a prescribed program versus the overall development of the student (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Advisors initiate contact with students based on their progress, ability to adapt, and ability to succeed in the collegiate environment. Mu and Fosnacht (2019) referred to this model as proactive or intrusive, and it is used to provide services to those who exhibit a need. Lee (2018) recognized how advisors can increase graduation rates, reduce time to completion, and their ability to positively impact student life. Intrusive advising is

a proactive way to assist the student with their academic goals, as well as, provide them with resources, and build an important relationship. BU provides many of these services to students though not in a proactive manner; their program is initiated by the student. Many universities have increased their graduation rates by using this method, due to its proactive, intentional, relational, and holistic approach (Rowh, 2018). It embodies the idea of early intervention and providing solutions before larger issues arise. However, it can be more expensive than some of the other models, given that these advisors track and initiate contact with the student versus the student making contact.

Advising as Teaching Model

Crookston (1972) argued that many of the advising functions, such as assisting students in their decision-making and critical thinking skills related to their studies and careers, mirror teaching in the classroom. Advising as teaching typically involves the relationship between faculty members and students. This method's uniqueness lies in its expectation that faculty take a scholarly approach to advising in which they view their work reflectively (Troxel, 2019). Teaching through academic advising involves implementing the curriculum structure needed to map coursework to accomplish student goals and apply critical thinking during the process (Steele, 2018). Students have access to program advisors who work with the faculty within each discipline to provide more specialized advising related to majors and minors at BU. The BU program offers an opportunity to interact with advisors who are tied to the faculty; however, it is not the student who develops a relationship with the faculty member personally. When faculty are the advisors, they bring knowledge related to the field, and while nonfaculty advisors

may know more about the broader curriculum faculty can provide students with specialized information related to their ultimate goal.

Proactive or Intrusive Method

Glennen (1975) developed the productive or intrusive method as a means to anticipate student needs and to help build a support network between the institution and the student. The proactive or intrusive method is an example of a more holistic model that may better serve the needs of today's diverse student population. The intrusive model requires the advisor to be much more involved in students' progress and proactive in making connections with students to ensure they continue to persist to graduation (Rowh, 2018). Uddin (2020) claimed the research of retention and persistence suggested that some best practices include: an assigned advisor, an advisor that is proactive in communication and connection, in-person advising experiences to candidly address academic challenges, an advisor who advocates and celebrates students' successes, and an advising experience that promotes student engagement in advisement support programs. The advising program at BU had instituted many of the best practices listed above except for having an advisor who has proactive communication and connection. Stony Brook University in New York has chosen to use the proactive model by tracking and intervening with all at-risk students based on 800 risk factors and claims to have increased 4-year graduation rates by 15% using this method (Bohanon, 2018). Understanding the complexities and unique challenges that face diverse student populations and selecting the appropriate advising model is key to student success and completion.

Strength-Based Advising Model

Schreiner and Anderson (2005) introduced strength-based advising to shift the focus from student needs (negative view) to the management of student talent and engagement (positive view). Strength-based advising uses the natural talent and strength of the student to further engage them in the college and curriculum experience. Banks and Dohy (2019) discussed that increased graduation and retention rates occur when students are introduced to their natural abilities and use that knowledge in course and curriculum selection. In a study of 1,228 students, the students found the road to a career path and the education required is clearer and easier to grasp when strengths have been identified (Soria et al., 2017). Students may be prone to have positive successful outcomes because the strength-based advising method involves areas in which the student already shows an aptitude.

Appreciative Model

Cooperrider (2018) developed the idea of appreciative inquiry, which is focused on encouragement to develop strengths in a positive environment that ultimately contributes to student success. Bloom et al. (2008) used this idea as the premise for the appreciative advising model using the positive concept of the strengths of the student and the institution to create an excellent educational experience. The idea was to have a reciprocal relationship between the student and the advisor as the representative of the institution and to provide the best resources to obtain positive outcomes from the student. Six principles are associated with the appreciative model: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and don't settle (Bloom et al., 2008). Schmidt (2018) described these

principles as: welcoming, uncovering strengths, conceptualizing, intentionally progressing, institutionally supporting, and continuously improving, respectively. Appreciative advising involves a consultative process typically implemented in student advising, focuses on their strengths, and seeks to guide the student with the end in mind (Davis, 2019). Beri et al. (2020) discussed how faculty and staff have used appreciative education to incorporate the use of assets and strengths of the students and encourage them to take ownership of their success with their guidance. Universities use varying levels of these principles as they deliver student support services. These principles focus on student success and encourage the institution to provide a positive, resourceful environment in which students can flourish.

Mentoring Programs that Support Advising

A mentor is often referred to as "a trusted counselor or guide" with more experience than the mentee (Udom et al., 2020). There are multiple perspectives on how *advisor* should be defined. However, an advisor is someone who gives advice based on structured information from an institution (Larson et al., 2018). These definitions are very close in meaning and are sometimes interchanged depending on perspectives. For discussion purposes, one major difference is that mentor programs may be voluntary and not promoted as widely as academic advisors, who tend to be part of institutions' customary practices. One of the most effective ways to promote growth and development is through mentoring relationship (Louis & Freeman, 2018). Birkeland et al. (2019) supported the idea that mentors provide support and guidance to students to increase the probability of their success. Chelberg and Bosman (2019) discussed how the additional

guidance can have a positive impact on the retention and persistence of underrepresented students, who may also be first-generation college students and lack knowledge of a university environment. Various forms of mentoring can help promote socialization and integration into the university environment.

Faculty Mentoring

Faculty mentoring often occurs through relationships that offer closer proximity (e.g., doing a research project with a professor, having a research/student assistant relationship, or when a student proactively asks for advice; Birkeland et al., 2019). Joshi et al. (2019) agreed that students tend to feel more empowered and benefit from the experience and feedback from faculty members while also developing a trusted relationship. These relationships provide an opportunity to interact on a different level than in the classroom, which may yield no personal interaction at all. As advising has become more prevalent over the last decade or so, some universities have sought to create programs that institutionalize and encourage faculty–student relationships (Birkeland et al., 2019). Once students have sought out BU advising services, they are encouraged to develop mentoring relationships with faculty.

Staff and Administrator Mentoring

Luedke (2017) noted that staff and administrators of color can offer social capital as mentors, as well as, role models for underrepresented students. Similar to peer mentors, they may have similar backgrounds, interests, or other commonalities. Experienced members of the institution can be instrumental in providing career and psychosocial support (Williams et al., 2018). Anyone a student comes in contact with on

campus has the potential to serve in a mentor role. Mentor relationships that form trust

and bonds organically tend to positively impact the student's academic goals, particularly

for students of color (Luedke, 2017). Other types of staff advising are offered at BU for

specific types of groups (i.e., transfer and reentry students, international students, and

economically disadvantaged students). Strategies needed to promote student success in a

supportive environment to help motivate and encourage student success can be gained

through mentorship by anyone (Chelberg, 2019). This provides another potential pathway

to help all students including African American students flourish in an academic

environment.

Student Peer Mentors

Many colleges and universities have peer mentoring programs as a means to

promote student retention. Holt and Fifer (2018) claimed these types of relationships help

to acclimate students to the campus environment by connecting them to events and other

valuable student support resources. The social integration that occurs in peer-to-peer

interaction supports institutional efforts such as academic advising as they relate to

students sense of belonging (Yonghong & Webber, 2018). At BU, they offer access to

peer academic success coaches and they help advise students on time management

techniques, effective study habits, and other advice from a student's perspective. The idea

is that peers may share similar interests and commonalities and may assist in the

socialization process is the premise of this relationship. Graham and McClain (2019)

suggested there may even be a connection between peer mentoring and academic

outcomes. The ultimate goal is to have student engagement which in turn, can help to increase retention and graduation rates.

Benefits of Diverse Faculty

Students can often find mentor/advisor relationships with faculty members. Yonker (2019) asserted faculty training focused on the greatest student advising needs can yield positive increases in student satisfaction. African American students need support systems that can also be found among faculty members who can help navigate the university system. McCoy et al. (2017) concluded that interactions with the faculty are important for degree completion at the lower levels, as well as an instrumental component of a student's desire to attend graduate school. A student's experience on campus contributes to retention and degree completion and is largely affected by the student's interactions with the faculty (Miller et al., 2019). Benitez et al. (2017) supported the idea that students of color have a better persistence rate when institutions also have diverse faculty members. The existence of faculty and staff that are representative of the student body can assist African American students through the challenges of university life given the limited role models, lack of programs geared to them, and faculty and administrators with whom they feel no connection (Lee, 2018). The possibilities related to educational attainment are more prevalent when you can see yourself reflected in the institution's faculty, staff, and administration.

Often, students may be first-generation college students from marginalized communities and can experience a lack of support in the university environment. In fact, Green and Wright (2017) proposed that faculty should bring culturally responsive

teaching to the classroom to empower first-generation African American students for whom higher education may be new. Golden et al. (2017) noted that faculty mentoring can serve to engage African American students and provide them with the dexterity to overcome barriers to degree completion. In fact, Louis and Freeman (2018) agreed that faculty members as mentors can guide students, serve as role models, and encourage student success. The faculty–student relationship can be beneficial and contributes to African American student success. The Campaign for College Opportunity is an influential grant funded organization, run by educators whose mission is to strengthen California by focusing on access and graduation for all. In 2019, this organization recommended that California public universities create a welcoming environment by increasing the recruitment of Black faculty and staff to reflect the student population as a means to attract, retain, and increase the graduation of African American students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Through faculty and staff that are reflective of the African American student population, universities foster a sense of community and create role models that can facilitate student success.

Types of Advisors

Depending on the institution and the model they have selected to best meet the needs of their student's dictates who leads in the role of academic advisor and determines how the program is structured. According to Lawton (2018), academic advising was intended to help students to be successful in higher education institutions, promote equity, and serve as a vehicle to decrease the opportunity gap for underserved or underrepresented communities. Advisors often assist students with career planning,

provide choices for majors and minors, and connect students with campus resources (Uddin, 2020). Though any type of advisor can provide these ancillary services, it is more typical of the primary-role advisor versus the faculty advisors. Faculty advisors or primary-role advisors are among the most common types of advisors.

Faculty Advisors

The use of faculty as advisors stems from wanting to connect students to scholarly resources and subject matter experts in their chosen fields. According to Troxel (2018), the success of faculty as advisors relates to learning as the main focus of the relationship. Oftentimes, this process happens through informal faculty mentoring versus a formalized faculty advisor program. Faculty can guide and foster a student's understanding of their chosen field, how to navigate through the institutional curriculum to move forward in the field, and offer a glimpse into external opportunities within the field (Golden et al., 2018). This is another way of engaging and connecting the students to the campus community.

Primary-Role Advisor

Primary-role advisors can be faculty or nonfaculty staff members; however, faculty typically do not provide instructional courses while performing this full-time academic support function. Faculty advisors are well versed in their field of study and can offer students realistic advice on what is needed to academically and practically in the field to succeed in that arena. The nonfaculty staff members' roles as advisors have been coaching and helping to navigate university systems and resources to help integrate students into the university environment and on to graduation (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017).

Those who serve in this capacity have an opportunity to build strong relationships with the students and through this trusted partnership help them to connect to the institution (Lawton, 2018). Both types of advisors have valuable information to share and can be beneficial in providing students with the skills needed to navigate university life to an expected end: graduation.

BU offers a major advisor and a college advisor for each student. However, it is the student's responsibility to take an active role in this process by contacting the advising department or reading through the materials provided at orientation. BU also offers peer academic success coaches who can offer advice on how to navigate the university and provide effective strategies they use to complete their courses. Again, the student must seek out these services. Additional information about all the services BU offers can be found on their academic advising services webpage.

Summary and Conclusions

A review of the literature revealed various academic advising models that have been developed and implemented in higher education institutions. A clear understanding was vital to ascertain which method might best serve African American college students to increase their retention and graduation rates. For the purpose of this study, it was imperative to reflect on legislation that has been instrumental in the African American experience related to education from K-12 through college. Knowledge of the historical challenges that African American students have experienced in terms of access provided insight into how systemic barriers continue to affect these students.

Additionally, the literature highlighted barriers that continue to affect African American students in their pursuit of an education. Inadequate academic preparation and financial needs have been identified as two of the many barriers. The type of academic advising that may be needed for the unique needs of these students, given that they are often first-generation college students may not be available due to funding constraints. This aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American students based on their interactions with academic advising, which may help to increase retention and graduation rates for African American students. Chapter 3 discusses the research methods of this study including the research design and rationale, data collection, analysis, and the role of the researcher.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem I explored in this study was the perceptions of African American students with academic advising at BU. A basic qualitative research design was used to explore African American students' perceptions of academic advising support services at BU. I used a basic qualitative methodology to explore and probe deeper into African American student perceptions about academic advising as it related to persistence, retention, and/or graduation rates. The qualitative methodology helped me to conceptualize and understand underlying themes and assumptions through participant interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, the qualitative methodology allows for a more in-depth view and can provide more detailed information from a smaller group of participants (Harding, 2019). The remainder of this chapter will include the research question, the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, the methodology, the instrumentation, the procedures for recruitment and selection, the data analysis plan, the trustworthiness, the ethical procedures, and a summary.

Research Question

The focus of this study was guided by the following research question:

RQ: What are African American students' perceptions about academic advising support services at BU?

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted this study to gain an understanding of African American college students' perceptions with institutional academic advising support services offered at BU. A deeper understanding of these perceptions can serve as a basis for identifying areas of

improvement in the types of services offered by academic advising support services. This may allow BU an opportunity to focus on specific service areas that can increase retention and persistence to graduation for their African American student population and other ethnicities that have low graduation rates. The research methodology is important as it allows the researcher to organize and clearly convey the process used to obtain and analyze data related to a subject or issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A basic qualitative approach was used because the respondents were encouraged to describe their perceptions, which provided a comprehensive view as seen through their lens (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through this basic qualitative method, I embraced exploration through the interview that I conducted with each participant. The interview process provided an opportunity to identify themes that emerged through dialogue and through coding interpret the themes and any underlying meaning.

A basic qualitative approach with interviews was used to provide the participants with the opportunity to provide answers that would give in-depth insight into their individual perceptions' about their experiences with academic advising support services. Semistructured interviews allow the researcher the flexibility to ask follow up questions during the process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used the basic qualitative approach to explore the personal perceptions of African American students at a specific institution; therefore, the basic qualitative methodology was the most appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher serves as the primary instrument and collector of data for the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) as well as an observer of the

participants in the study. As such, I needed to identify and account for any conflicts of interest. During the interviews, I listened to and recorded all of the participants' perceptions of their interactions with academic advising support services during the interview process to minimize bias. As suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), I attempted to control any biases by exclusively, without manipulation, using the data to report findings. Additionally, I took field notes to record my thoughts and to provide reflexivity to help control researcher bias. I used Microsoft Word's transcribe feature to transcribe the data to further minimize and protect against researcher bias. As the interviewer, I conducted semistructured interviews with five African American students who currently attended or had attended BU. I maintained a calm and welcoming disposition while clearly stating the questions and encouraging the participants to relax. As part of the process and to ensure privacy, I also provided a secure virtual environment.

Confidentiality was of the utmost importance and was accomplished through the use of pseudonyms (Thomas, 2017). I used numeric pseudonyms to refer to the participants when speaking about the comments that were shared during the interview process. Additionally, during the interviews, I maintained a sense of equality and openness to foster active participation. As recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), I shared a sense of openness in power, creating an environment that encouraged active and open participation. I created a comfortable environment by sharing my interest in conducting the study and how interviewees' participation could have a positive impact on graduations rates for other African American college students. All of participants in this study were obtained from social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, as well

as current participant referrals. I first identified participants based on their attendance at BU and then sent an invitation via email to participate. Three of the participants were obtained through social media avenues such as LinkedIn and Facebook while two participants were referrals from the initial social media participants. All of the affirmative responses created the participant pool, and informed consent forms were sent to the participants via email and were required to be returned as a condition to participate in the study.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016), refer to a process used to understand how individuals and groups interpret their experiences in various situations. I used a basic qualitative research design to describe the perceptions of African American students with academic advising support services and their decisions to persist toward graduation at BU.

An open-ended semistructured interview process was conducted with five African American students who attended BU or who graduated from BU via Zoom video communication software. The data were collected and stored on a tape recorder and later transcribed by an outside transcription service. I then coded the data using computerized software. The results of this study can be used to provide a better understanding, help fill the gap in research, and contribute to the field of education as it relates to the graduation rates of African American college students. A basic qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it allowed an opportunity to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the subject matter (see Harding, 2019).

Participant Selection

Population

The population for the study was African American people who currently or previously attended BU. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), an ideal sample is based on a systematic random sampling model. This process was followed by the selection of every student from the population of students that met the eligibility criteria. The idea of stratification might have arisen. However, since it was truly a random selection it is important to note that there was not an equal representation between gender or class level.

Sampling Strategy

The chosen sampling strategy for the study was random sampling. The sampling method was random because individuals were not specifically selected but rather randomly selected from African American groups that attend or attended BU based on the criteria previously laid out. It was expected that there would not be an equal distribution of participants between recent graduates and students attending BU or students at BU who are currently juniors and seniors. A random selection means the probability of being selected was equal for each member of a particular population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The flyer (Appendix A) with the selection criteria was posted on BU's online bulletin boards and other social media sites frequently used by these students. Using Zoom video communication software interviews were conducted with five current or previous BU students. Interviews with individuals in this group of African Americans

helped to further explore the perception of their experiences with advising support services. The hope was to gain rich and valuable information based on each individual's unique experience with BU's advising support services.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument consisted of 10 interview questions. The 10 interview questions focused on the experiences of African American students with academic advising support services. Additionally, follow-up questions to accompany each interview question were developed. An in-depth review of the literature was instrumental in developing the questions for the interview process (see Thomas, 2017). The interview protocol was reviewed by the dissertation committee at Walden University for feedback on alignment, appropriateness, and relevance to the study. The interview questions were reviewed by one person with a Ph.D. and one person with an Ed.D. to establish content validity. Adjustments were made to the questions based on feedback I received from the various consultative sources.

The questions in the interview were influenced by the conceptual framework of Tinto's theory of student persistence. Tinto (2012) supported the idea that institutions are largely responsible for student persistence and should continuously solicit feedback from their students to refine processes and ensure student success. Interview questions can be well served and informed from the conceptual framework (Harding, 2019). Effective advising support services can help provide students with the resources needed to navigate the academic experience, which helps with persistence and graduation rates. Tinto and The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (2004) found that

effective advising addresses those students who do not know what they want to study and first-generation students who are unfamiliar with college and need assistance navigating the process. Open-ended questions were asked in the interview process to explore the experiences of the participants in the study. The use of follow-up questions were used to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences from their perspective (Billups, 2021). The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken during and after the interview. This allowed me to personally reflect on the process, the experiences of the participants, and the topic.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

I obtained approval from Walden's Institutional Research Board (IRB) for this study. Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 02-03-22-0742652. I started the recruitment process for participants once the I received the IRB approval number. I recruited from different social media sites including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, and other campus virtual sites. The criteria used for the recruitment selection included those of African American descent that were either current or previous students at BU and utilized academic advising services on at least three occasions and must have been age 18 years old or older. The participant criteria were developed to ensure an adequate amount of contact with academic advising services had been reached to warrant sufficient experience. A $25 Amazon gift certificate was offered as an incentive to increase the population of participants in the study.

An invitation to participate (Appendix B) was sent to solicit students at BU to ascertain eligibility. Once the eligibility was confirmed, participants were accepted

throughout the process. I originally wanted a minimum of seven or a maximum of 10 respondents. However, only five student participants were obtained through the recruitment process. It appeared that saturation was still reached. Contact information was obtained from those who positively responded to the Invitation to Participate. The selected respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could leave the study at any time. The respondents were sent the Informed Consent Form and were asked to respond via email by stating "I consent." Once respondents had confirmed their consent they were scheduled for an interview via Zoom video communication software, a virtual meeting platform. Prior to the interview, I assigned a random number as a pseudonym using a random number generator for each of the participants and it was recorded on the participant's One-on-One Interview Protocol Form (Appendix C) for tracking purposes, along with the meeting date, time, and recording method.

At the beginning of each interview, I used the protocol form to restate the purpose of the study, ask permission to record the interview, and remind the participant of their right to discontinue the interview at any time. I recorded the interview and wrote field notes to capture any contextual information that may not have been reflected in the recording. At the conclusion of the interview, I thanked the participant for their time and willingness to be a part of the study. Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to review their information to confirm that an accurate depiction of their interviews had been captured. This helped to ensure that only the participants' data are reflected in the outcomes rather than any biases of the interviewer. I also purchased and emailed each

participant an electronic $25 Amazon gift card immediately after we concluded the interview.

Data Analysis Plan

A data analysis plan helps to systematically organize and manage the data collected from various sources as it relates to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The plan assists the researcher to more easily identify gaps and themes in the data. The plan also helps to manage large amounts of data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) further supported the use of a data analysis plan to organize and assist with the identification of underlying themes that emerge during the process. The data analysis plan and all detailed documentation and transcriptions were backed up on a zip drive and stored in a safe for security purposes. I also compiled, processed, and systematically managed the data for consistency in the analysis process.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Microsoft Word transcription function. The data collected were manually and electronically coded using NVivo software for analysis. An analysis of each transcript and journaling of my thoughts, along with reading and rereading the data was done to identify themes that may emerge. I also used a spreadsheet to organize and identify categories, trends, and themes that appear across the transcripts. From the interviews, themes emerged and codes helped to further develop and organize them to recognize frequent occurrences of similar or like data. Coding allows patterns and trends to surface and serve as indicators that demonstrate tangible meaning (Saldana, 2016). This process allowed me to capture consistencies, inconsistencies, themes, anomalies, and other items pertinent to the

findings. I also used NVivo software to analyze the transcribed data to help uncover insights and themes. NVivo software provided a single electronic storage place to contain transcribed documents that can be coded and further analyzed. According to Harding (2018), programs like NVivo can even assist in identifying the relationship that codes may have with each other. Additionally, I selected NVivo software for its ease of use, relatively low cost, and access to support both internally at Walden University and externally on YouTube and the NVivo software website.

Trustworthiness

To achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research, the complexities related to the experiences of participants must be thoroughly captured and vetted to ensure accurate themes are realized during the data collection process (Harding, 2019). Several criteria have been identified as instrumental in the process of gaining confidence and trustworthiness in the data presented. Credibility is one of the criteria used and it refers to the feasibility of the topic and the validity of the data gathered as they relate to the topic (Thomas, 2017). The design of the research included interviews of African American students who attended BU and used the academic advising support services. These students were asked to speak about their perceptions and in an effort to further support the credibility of the data. Additionally, I also made it clear to the participants that at any point during the process they could opt out.

Maxwell (2020) supported the criteria of transferability and the implication that the results can be applied to others in similar situations. This study included an assumption that the experiences of the selected participants of African American descent

could be applied to others with similar cultural backgrounds. I tested the data for common responses related to participants' experiences with academic advising to identify themes and data saturation to further support transferability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) declared that dependability refers to the method of data collection and how that methodology is constructed to ascertain viable information. In the study, I interviewed the participants to determine if there were any effects that they perceived BU advising support services had on persistence, retention, and graduation rates for African American students. Lastly, confirmability is similar to objectivity in quantitative analysis, which assumes there is a way to confirm the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Hence, qualitative research should use only reliable data sources to develop research criteria and content in the research study. I demonstrated confirmability through member-checking, which allowed each participant to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview. Using member-checking as an extra precaution reduced the possibility of researcher bias and added more trustworthiness to the data collection and outcomes.

In addition to the criteria associated with trustworthiness, triangulation was considered as it helps to further validate the consistency of the data. Triangulation involves looking at the data from multiple points of view to add validity to the process (Thomas, 2017). Another way to ensure data saturation has been reached and that researcher bias has been eliminated is through the use of multiple sources to validate the data (Fusch et al., 2018). One source of this validation was covered in the literature review, which gave context and background to the topic. In a similar manner, member-checking can also serve as a means to validate the accuracy of the participants data

(Thomas, 2017). Upon completion of the transcription, the participants had the opportunity to review their information to confirm that an accurate depiction of their interviews had been captured. This helped to ensure that only the participants' data are reflected in the outcomes rather than any biases of the interviewer.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues can arise during a study that may not have been anticipated along the way (Thomas, 2017). To combat these types of issues, using anonymity as it relates to the participants is important. It has been noted that incentives can also be used in an unethical manner unless they are small incentives such as the ones that were offered to participants in this study (Harding, 2019). The consent forms contained information about the research to make sure all participants were informed about the focus of the research, the ultimate goal of the research, and the process involved in the collection of the data. Ravitch and Carl (2016) concluded that at the heart of ethical issues is how the participants are represented in the research as it relates to their free will and rights. Each participant was given an informed consent form, which was used to inform them of the protections against physical and psychological harm. Furthermore, to protect the data and related documentation, they will be kept in a safe in a secured home office and only accessible to me for 5 years and then destroyed.

Summary

Using a basic qualitative method to conduct this study, I explored the perceptions of African American college students with academic advising support services at BU. The intent was to assist BU with its delivery of academic advising support services that

may better support the African American student population at BU. I explored the perceptions of African American students who have attended BU to gain a deeper understanding of the advising services they found most helpful and those they found to be unhelpful as it relates to their persistence, retention, and graduation rates. In Chapter 3, I explained the methodology I used to analyze the data collected during the study. Chapter 4 is a compilation of the results based on the data collected from those who participated in the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore African American students' experiences with academic advising support services at BU. Semistructured interviews were conducted with five students who were enrolled from Fall 2017 to Fall 2021. This study was designed to provide a deeper understanding of African American students' academic advising experiences and how those experiences can be improved to better support and increase graduation rates for this population. I also wanted to gain a greater understanding of the disparity in graduation rates for African American students versus other ethnicities who attend this university. In this chapter, I provide the results of the data collected and an analysis of that data. The research question was used to guide the data collection and analysis process. The sections that follow will identify the findings and themes that emerged throughout the interviews with the use of NVivo software. The research question that was at the core of the study was as follows:

RQ1: What are African American students' perceptions about academic advising support services at BU?

This chapter is focused on the research questions, the interview setting, data collection, demographics, data analysis, results, and the evidence of trustworthiness. In the discussion related to trustworthiness, I was also careful to include how the presence of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability validated this concept.

Setting

Participants were asked to select a date and time for the interview that was convenient to schedule an hour-long meeting via the Zoom video communication

platform. Based on the dates and times selected by the participants, I created Zoom

meetings and forwarded the invite to each of them. At the beginning of each Zoom

meeting, the interview protocol (Appendix C) was reviewed with each participant.

During each interview, the participant and I were able to see each other via their

respective computer screens using Zoom video communication software. The interview

was audio recorded using an external recording device. I interviewed five participants in

this manner based on their individual date and time preferences selected for the Zoom

meetings. Each interviewee appeared to be alone in a quiet room with no noise or

disruptions.

Demographics

A total of five individuals participated in the study. The process was

confidential and numeric pseudonyms were used to identify the participants.

Table 1 lists the participants in order by their random number, total number of

meetings with academic advising support services, gender, race, age range, their

current student status, the number of terms attended, and if they were a transfer

student.

Table 1

Characteristics of Study Participants

Random #	Total Meetings	Gender	Race	Age Range	Student Status	Terms Attended	Transfer Student
0002	7-8	F	AA	18-24	A	7 +	No
0008	9 +	F	AA	25-34	A	7 +	No
0046	9 +	M	AA	18-24	J	7 +	No
0069	7-8	F	AA	18-24	A	7 +	No
0071	1-2	F	AA	25-34	A	7 +	No

Note. A = Alumni, J = Junior, F = female, M = male, AA = African American

Four participants self-identified as female and one identified as male. This study was specifically related to the perceptions of African American college students and as such, all of the participants identified their race as African American. Three of the participants in this study self-identified in the 18-24 age range and two in the 25-34 age range. Additionally, participants self-identified their student status and there were four alumni, and one junior. All participants attended BU between Fall 2017 and Fall 2021 and had attended the same campus for seven or more terms.

Data Collection

I solicited and collected all data used in this study from the five African American college students that participated in the study. The participants were solicited through LinkedIn, Facebook, postings in the African American Resource Center, and participant

referrals. I sent potential participants a Walden IRB-approved invitation to participate via

email. This solicitation process yielded five participants and I sent each of them an

informed consent form with reply instructions. Each individual who agreed to participate

in the study replied "I consent" to the email I sent to them with the informed consent

form.

One-hour interviews were scheduled for each participant using Zoom. However,

none of the interviews took longer than 40 minutes. I created the interview protocol and

developed all of the questions for the interview process (Appendix C) in alignment with

the guiding research question. The questions were designed to capture the experiences of

African American students who attended BU as they dealt with academic advising

support services. Subject matter experts were consulted at a similar institution with

identical academic services to confirm the reliability of the questions. With permission

from each of the participants, the interview was audio-recorded and lasted between 30-40

minutes. During the interviews, the external audio recorder did not record the interview

in one mishap. I scheduled a second interview at a time convenient for that participant

and not only interviewed the participant a second time but also emailed them another $25

Amazon gift card as a thank you for their continued participation in the study. The

original solicitation and expected sample size was 10-14 participants. However, the final

sample size was five participants. From 2017-2020 the enrollment for African American

students at BU was only 2% of the overall student population. Therefore, it should be

noted that the small student population may have also influenced the small sample size

obtained for this study.

Before each interview began, I reviewed sections of the consent form and the interview protocol with each participant. I reminded each participant of the procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, privacy rights, the option to withdraw at any time, and that their identity would not be tied to their interviews and they would be assigned a random number. I also asked each participant if they had any questions or concerns about the interview process and each of them replied "no." The research question and the related interview questions guided the interview session. There were also probing questions that helped to better explain or further clarify statements that were made during the interview. Additionally, I asked the participants if they had any questions or if they had any other relevant information that they wanted to add to the interview.

In an effort to capture nonverbal communication, I took notes related to my observations of the participants. I also noted my thoughts on how the structure of interviews provided an in-depth understanding of their experiences with academic advising support services. After each interview, each participant was emailed a $25 Amazon gift card as a thank you for his or her participation in the study as stated in the invitation to participate. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the genders of the participants were not equally represented, because there were 80% female and 20% male. Additionally, the class level was not equally distributed because 80% of the participants had already graduated and only 20% were still enrolled at BU.

Data Analysis

As suggested by Vanover et al. (2021), inductive coding is an appropriate method of obtaining emergent themes from the data. As such, I employed this method as I

reviewed the transcripts. Additionally, I used open and axial coding to assist in the categorizing and sorting of the data into overall categories for analysis. Open coding allows the researcher to pick a labeling method to identify items while axial coding allows the researcher to use the labeling to identify specific patterns (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was also noted that there were no discrepant cases. Using these methods, I was able to identify broad categories from the participant interviews.

The transcription involved the use of external software to transcribe the audio interviews into text. The Microsoft Word transcribe feature converts speech into text, which was done by uploading the audio file from each interview. During the process of reviewing the transcripts multiple times, I was able to identify keywords, statements, and phrases from the transcribed interviews in an Excel spreadsheet for commonalities and frequency. The themes that emerged are listed in a table (Appendix D). Following the first review of coding, 25 codes were identified for the participants. I listed the codes on an Excel spreadsheet to categorize them. Additionally, I used the NVivo 12 software to manage, analyze, and report on the data. I uploaded each participant's transcript into the NVivo 12 software for further analysis. To ensure unbiased and accurate themes were captured through the use of the Excel spreadsheet and the NVivo 12 software. I reviewed the data several times to ensure that all the information was captured and considered while coding. Through the coding process, I was able to cluster items that appeared multiple times to form overall categories and themes. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), it is important to show how the researcher critically draws conclusions from the analysis. NVivo software helped to support critical thinking in the data analysis process,

provided transparency, and supported the validity of the information captured in the

Excel spreadsheet.

The NVivo software created a simple way to organize the data, provide basic

coding, and provide alternate methods of viewing the data. Participants have their own

unique experiences and perspectives. However, each participant provided similar

responses to the interview questions that formed the themes that emerged. The four

themes that emerged from the data across all transcripts were a sense of belonging, lack

of advisors, advisor training, and comprehensive academic advising. There were some

overlapping themes that some participants found to affect them positively while others

found the same theme to have a negative effect.

Table 2

Themes: Regarding African American Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising Support at a California University

Theme	Codes	Participants' Quotes
Sense of belonging	Connectedness Diversity Institutionalization Inclusiveness Mentoring Organized Representation Resources Support	" You have to connect with other resources on campus to find a sense of belonging." "I don't think at my campus that the advisor was there to connect you to anything." "Diversity in the staff helps to create a level of comfort and openness among students." "I felt so isolated due to low representation of advisors that looked like me. Especially as I neared the end of my education there." "I found representation from folks that were mentors but not in the organized advising services." "There was a lack of connection to on campus groups that specifically focused on supporting African American students." "Mentors in affinity groups were much more helpful." "Advising was very transactional and not humanistic." "Without other resources to find out about what was going on I would have wasted a lot of time trying to find out or may have never found out." "They should be the gateway to everything else the campus has to offer."
Advisor training	Biases Communication Competencies/knowledge Cultural competence Interpersonal skills Situational training	" Training on microaggressions." "Also, having environmental bias training would be helpful." "Understanding different types of students and learning to communicate with them in a way that is not demeaning." "I would want to create an environment that allows for open conversation." "I think social competence training would be helpful to different types of students." "Situational training to see how people respond instead of just reading and reciting answers from a script." "Training that enhances interpersonal skills." "Advisors knowledge and ability to connect the student with other campus resources."

Theme	Codes	Participants' Quotes
		"I felt like they were there to help but not really to retain." "Training on how to deal with underrepresented populations."
Comprehensive advising	Customization Holistic Interactive Informative Mandatory Opportunity awareness Relationship Resources Supportive	"They should customize their interactions based on each student's uniqueness." "There were so many resources that were available that I didn't find out about until my junior year. So having an advisor to inform students of the various resources early." " There should be mandatory check ins." "It is hard to build a relationship when you have a different advisor all the time." "It would have been nice to start with one advisor that stays with you throughout your time on campus." "Knowing about opportunities and resources early during your freshman year would be helpful." "As a first generation student I didn't know anything about college." "I spent a lot of time asking friends and their parents that had gone to college." "More information on various topics versus the short answers without the whys and hows." "I felt like I could have used more advising in my final year. But because it was so general I just stopped going." "It wasn't customized or geared to me personally."

Results

The findings of this study concerned the experiences of the five participants, all of whom have either graduated or are on track to graduate. All data were obtained from the transcribed interviews. Audio taping of participants was done to ensure accuracy. Each participant received a copy of their transcript and was asked to review it as a member check for accuracy. During the interviews, each participant shared their challenges navigating courses and programs offered on campus. Emergent themes arose from the interviews based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. All of the themes are highlighted and further expanded upon in this section. Two research questions ultimately became one research question when gender was removed due to a low participation rate. That research question provided the focus and became the basis to guide this study.

Research Question

What are African American students' perceptions of academic advising support services at BU? Students expressed their feelings about the experiences they encountered when interacting with academic advising support services. From those perceptions, the following themes emerged: sense of belonging, advisor training issues, and comprehensive academic advising services.

Sense of Belonging

Engagement, socialization, and acceptance into a campus community helps to create a sense of belonging. Hotchkins et al. (2021) indicated that the sense of belonging can contribute to positive outcomes and increase retention for African American students

in higher education. It has also been shown by others that a sense of belonging typically creates a greater connection to the campus and can be a predictor of student persistence (Simons & Belton, 2021). Understanding and providing resources to address the needs of the African American student population may be instrumental in helping to create an environment that is welcoming and promotes student success.

Sense of belonging can be accomplished in a myriad of ways. It can be accomplished through the interaction with other minority peer groups that can help to create a connection to the college environment (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Career and other professionally related groups include the National Black Association of Accountants, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the National Black Nurses Association. Additionally, African American representation in the administration, faculty, staff, and student population can also create a sense of belonging and connectedness to a campus. In fact, in the interviews, participants mentioned on multiple occasions that these types of professional groups were instrumental in their ability to persist to graduation.

Participant 2 stated, "It wasn't like the advisor was there to connect you to anything. No, they didn't give you information on clubs or other groups like that on campus." Participant 8 expressed the feeling of "Advising being very transactional and not humanistic. I feel like they are there to help but not really retain."
Another participant, 46, stated:

> The role of academic advising support services seems separate from the rest of campus. You have to connect with other resources on campus to find a sense of belonging. It seemed to be geared towards when and which classes I should take

not really feeling a sense of the campus. Without other resources to find out about what was on campus I would have wasted a lot of time trying to find out or may have never found out.

Participant 71 explained:

The African American themed housing gave me that sense of belonging. The two Black resident advisors kind of helped you out and gave you someone to bounce ideas off of, share your experiences the good and bad with your community that lives really close to you. And this program does it best to make sure that you're successful which means they do bring advisors in sometimes to talk to you.

African American students often feel disconnected on university campuses and suffer from a sense of not belonging (Lewis, 2019). In fact, some universities have recognized the disconnection and have institutionalized positions that serve as advisors/mentors to holistically guide students and help them persist to graduation (Gildehaus et al., 2019). Feeling a sense of belonging can be instrumental in a student's ability to feel connected to the campus and their ability to persist to graduation.

Advisor Training

It is important for advisors to have training that creates better communication, empathy, and self-evaluation skills. Training advisors to deliver information effectively and understanding the impact of the student advisor is critical to emphasize in the training plan (McDonald, 2019). Well-trained advisors are needed to foster positive relationships with a changing student population that can positively impact student success, retention, and graduation rates. Participant 2 stated, "The advisors could benefit from cultural and

environmental bias training. I also feel like they should keep in mind that what is obvious to them may not be so obvious to others." Participant 8 stated, "I think the advisors should have more training to make them more aware of the different identities that black students possess, cultural competency." Participant 71 stated, "Advisors should have communication and social competence training." Although not all participants' experiences were exactly the same, many agreed that cultural competency is an area of concern that needs to be emphasized in the training plan for advisors. Additionally, Participant 71 had a negative experience with academic advising support services and stopped using their services. Participant 71 still graduated but attributed the additional year of study at the university to the negative experience they encountered. They believed that if the experience had been a positive one, it would have negated their need to find out so many things on their own. Hence, they felt they would not have made so many mistakes and would have graduated on time, as the other participants did.

Comprehensive Academic Advising Services

A more holistic approach to advising services may be needed to address the needs of the African American student population. Chamberlain and Burnside (2021) asserted that there is not one way to meet the needs of African American college students but rather an assessment of the needs is foundational in the creation of a more customized approach. There are several methods of advising that have been instrumental in providing a holistic approach. Proactive advising is one method of providing a more customized approach with the advisor initiating the conversation and creating the relationship with the student (Van Jura, 2021). The foundational idea behind this type of advising is to

anticipate the needs of the students and build a network within the institution to support those needs as developed by Glennen (1975). Comprehensive academic advising is more than just making sure the student has identified the proper courses to complete a particular degree path. The connections and relationships that are formed during the college experience is vital to the growth process of the students (Strawn, 2021). This experience can be particularly important when dealing with those who may not be familiar with the higher education system and how to navigate within a college campus environment. According to Miller et al. (2020), colleges and universities that have instituted comprehensive advising models have not only experienced an increase in degree attainment but also an increase in units taken and the number of students that go on to do postgraduate work. Participant 8 stated, "I felt like advising was like the Department of Motor Vehicles, it is like they want to help and they are there to help but they are not there to really retain."

Participant 46 stated:

> I wasn't really sure how everything was supposed to go when I interacted with my advisor. Since the advisor never reached out to me. I kind of started to develop my own schedule for my academic career without knowing that there was an academic advisor that would help me or guide me through that.

Participant 69 stated, "It would there should be mandatory check-ins with your advisors and have them follow you throughout your whole entire journey." Participant 71 stated, "I think if I was steered in a positive and good direction from the beginning it would have been a more successful transition. From the beginning my grades would not have

tanked." There was a common feeling among most of the participants that advisors should be more proactive in developing the relationship with students. In doing so, the relationship building would begin early and may positively affect student outcomes in a timely and effective way.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies require that the components of trustworthiness be explicitly supported through an array of steps used throughout the research process. The criteria to create this validity require that the researcher establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked each of the participants to review their transcripts for accuracy and completeness and to provide any feedback they deemed necessary to add credibility. This process is a form of member checking and is used to ensure that the interpretation of the participants' interviews accurately reflected their views and perceptions. According to Carl and Carl (2016), this process involves the accurate identification of major findings and themes from the data analysis. Once credibility has been established then dependability can occur.

The ability of the study to be applicable to other "broader contexts while still maintaining context-specific richness" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 189) is one way to describe transferability. In this study, one strategy used to ensure transferability was obtained through a thorough description of the interview setting with each participant. Another strategy used was to provide pertinent details related to the participants profile and the inclusion of quotes from each of the African American students related to their perceptions. This data were obtained from the student participants through audio

recordings which was transcribed and reviewed by each participant. Each participant had to meet the criterion outlined in the study, which was to be an African American college student in attendance at BU from Fall 2017 to Fall 2021.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), dependability refers to the method of data collection and how that methodology is constructed to ascertain viable information. To ensure dependability, I followed the step-by-step process discussed in the research methodology section in Chapter 3. I used an interview protocol (Appendix C), which was reviewed by experts in the field and conducted semistructured interviews with each of the participants. I conducted each interview via Zoom communication software for visual contact, audio recorded with an external device, transcribed using Microsoft Word's transcribe feature, and analyzed each interview using NVivo software. I took notes during and after each interview to document my observations and feelings related to the participants' interviews.

Colorafi and Evans (2016) agreed that impartiality and objectivity are used to describe confirmability. Awareness of my personal biases and beliefs helped to provide me consciousness and reflective information. I was a first generation college student admitted through an equal opportunity program which provided a diverse academic advising support program. So, I recognized through my journaling that my personal experience with academic advising support services may have been different than the those of the students that participated in this study. Additionally, I was a transfer student, which provided a different perspective than those of the participants in this study, who were all of students at one four-year university. According to Billups (2021), self-

questioning and self-understanding demonstrate the practice of reflexivity and is a common strategy that supports trustworthiness. Documenting my personal biases and beliefs created confirmability that the study results reflected the views of the participants and not those of the researcher.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore African American students' experiences with academic advising support services at BU. The participants expressed their thoughts and perceptions. Participant responses helped to better understand the benefits and the challenges of working with advisors. I developed semi-structured interview questions that were designed to explore the experiences of African American students with academic advising services at BU. The research question guided the study and formed the basis for the development of the interview questions.

Three themes emerged from the participants' responses to the interview questions. These themes were sense of belonging, lack of advisors, advisor training, and comprehensive academic advising models. The findings from these themes indicate a need to add strategies to increase the sense of belonging, add a greater emphasis on cultural competencies in the advisor training, and institute a more comprehensive advising model.

In Chapter 5, I provide an analysis and my interpretation of study findings via the lens of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the conceptual framework, and the recommendations for practical use and future research. I discuss the implications for

positive social change from the findings of this study and recommendations on how it can increase student success for African American students at BU.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Colleges and universities typically offer academic advising services that contribute to student success which increases retention and graduation rates. Academic advising has been known to benefit students with their higher education and graduation goals (Troxel, 2018). According to Zargus et al. (2018), academic advising positively impacts graduation rates. African American students can experience increased graduation rates when certain types of academic advising methods are institutionalized (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Advising methods may be a key component in the customization of services focused on the unique needs of a diverse student population to increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore African American students' perceptions of academic advising support services at BU. This study was designed to provide a deeper understanding of African American students' academic advising experiences and how those experiences can be improved to better support and increase graduation rates for this population. Although research has been conducted on advisement services in higher education institutions, there is limited research related to the experiences of African American students with academic advising.

The findings of this study originated from the perceptions of the participants in their interactions with academic advising support services while in attendance at BU. The data analysis was conducted and from the participants interview responses and three themes emerged: sense of belonging, advisor training issues, and comprehensive academic advising. The participants' responses to the interview questions were analyzed

and they had varying perceptions on how academic support services contributed to their success while in attendance at BU. They all agreed that regardless of their perception of academic support services, it is a resource that benefits the entire student population. The principles of Tinto (1997, 2012, 2017) suggests that student engagement is an important aspect and has a positive impact on student success. This socialization process in the academic environment often begins with the academic advisor and has been shown to have an impact on retention and persistence (Tinto, 1997).

While analyzing the responses to the interviews, I reflected on the principles of Tinto's model of student persistence to provide more in-depth knowledge of the institutional influences that may impact persistence to graduation for African American students. In this chapter, I interpret the findings, address the limitations of the study, make recommendations related to future research in this area, and discuss the implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I interpreted the findings and added to the body of knowledge as it relates to the experiences of African American college students. The conceptual framework and the literature helped me to interpret my findings.

Findings and the Literature

Findings associated with certain aspects identified in the literature helped to explain and add context to the participants' experiences with academic advising support services. Many of the participants' responses from the African American college students confirmed the information from the literature review. I discussed the themes related to a

sense of belonging, advising training issues, and comprehensive academic advising services. Details on these themes were presented in Chapter 4.

The conceptual framework of Tinto's theory on student persistence provided the basis for understanding retention and persistence and the role of the academic advisor in the process. The positive impact of socialization in the academic environment, which often begins with the academic advisor, helps to create a sense of belonging at the institution (Tinto, 1997). The literature review indicated that a sense of belonging was a very important aspect of the college experience for African American college students. For example, Thelamour (2019) noted that the lack of feelings of closeness or connectedness to the campus environment has often been expressed by students of color. Lewis et al. (2019) considered the implications of African American students and how a sense of belonging through campus experiences signals the institution's investment in their retention, persistence, and graduation. Hotchkins et al. (2021) stressed the importance of a sense of belonging for African American college students and the positive impact it has on their enrollment satisfaction. Participants 2, 46, and 71 all reported that their sense of belonging came from other resources on campus and not from academic advising support services. In other words, African American college students who participated in this study found a sense of belonging in other ways. Mentoring groups, career-focused organizations, and other entities connected to the institution were instrumental in fostering connectedness and creating a social network within the campus community. Specifically, organizations like the National Association for Black

Engineers, affinity-focused housing, and other affinity groups and clubs were instrumental in creating a sense of belonging for the participants of this study.

In this study, relating to and addressing the unique needs of the African American college student was imperative to integrate into the academic advising plan. The literature supported the roles and contributions that academic advisors should make to support student learning outcomes. The participants collectively expressed the need for advisors to obtain training related.to cultural competency, communication skills, and other interpersonal skills. Zargus et al. (2019) emphasized the advisor's role in ensuring a quality advising experience for the students they advise. Additionally, a more holistic approach to the advising experience for today's diverse student population is needed to address them based on their individual needs. Topics that address cultural and social awareness related to diverse student populations are important and should be a foundational component of the advisor training plan at BU. Therefore, being aware of different social and cultural backgrounds and of ways to communicate that help to foster positive relationships between the student and the advisor.

The literature review explored the positive aspects of various advising methods and how they impacted the African American college students' experience with academic advising support services. For example, the proactive and intrusive method of advising has shown progress in promoting student success for those students from diverse backgrounds. The participants in the study were adamant that advising should be done using a holistic approach that is customized to fit each student's unique situation. One

size does not fit all, and the techniques and approaches should be customized based on the individual student's needs.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study helped me to better understand the perceptions of African American college students with academic advising services, there were limitations. The first limitation was the small sample size of participants, given the small overall population of African American students at BU. An increased sample size would expand the richness of the information gained from the participant interviews. Another limitation was access to students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although recruitment was virtual, the pandemic may have limited access to students since BU closed for in-person instruction. Additionally, accessing students in person as an alternative interview method was not a possibility during the pandemic years in which the participants for this study were recruited.

Recommendations

The study findings revealed areas that should be addressed to better support the unique needs of African American college students. I have included recommendations that might provide additional insight for future research on the academic advising support services. The recommendations are divided into four categories: Virtual and in-person recruitment efforts, a qualitative study that incorporates interviews with academic advisors, and a qualitative study that incorporates interviews with the academic advising leadership.

Recommendation 1: Virtual and In-Person Recruitment Efforts

This study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic which changed the landscape and possible makeup of students. During non-Covid 19 conditions, a two-pronged approach using virtual and in-person solicitations to obtain a larger sample size could be helpful for a new study. Although Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that there is no set rule about the sample size, they agreed that no longer finding new themes in data is most important. That said, I recommend a larger sample size to increase the richness of the findings and to potentially add more diversity in the demographics of the participants.

Recommendation 2: A Qualitative Study That Incorporates Interviews With Academic Advisors

The student participants spoke about the ways in which advisors supported their success and areas for improvement. It would be helpful to understand the perceptions of the academic advisors and what their ideas are about their roles in how they support student success for the diverse student population. Additionally, learning about challenges they face as advisors may help to customize an advising program that better supports student success for African American college students.

Recommendation 3: A Qualitative Study That Incorporates Interviews With the Academic Advising Leadership

In the study, I discussed the types of advising that should be implemented to support student success for a diverse student population. It also discussed the importance of the students feeling a sense of belonging, areas of improvement in the training of advisors, and a more comprehensive advising approach. This study would provide a

greater understanding of the current models used and the other resources that may be in place to help fill the perceived gap in advising resources.

My study revealed the necessity to better understand the need for continuous improvement as student support services are developed for a diverse student population. These services should include proven strategies that enhance the student experience, contribute to retention, maintain persistence, and support students through graduation. There is a need for further research studies to explore innovative ways to create a sense of belonging, enhance advisor training, and search for holistic advising methods. The research should also explore the unique needs of diverse groups, including African American college students. The outcome of this research should include metrics that assess the effectiveness and success of the services. The assessment should be used as the basis for continuous improvement in the future development or enhancement of academic advising support services. The findings of this study could also be used to inform future research on academic advising support services. It might also provide an even greater level of service to African American college students, which could lead to positive social change through increased graduation rates at BU and other colleges and universities.

Implications

This study provided implications for advising practices in higher educational institutions and for positive social change. Additionally, this study may provide useful information in the development of future academic advising support programs and training of the advisors that staff them at colleges and universities. The development and

training implications for the academic advising support services areas are discussed below.

Implications for Practice in Higher Educational Institutions

Implications of the study are that the perceptions of African American college students may be instrumental in providing insight into best practices that may be developed to best support this student population. Participant 8 expressed the feeling of "Advising being very transactional and not humanistic. I feel like they are there to help but not really retain." An extensive look into how the BU campus can offer more holistic programming in academic advising support services to handle the unique needs of a diverse student population. Uddin (2020) discussed the benefits of a more holistic approach as a best practice for advising which can ensure student retention and persistence. Advising should be a place that helps foster a holistic environment that connects African American students to other resources that the campus may offer. Resources include peer groups, affinity group connections, and other organizations that would like to engage with this student population. Tinto (2012) determined that a sense of belonging and integration into the campus community can positively impact student retention. As mentioned in the conceptual framework section found in Chapter 2, much of Tinto's work focused on the student relationships and their involvement with the university. These connections may be helpful to promote a sense of belonging and engagement with the BU campus community for their African American student population.

Acknowledgment of the differences in the social and cultural aspects of the student population being served should be carefully considered in the development of the advisor training materials. Tinto's work addressed how a sense of belonging does not happen through involvement alone but rather with individuals whose values provide meaning for students within a social and cultural context. There should also be some forethought as to training modules for the advisors, that offer scenario-based training that integrates different types of social and cultural bias exploration. Participant 71 stated, "Advisors should have communication and social competence training." These training modules are meant to be enlightening and create a heightened sense of awareness for the advisor as it relates to the social and cultural norms they may encounter when serving a diverse student population.

In practice, offering a more comprehensive advising model that has a more proactive delivery style may be impactful for student success. The advising models that have shown the greatest promise with these groups are those that are more proactive in nature. Currently, the advising model appears to be the prescriptive model which was described in Chapter 2. It is typically informational and helps guide students through course selection to ensure they remain on the pathway to degree completion. However, the proactive or intrusive method also discussed in Chapter 2 may be more appropriate for diverse student populations to ensure their needs are met. This method is more hands-on and has been shown to increase student success, especially when it integrates proactive communication and connection.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This basic qualitative study explored the perceptions of African American college students with academic advising support services. Participant 46 stated that "the role of academic advising services seems separate from the rest of the campus." Their perceptions provide insight into areas of the profession that should be further explored and addressed. The themes that emerged from the participants' responses to the interview questions can be used to develop better academic advising support programs for African American students as well as other diverse college student populations. Some institutions have institutionalized personnel to serve as advisors and mentors to address these issues and provide a holistic environment to ensure student success (Gildehaus et al., 2019). A sense of belonging is ensured by having well-equipped advisors and implementing a comprehensive program that addresses the needs of the students in a holistic manner. As suggested in the conceptual framework, institutional efforts to capture issues related to a diverse student body is necessary to better support student success (Tinto, 1975, 2012). Institutionalizing these aspects in the academic advising support services may positively influence retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Additionally, these enhancements to academic advising support services will affect positive social change at BU and enhance the student experience.

An enhanced student experience can create positive social change through greater engagement and connectedness with the campus community. Academic advising support services can serve as a resource for academic pathways and also a resource for other impactful programs such as the academic excellence and the career success programs on

the BU campus. A more proactive and comprehensive way of delivering support services may increase the retention, persistence, and graduation rates at colleges and universities.

Conclusion

Academic advising support services provide needed services to college students to ensure they stay on track and graduate. How the services are delivered and the type of advising model used varies by institution. Today's diverse populations of colleges and universities warrant an in-depth look at the unique needs of these students. In this study, I focus on the unique needs of African American students and their experiences with academic advising support services. Although there is a myriad of research that has been done on academic advising, the various types of academic advising models, and how advising affects the student experience. Additional work needs to be done to address and further understand the perceptions of African American college students and their interactions with academic advising support services.

The results of this study showed that African American college students experiences are affected by a sense of belonging, advisor training issues, and the need for comprehensive academic advising services. In the results of my study, I showed that the perceptions of African American college students may vary. However, these student have unique needs and may require more customized academic advising support services. An assessment of how academic advising support services interacts with African American students and which advising methods are used is essential.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY
You will receive a $25 Amazon Gift Certificate

- **You are invited to be a participant in a research study exploring how Academic Advising Support Services can help to increase the graduation rates for African American college students.**

- **Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns: Yolanda Anglin, Walden University Doctoral Candidate yolanda.anglin@waldenu.edu**

This study is being conducted by Yolanda Anglin, a doctoral candidate at Walden University.

If you are selected, you then will be contacted to arrange a 1:1 recorded interview via zoom on a date and time convenient for you.

The information obtained during the recorded interview will be confidential

You will be placed on a participant list and individuals will be randomly selected to participate.

After five years the locked data acquired from the interview will be destroyed.

- *The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of African American students' academic advisement experiences and how those experiences can be improved to better support and increase graduation rates for this population.*

- *After your interview is transcribed you will be requested to review the transcripts of your interview to ensure its accuracy as is estimated to take less than 20 minutes.*

- *After five years the locked data acquired from the interview will be destroyed.*

IRB Approval #02-03-22-0742652

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Dear [Participant's Name],

You are invited to be a participant in a research study exploring how advising support services can help to increase the graduation rates for African American college students. This study is being conducted by Yolanda Anglin, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of African American students' academic advisement experiences and how those experiences can be improved to better support and increase graduation rates for this population.

If you decide to participate in this study please contact me at the email address provided in the signature line of this email. You will be placed on a participant list and individuals will be randomly selected to participate. If you are selected, you then will be contacted to arrange a 1:1 recorded interview via Zoom on a date and time convenient for you. After your interview is transcribed you will be requested to review the transcripts of your interview to ensure its accuracy as is estimated to take less than 20 minutes.

After a date, time, and meeting ID of the Zoom meeting is confirmed, you will receive an informed consent form to read, sign and return. Your participation in the study will be validated once the informed consent form is signed and returned. The information obtained during the recorded interview will be confidential and anonymous. After 5 years the locked data acquired from the interview will be destroyed. For your participation you will receive a $25 gift certificate after you have had an opportunity to review your transcripts for content and accuracy.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and hope you will decide to participate in the study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Regards,
Yolanda Anglin
Walden University Doctoral Candidate
E-Mail: █████████████████████

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interviewer No:	Date:
Time:	Meeting via:

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. My name is Yolanda Anglin and I am a doctoral candidate working to complete a project study to complete my doctoral requirements for my EdD in Higher Education Leadership and Management. Again, thank you for agreeing to participant in this effort. Before we start, I would like to review a few items.

The purpose of this study is to explore African American students' perceptions about academic advisement at BU. The study is designed to provide a deeper understanding of African American students' academic advisement experiences and how those experiences can be improved to better support and increase graduation rates for this population. In other words, what can be done to create an advising experiences that will foster student success for African American students?

There are 10 questions with additional probing questions to gain a better understanding of your experiences. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes from the time we begin.

Additionally, I would like your permission to record this interview. Recording it will ensure I capture the interview accurately as I prepare my report of the findings. Please let me know if you have concerns about me recording this session. I can also thorough notes to make sure I capture this interview accurately. You can also opt not to continue this process as you are under no obligation to continue. You may also stop this interview for any reason at any time.

This interview will be kept confidential, and instead of your name a number will be assigned to this interview. Rest assured that your name will not appear in any of the data collected. Interview data will be locked in a safe in my home office.

As a reminder, you have signed and dated a consent form via e-mail agreeing to participate in this study. As the doctoral candidate for this project study, African American Students' Perceptions of Academic Advisement at a California University, I have acknowledged your consent form via e-mail to confirm that we both agree to continue in this process together.

Again, your participation is entirely voluntary. Before we start, what questions do you have? Then if you are ready, we can proceed.

1. How were you first introduced to advising support services?

2. How do you feel when you interact with advising support services?

3. How can advisors better serve the unique needs of African American students?

4. As an African American student, what were some of your unique needs that you may have had and either discussed with an advising support services advisor or you wished you could have discussed with them?

5. What would be the experience that you would want students to remember or gain from their interaction with you if you were an advisor?

6. Imagine you were the administrator in charge of the advising center what kind of training would you implement for your advisors?

7. Research has shown that advising support services is instrumental in student success. How has or did advising support services influence your success?

8. Based on your experiences with advising support services, what would have been different had you not met with them?

9. Based on your experience with advising support services was there a sense of belonging to the campus community?

10. What suggestions do you have that might increase the efficiency and effectiveness of advising support services to increase student success?

Appendix D: Themes by Research Question

Research Question	Themes by Research Question	Topics that Emerged
1. What are African American students' perceptions about academic advising support services at Blendenburg University?	1. Sense of Belonging	Sense of Belonging • Not feeling connected to the institution • Seeing others that look like me • Feelings of isolation • Feelings of being misunderstood
	2. Advisor Training Issues	Advisor Training Issues • Cultural competency • Communication skills • Empathy training • Self-Evaluation skills
	3. Comprehensive Academic Advising Services	Comprehensive Academic Advising Services • Holistic approach • Advisor initiated contact • Mandatory check-ins • Relationship building