


2016

# Improving Graduate Students' Satisfaction with Academic Advising

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*Walden University*

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Jamie Green

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Improving Graduate Students' Satisfaction with Academic Advising

by

Jamie L. Green

MAT, The University of Memphis, 2009

BS, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

July 2016

## Abstract

Academic advising is associated with increased student retention and academic success. However, advising at an urban graduate school of education in Tennessee has been criticized for limited advisor availability, poor communication, and lack of advising knowledge. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons for student satisfaction or dissatisfaction and to identify techniques to improve academic advising. This study was guided by the conceptual frameworks of Kelly's personal construct theory and Daloz's psycho-developmental perspective. The research question addressed the perceived role of academic advisors that graduate students associated with academic success. The data were collected using 4 focus groups. Group 1 consisted of 10 graduate students; group 2 included 5 professors; group 3 was comprised of 2 advisors; group 4 consisted of 3 administrators. A thematic analysis was performed on the data, and member checking was used to improve data quality. Findings revealed that students were satisfied with the positive attitude of advisors, but were dissatisfied with advisors' relational skills and knowledge of college programs. Findings also revealed that students, professors, and administrators were dissatisfied with advisor's limited availability and lack of training. Based on these research findings, a 3-day professional development workshop for advisors was developed. The workshop included training about techniques to improve advisor communication skills and knowledge of effective advising practices. Implementation of this professional development workshop could bring about positive social change by improving the effectiveness of the advising program and the quality of graduates.

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## Dedication

This doctoral project study is dedicated to my mother and my late grandparents. Thank you so much for the many years of love, support, and encouragement. I would also like to dedicate this to my friends who encouraged me along my educational journey.

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## Section 1: The Problem

In the current setting of challenging enrollments, student diversity, and diminishing budgets, institutions of higher education place a great deal of emphasis on degree completion and student success. Faculty, staff, and administrators at U.S. colleges and universities recognize the importance of graduate student advising (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Feghali, Zbib, & Hallal, 2011). Poor graduate student satisfaction with advising may lead to attrition, which refers to students who withdraw from the college or university without successful completion (Applegate, 2012; Dibia & Obi, 2013; Park, Berry, & Edwards, 2011). Faculty, staff, and administrators view advising as important because advisors can foster a positive connection with students and are an integral part of the higher education process (Arteaga, 2015; Battin, 2014). Other outcomes associated with academic advising are workforce preparation and development of students' problem-solving skills (Lepper, 2014; Tladi, 2013). Although Riverside College, which was the pseudonym for the actual college in this study, prides itself on offering a unique learning environment for working graduate students, its students reported very low satisfaction with the College's advising program (██████████ website, 2015). Riverside College students were also not satisfied with the academic advisors' resources, knowledge about course offerings, and communication.

### **Local Problem**

The problem that this project study addressed was that a high number of students were dissatisfied with Riverside College's academic advising program as compared to survey results for previous years from the Adult Learner Focused Institution ([ALFI];

Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). Despite various interventions made by the advisors such as meetings and appointments with students, emails, informative websites, praxis workshops, and event calendars, students' level of satisfaction with advising in 2015 was still lower than in previous years (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). According to the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (2015), little research had been done to explore the reasons behind the lack of student satisfaction with the advising process and how this could be improved. Riverside College had reviewed data from the ALFI surveys, but it had not created a plan of action to improve students' satisfaction with academic advising (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015).

Researchers also reported that certain student characteristics could also contribute to their view that the advising program was ineffective. Cao (2012) pointed out that graduate students procrastinate more than undergraduate students, often times because they have a greater fear of failure, task averseness, reading ability, and self-efficacy. Conversely, a graduate advising program could be tailored to help students focus on their academic goals and overcome their fears of failure. Daniel (1992) found that nontraditional graduate students had special needs in all areas of their college experience, especially in academic advisement, which linked to retention and student satisfaction. Because Riverside College serves nontraditional graduate students, the College viewed it as crucial to keeping graduate students satisfied with advising program to improve student retention and recruitment (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015).

Riverside College's problem with advising graduate students illustrated problems that other U.S. colleges and universities have with advising at the graduate level in that the results of the ALFI survey (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015) indicated that students locally and nationally were unsure of academic advisors' roles and responsibilities. Students at Riverside College who completed the ALFI survey also concluded that academic advisors lacked the training to provide students with accurate information (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). When the advisor lacks knowledge of the degree programs offered, advising becomes more difficult; furthermore, undermining the advising program (Stebbleton, Soria, Alexio, & Huesman, 2013; Trowler, 2013). They also did not view academic advisors as being actively involved in the academic advising process (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). These results are supported by past scholarly research on students' satisfaction with academic advising (Applegate, 2012; Baharudin, Murad, & Mat, 2013). According to Behrens (2013) and Dichaba (2013), graduate students concluded that academic advisors did not take full responsibility for their professional duties. Students also viewed many advisors as lacking the training and preparation to perform the role of academic advisor (Arif & Ilyas, 2012; Kim & Sax, 2014; O'Keeffe, 2013). Overall, students viewed some academic advisors as lacking advising skills.

Seventy percent of the students at Riverside College who responded to the ALFI survey were not completely satisfied with academic advising (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). Students who responded to the survey felt that advisors needed to be more available and better trained (Office of Institutional Planning



and Effectiveness, 2015). The ALFI survey results were consistent with other studies about graduate students' satisfaction with academic advising (Siming, Niamatullah, Xu, & Shaf, 2015; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Thus, the purpose of my qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of the graduate students' dissatisfaction with academic advising at Riverside College. I hope to use this knowledge to improve student satisfaction with academic advising. This could be met by evaluating the advising program and seek improvement on students' satisfaction.

### **Rationale**

The rationale or justification for the problem choice is based on two factors. The first is the local problem. The second is evidence from the professional literature. Both factors are discussed in this section.

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

At Riverside College, graduate students' satisfaction with the advising program is measured each semester by their responses to questions on the ALFI survey administered by the Office of Institutional Planning about their impression of their academic advisors. The questions are on a Likert scale and range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questions include the students' opinion about their advisors' knowledge of programs, course information, the advisors' role, and the advisors' ability to build a relationship with the student.

ALFI survey results showed low student satisfaction at Riverside College with the advising program for 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). The surveys revealed that only 30% of the students enrolled at

Riverside College were satisfied with the advising program, which was unacceptably low according to Riverside College. According to Riverside College, results lower than 60% of students being satisfied with the advising program is unacceptable (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015). The purpose of this study was to learn how to improve student satisfaction with academic advising.

Low student satisfaction is important because it can have a negative effect on the institution. Low student satisfaction with academic advising became an issue for Riverside College. Based on my review of the literature, I concluded that low satisfaction with academic advising could reduce support from alumni, the public, and the government for Riverside College. Hale, Graham, and Johnson (2009) and Vanderbout (2010) studied colleges and universities that have high levels of students' satisfaction with their advising programs. The researchers found that these institutions have more financial support from their alumni, the public, and the government. A goal of this study was to identify the influential aspects leading to improving students' perceptions.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Improving enrollment, retaining students, and having a high student success rate are important for institutions of higher education. Kim and Sax (2014), O'Keeffe (2013), and Park, Berry, and Edwards (2011) found that negligent, and unsupportive advising makes colleges and universities more susceptible to student attrition, which refers to students withdrawing before graduation. Attrition is a cause of concern for institutions of higher education because it is costly as the costs to recruit students is higher than the cost to retain existing students (Waters, White, Wang, & Murray, 2015; White, 2015). Also,

some colleges and universities have to rely on tuition and fees to support programming, which can be negatively affected by attrition (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013; Erford & Crockett, 2012). Lack of attention from academic advisors is also heavily related to student attrition (Arif & Ilyas, 2012; Hu, Hung, & Ching, 2014). Pfund, Rogan, Burnham and Norcross (2013) found that students may drop out of graduate school if they view that their academic advisors do not care about them and they would not get necessary academic advice about courses and programs. Ineffective and negligent advisors can be detrimental to advising program and a have potential negative effects on colleges and universities.

Student-advisor relationships impact student satisfaction with advising programs. Lack of frequent interaction and close working relationships between students and academic advisors can be detrimental to a students' educational experience (Siming et al., 2015; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Also, there is a strong correlation between academic advising and student retention (Kim & Lundberg, 2015; Smith & Allen 2014). Furthermore, Hu, Hung, & Ching (2014) reported that lack of student-advisor interaction could influence student persistence. If students do not have consistent positive interactions with their academic advisor, this could have a negative effect on the advising program and the institution as a whole.

There is a growing need to understand and improve the issues students have with academic advising programs. Increased focus on advising and mentoring issues improved the quality of research conducted on this topic because institutions of higher education are now acknowledging the importance of academic advising (Cook, 2009). Bitz (2010)

and Schlosser, Lyons, Talleyrand, Kim, and Johnson (2010) found that examining advising programs provides academic advisors and administrators with a fuller understanding of the advising process. This examination also provides a basis for interventions. Advisors and their students who share similar interests may have a more positive and satisfying experience. Gill, Russell, and Rayfield (2012) and Schwartz and Holloway (2012) found that student satisfaction with advising influences students' dedication to their institution. Academic advising sustains more solid relationships between students and faculty, which in turn makes the advisor's job an important factor in the development of students' perceptions of the advising program and a successful collegiate experience (Coll & Draves, 2009). Shcokley-Zalabak (2012) described a successful college experience as students being satisfied with their advising program, passing all courses with a "C" or better, and wanting to complete their degree at the same institution they started. Advising is important in a student's process to degree completion.

Barnes, Williams, and Archer (2010) found three advisor characteristics in successful advising programs. These characteristics include humanizing the practice of academic advising, acknowledging those who take on a variety of approaches to advising, and being proactive. Successful advising programs ensure that academic advisors are accessible, helpful, sociable, and caring. According to Museus and Rovello (2010) and Siegel (2011), the rewards and significance of providing excellent academic advising should be at the forefront for all institutions of higher education. Jaeger, Sandmann, and Kim (2011) and Starling and Miller (2011) explained that communication between a student and an advisor is beneficial to both parties involved. With student satisfaction per

advising being an important part of college (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2013), the need for orderly, continuous advising and various guided outlooks on the graduate level process are prominent factors when determining graduate students' level of satisfaction (Roberts, Gentry, & Townsend, 2009). For academic advising programs to be successful, academic advisors must be relatable to the students in some capacity and the program must be monitored for effectiveness on a continual basis.

Students' perception of an advising program could impact their views of the institution. Drake (2013) reported that graduate advisors can affect students' perception of their institution. Horton (2010) found that advisors in higher education profoundly affect students' attitudes of their institutions, which could relate to retention. Literature shows that students having interaction with a noteworthy person within the institution of higher education is a vital element in a student's choice to continue at that institution (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). According to Strapp and Farr (2010), academic advising programs could expedite academic achievement by promoting the idea of increasing the level of student involvement and improving graduate students' perception.

Graduate students often vocalize their dissatisfaction with academic advising. Buissink-Smith, Spronken-Smith, and Walker (2010) found that graduate students often discussed their dissatisfaction with academic advising within their student groups. In cases, a plan of action to improve advising is made when administrators and advising staff find that the dissatisfaction could negatively affect the institution. Other research conducted on alumni that were dissatisfied with their graduate advising programs from institutions of higher education took those results and improved the programs (Bosshart,

Wentz, & Heller, 2009). If students' dissatisfaction with advising could become detrimental to a college or university, then it is important to try to improve students' satisfaction to get support from potential alumni. Students may discuss amongst themselves about their dissatisfaction with advising, but the change can only be implemented when administrators and academic advisors understand that this issue has to be improved.

The primary purpose of my study was to gain a deeper understanding of Riverside College students' reasons for being dissatisfied with academic advising. A broader goal was to provide insight about how to improve student satisfaction with advising. The knowledge yielded by my research may help advisors and administrators at Riverside College and at other U.S. colleges and universities to increase student satisfaction with academic advising, which may help increase student academic achievement and retention.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following words and expressions were used in this study:

*Academic advising:* A practice in which individuals working in education intermingle with students as they progress through their studies. Advising helps students better understand what choices they should make and follow actions to attain their learning and professional goals (Roberts & Styron, 2010).

*Academic advisor:* A person who coaches students to become active in their choices and has a positive impact on related outcomes (Elrich, Russ-Eft, 2011; McClellan & Moser, 2011; Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012).

*Approachability:* It involves faculty making themselves available and accessible both inside and outside class, especially at key junctures when students need them (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Roberts & Styron, 2010).

*Nontraditional graduate student:* Adult learners, workers, and part-time students who are between the ages of 25 and 50, and are financially independent (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

*Student satisfaction:* The favorability of a student's experiences associated with education (Letcher & Neves, 2010).

### **Significance of the Study**

One of the goals for institutions of higher education is to retain students. Graduate student retention, which is a primary alarm for establishments of post-secondary institutions, is positively linked to satisfaction with academics (Bai & Pan, 2009). Paul et al. (2012) stated that research repeatedly supports that academic advisors serve a crucial position in retaining and producing persistent, successful students. A project study on the impact advising programs have on students' satisfaction is significant for several reasons. If results of satisfaction improved with Riverside College's advising program, then this would be a positive reflection on the school that could bring support from the alumni, the public, and the government where applicable. Rabovsky (2012) and Vanderbout (2010) found that colleges and universities that have effective advising programs and students' satisfaction with their school were positive have more financial support from their alumni, the public, and the government. Colleges and universities increasingly rely on student retention to as a financial resource and as a tool to stimulate alumni contributions.

It is important for graduate students to understand that they are valued by the institution. Grites (2013) and White and Schulenberg (2012) found that graduate student satisfaction helps students realize that they belong and are a great asset to the school. An effective academic advising program could potentially help students come to the conclusion that they are important and that they matter. Graduate students could recruit their colleagues and friends to apply for this college due to its improved reputation and great rapport with its students. The more appealing Riverside College becomes, the better its reputation and its ability to attract students. This appeal could mean more federal funds for Riverside College, more alumni support, positive press from the public, and producing better-prepared students for the workforce. Riverside College could intentionally design its institutional structure based on the data in order to maximize its potential in providing an excellent academic advising program experience to its students.

If this problem is not addressed and studied thoroughly, it could lead students to having a negative attitude about the school due to advisors and administrative team ignoring the issue of students not being satisfied with the academic advising program. Riverside College could appear not organized as far as academic advisors not improving on their skills and responsibilities as an advisor. Low student satisfaction could leave a negative impression on the school where they could lose future recruitment of students due to a negative reputation. In turn, low student satisfaction could lead to a loss of jobs at the institute due to low enrollment and less funding being made available to the school to make improvements to the academic advising program.



It is imperative for students to have a high satisfaction rate with academic advising because graduate student income was the only financial source for Riverside College. Insufficient funds could ultimately lead to the demise of the college. College dropouts have often reported their reasoning for dropping out was due to insufficient advising, which provides a further rationale as to why having a dynamic advising program could greatly assist with retention (Roberts & Styron, 2010). Evaluating student satisfaction with the advising program could ultimately help this institution pinpoint its areas that need growth and expound upon those factors to improve the situation. Results from this project study could generate guidelines to educate academic advisors on how to provide effective support for graduate students at Riverside College.

Graduate student satisfaction with the advising program could potentially improve as students become actively involved in analyzing advisor performance. The college administration could gain a better understanding of how students view the advising experience at Riverside College and more clarity on what matters to students in their academic advising.

The results of this study could help improve graduate students' satisfaction with their advising program. Exploring and examining those perceptions was an important step in devising a plan for effective advising. An advising plan could potentially enhance and improve the overall advising program at Riverside College. Also, an effective advising program may increase the percentage of student satisfaction at Riverside College and improve the confidence of the institution.

### **Research Questions**

Many Riverside College students indicated that they were not satisfied with the advising program. Their dissatisfaction presented many challenges for Riverside College administrators. These challenges included students withdrawing from school and a decrease in student recruitment. This study addressed the following questions:

RQ1: What is the role of academic advisors in promoting student satisfaction at Riverside College?

RQ2: What are the processes of the academic advising program that impact student satisfaction at Riverside College?

By addressing these questions, I sought to better understand student dissatisfaction with the advising process and discover ways to improve the effectiveness of Riverside College's advising program.

### **Review of the Literature**

A review of the literature was completed by navigating Walden University's online library, Education Research Complete database, Sage database, ERIC database, ProQuest Central database, and Google Scholar search engine. Boolean phrases were used, and these important expressions were explored: *academic advising*, *advising styles*, *graduate student satisfaction*, and *advising program success*. This review provided a detailed summary of the literature regarding the conceptual framework of students' perceptions as it related to factors that influenced student development and levels of student satisfaction with academic advising. In order to discuss students' perceptions from a psychological perspective, Daloz's (1999) conceptual framework of the psycho-

developmental perspective and Kelly's (1955) personal construct psychology theory were the areas of focus. Academic advising models were reviewed to provide the reader with an understanding of sorts of advising models that may be applied to advising and also to demonstrate the complexity associated with each model. This literature review also discussed how worldviews may influence perceptions of students and students' satisfaction.

### **Conceptual Framework**

There are two concepts closely related to explaining students' perceptions of their satisfaction with the advising process. The conceptual framework of the psycho-developmental perspective of the transformative learning process explains that advisors are particularly vital at the start of peoples' career or critical moments in their professional lives. In the realm of higher education, the advisor serves in the capacity as a mentor who acts as a guide. The transformational learning process is a dramatic, essential alteration in the way people see themselves and their surroundings in which they reside (Chen, 2014; Zachary, 2011). Daloz (1999) expounded on the idea that the mentor seems to embody what a protégé strives to be as far as being accomplished and offers sound guidance throughout life's journeys. Advisors are sometimes not received well initially because students are unaware of their intentions until they get to know their advisor, which could cause students anxiety.

An academic advisor's approach during an advising session may influence the learning outcomes through the psycho-developmental concept. The psycho-developmental concept concentrates on nontraditional graduate students that are returning

to post-secondary education and offers three maps of mature student growth (Tillema & Van der Westhuizen, 2013). These maps include students knowing how to execute, reaching a desired goal, and monitoring performance. The academic advisors' position and role is to heighten the level of aptitude of their students and conversation is their main vehicle. Phase theories examine similar responsibilities that individuals meet as issues occur linked with maturing (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013). This involves graduate students seeking advice only after an academic issue has occurred. Stage theories examine mental development and the aptitude to reason beyond an individual's social existence (Winter & Procter, 2013). Looking at mentors and scholars take an expedition from inexperienced and simple-minded thinking to multifaceted and relative thinking over an interval is the third map. These maps are supported by Caputi, Viney, Walker, and Crittenden (2012) and Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) who found that graduate students make sense of things and choices in accordance with how they construe the situations in which they find themselves. Rogers and Horrocks (2010) supported that adult learners need to explore other options and expand their thought process in order to grow academically. Academic advisors help graduate students to view situations and opportunities in multiple ways. Graduate students who have a closer relationship involving frequent communication with a mentor are at an advantage in terms of being successful (Tillema & Van der Westhuizen, 2013). The more graduate students are frequently in communication with an academic advisor, the better a student can view their options and come to a clear understand about an educational goal.

Academic advisors can serve as a dual role of mentor to graduate students. The psycho-developmental perspective of the transformational learning process is also reminiscent in Selke and Wong's (1993) Mentoring-Empowered Model for graduate student advisement, which explains the part of the advisor in a growing context that met the requirements of mature learners. The Mentoring-Empowered Model is based upon the psychosocial necessities of mature learners. The model addresses graduate students in the context of communication that emphasizes the mental and evolving needs intrinsic of graduate students based on concepts of graduate student advisement and knowledge centered on mentoring in education.

The academic advisor could also serve as a developer during the advising process. The second concept that provides a useful framework for the advising process was Kelly's (1955) personal construct psychology theory. The advisor acts as a facilitator, and both the graduate student and advisor would question each other about their communication processes and the student's educational route. The personal construct theory probes how people develop concepts they use to order their world based on their experiences (Bryson, 2011). This theory was supported by the research of Hergenhahn and Henley (2013) and McLeod (2013) in that the personal construct theory helps graduate students to use their experiences to formulate a concept. The personal construct theory is a process where individuals methodically build their thoughts and points-of-view, which simplifies their understanding of certain situations (Young, 2011). Kelly's (1955) corollaries are useful tools for making sense of students' perceptions of the advising program (Burr, King, & Butt, 2012; Winter & Procter, 2013). The basic

postulate for Kelly's (1955) corollaries describes when a person's development is internally channeled by the ways in which he or she expects happenings to occur. Experiences help to formulate expectations of an event. Kelly's 11 corollaries describe the different stages individuals experience in order to find meaning to life's experiences and formulate expectations (Kelly, 1955). Table 1 summarizes the 11 corollaries and describes the corresponding type of individual at each corollary.

Table 1

## Corollaries of Kelly's Personal Construct

Corollary	Description
Choice	A person chooses a contrasting paradigm through which there is a grander likelihood for leeway and meaning of a system.
Commonality	One person engages in a structure comparable to that engaged by another; a person's mental processes are comparable to those of the other person.
Construction	A person who anticipates an event through interpreting their duplications.
Dichotomy	A person's construction classification is collected of a fixed quantity of dichotomous paradigms. Each construct can be regarded as bipolar.
Experience	A person's construction arrangement differs as he or she continuously interprets the duplication of occasions.
Fragmentation	A person may positively engage a variation of construction subsystems that are relentlessly discordant with each other.
Hierarchical	Description of person at this corollary.
Individuality	Persons fluctuate from one another in their structure of occasions.
Modulation	The deviation in a person's mental structure is restricted by the flexibility of the constructs within whose variety of ease the deviants are at that time.
Organization	A person evolves into a mental structure accepting ordinal connections amid constructs.
Range	A construct is suitable for the expectation of a limited range of occasions only.

## **Review of the Broader Problem**

**Academic Advising Models.** As with most programs, change is inevitable.

Academic advising has gone through several modifications since its unofficial beginnings in 1636 with the founding of Harvard College (Kuhn & Padak, 2009; Thelin & Hirschy, 2009). When colleges began in the U.S., academic advising did not officially exist. But over the years, the importance of academic advising grew. As the graduate student population and demographics changed throughout the years, academic advising had to be revised to acquaint the students better. Before being given the official title of “academic advising,” the faculty handled the academic and moral needs of the students, and eventually, traditional academic advising processes were viewed as strictly involving scheduling and course selection (Noy & Ray, 2012). The academic advising program has also been known to contribute to the retention and recruitment of an institution. Developmental advising grew from traditional academic advising, which was an effective advising program consisting of both short and long-term goals and planning.

There are four models of academic advising discussed in this section: developmental, prescriptive, intrusive, and appreciative. Riverside College implements these four models of academic advising. Crookston (1972) and Walsh (1979) redefined academic advising so that advisors could assist in student progress that would range beyond an institution. Habley (2009) and Soria and Mumpower (2012) agreed the four models were the main models for academic advising. Habley, Bloom, Robbins, and Robbins (2012) and Keeling (2010) described how developmental advising, which involves personal relationships between the advisor and the student integrating academic,



career, and personal goals; tends to replicate a jointly derived connection between the advisor and the student. Developmental advising assists advisors with evolving effective relationships with students, which empowers students to make personal and academic decisions that promote personal growth (Crookston, 2009). This concept is supported by Green, Coke, and Ballard (2014). Developmental advising involves both students and advisors in a goal-oriented relationship where both parties have to share the responsibility of being actively involved if the relationship is to be successful.

There is a connection between college or university practices and graduate student satisfaction. Mansson and Myers (2012) stated that developmental advising acknowledges the significance of positive cohesion between students and institutes of higher education while focusing on the person holistically and working with students where they are academically and in life. However, developmental advising is criticized by some researchers as not being specific in describing the way students learn within the academic advising setting due to overbearing caseloads with advising (McGill, 2016; White, 2015). These loads left minimal intervals for significant relationship building, no professional development for advisors, unaccustomedness with diversity, and indistinct measuring of its effectiveness (Behrens, 2013; Shana & Abdullah, 2014). Developmental advising can be an appropriate approach, if it meets the student's preference.

Graduate academic advisors serve graduate students. Developmental advising correlates to servant leadership, and that knowledge is the greatest forecaster of developmental advising characteristics (Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011). Manning and Curtis (2012) defined servant leadership as an action where the leader

assists in the process of achieving a common goal by serving as a coach or facilitator and taking ownership in helping to achieve a common goal. The student and advisor collectively deliberate occupation and specialized goals in life holistically for additional growth of the individual as a person and not just as a scholar (Drake, 2013; Wiseman & Messitt, 2010). Booth and Schwartz (2012) and Schwartz and Holloway (2014) supported that advising processes grow equally, strengthening the students' educational and social skills, and that developmental advising normally occurs at the graduate level where advisors are regarded as mentors. Advisors are to guide graduate students to academic success.

Developmental advising has proven to be effective. Research indicated that advisors that engage in developmental advising practices generate greater opportunities for effective advising outcomes (Battin, 2014; Hughey, 2011). Shaffer, Zalewski, and Leveille (2010) and Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2009) defined developmental advising as a practice focusing on human growth that is objectively connected, offered by adult mentors, and the cornerstone between students and advisors that graduate students are known to prefer. Developmental advising can assist graduate students to achieve their academic goals. Elrich and Russ-Eft (2011) and Reybold, Brazer, Schrum, and Corda (2012) noted that developmental advisors are known to accentuate optimistic strengths, capabilities, and services and inspire independence in students by assisting them to set achievable objectives and make informed, coherent choices. By incorporating developmental advising in their daily practice, advisors are better able to foster an environment of graduate student success.

Graduate academic advisors have also been known to use prescriptive advising. Undergraduate schools' advising programs frequently use the prescriptive advising model undergraduate school, but it could also be applied to the master's and doctoral level where advisors offer thorough and precise information to students regarding their educational platforms (Coulter & Mandell, 2012; Duke & Hinzen, 2011). Some graduate students prefer a strict form of advising which does not require a lot of effort on their part and give the advisor more autonomy. It is neutral, authority-based, emphasizes on only answering detailed questions, and does not take personal growth into contemplation (Fedynich & Bain, 2011). Flynn, Brown, Johnson, and Rodger (2011) noted that when work has to be done at home, adult learners tend to make school a low priority, which makes it a necessity to offer prescriptive advising. Prescriptive advising is a strategy for graduate students that need more guidance to achieve their academic goals.

The prescriptive model offers fewer options for graduate students to have autonomy throughout their academic process. This model aids establishments by permitting advisors to standardize their services to the majority of scholars in a limited fashion, forcing scholars to retain rudimentary skills, interests, and beliefs that adapt to the dominant establishment's principles (Drake et al., 2013; Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010). It offers standard procedures for all students. Champlin-Scharff (2010) and Teasley and Buchanan (2013) had shown that prescriptive advising may not be as stimulating to students, but the students are expected to get their basic academic needs met through this model. It can sometimes be helpful to students that need to be reminded to read the assignment and attend lectures, seek out a mentoring relationship, or

involve themselves in an extracurricular activity (Robbins, 2012; Schuh, Jones, & Harper, 2010). The prescriptive model is effective for graduate students that need much structure.

Prescriptive advising is typically practiced by advisors new to the profession. Predominantly practiced by novice advisors, many students expect to receive prescriptive advising; therefore, many advisors never get an opportunity to transition to developmental advising (Conklin, 2009; Hutson, 2013). Some graduate advisors never are offered an opportunity to try other methods of advising because students have grown accustomed to the prescriptive model. Crookston (1972) and Fowler and Boylan (2010) showed that prescriptive advising focuses on rules and course selection. Hurt and McLaughlin (2012) stated that students have practically no autonomy in their academic journey. Academic advisors focus on course selection, academic regulations, and are an authority in the advising session (Fullick, Smith-Jentsch, & Kendall, 2013). Erford and Crockett (2012) also found that prescriptive advising could be clerical in nature where the advisors' role makes decisions centered on institutional policy or a list of requirements.

Prescriptive advising can have a negative perception for a graduate student. When the prescriptive model is in implementation, the student may be viewed as being undeveloped, inexperienced, negligent, in need of strict monitoring, and incompetent in decision-making skills (Crookston, 2009). Graduate students should have more autonomy and be competent in achieving the academic goals. Karge, Phillips, Jessee, and McCabe (2011) found that even though prescriptive advising could have a negative connotation, it could also be a precursor to developmental advising especially for students who self-

advise. Some graduate students can be persuaded to descriptive advising as time passes and they become more comfortable with the advising process. Without recognition and acknowledgment of individual context, prescriptive advising could be inappropriate if made without deliberation of how it has significance for each scholar (Ellis, 2010). Hollis (2009) and Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2013) described prescriptive advising as focusing on outcomes and directing decision making for the student; it addresses crisis immediately without the student gaining self-understanding, and this could be ineffective as it neglects to acknowledge the origin of ineffective educational outcomes. Prescriptive advising allows for the advisor to be in control of that student's academic future without looking at the student holistically. The prescriptive model forms no real relationship of value between the advisor and the student.

Another form of advising is the intrusive model. Initially, intrusive advising represents a blend of progressive and narrow tactics used in the setting of developmental advising; however, advisors took the initiative to make the initial interaction with the student (Campbell, 2013; Morillo, 2012). The advisor initiates the communication with the graduate student, and the relationship builds from that first interaction. Intrusive advising consists of advising students on a consistent schedule with a pre-determined goal in mind, increasing motivation amongst students and reducing the attrition rate (Jenkins, Ellwein, & Wachen, 2009; Jenkins, Wachen, Kerrigan, & Mayer, 2012). This type of advising is consistent and goal-oriented. Intrusive advising consists of individual interaction, creates learner accountability for resolving and decision making, assists students in categorizing fixable sources of poor educational performance, and offers

discussing arrangements for upcoming activities (Portnoi & Kwong, 2011; Schaefer, 2009). The advisor and the graduate student have a shared responsibility in the student's academic success. Advisors use intrusive advising as an intervention piece for students on academic probation (Glennen & Baxley, 1985; McGrath & Burd, 2012). Schwebel, Walburn, Kyle, and Jerrolds (2012) described intrusive advising as being the most involved form of advising outreach, and it is a tactic to lessen attrition in higher education due to educational deficiencies or dissatisfaction. Graduate students are more involved in the advising process when the advisor uses the intrusive model.

Based on the literature, intrusive advising is effective and increases the effort of student-advisor contact. This advising offers quick feedback and could identify support mechanisms to students that are falling off task (Moore, Sener, & Fetzner, 2009). This concept was supported by the research of Baharudin et al. (2013). Glennen and Baxley (1985) described the advisor as being vigorously attentive to students' academic progress. Intrusive advising influences student motivation, and academic and social integration (Jones, 2013). Graduate students are often motivated to succeed when they are a part of the advising process. Intrusive advising differs from developmental and prescriptive advising in that the students are required to meet with their advisors instead of just meeting when they decided it was convenient. Crookston (1972) described intrusive advising as taking a preemptive method where the advisor identifies the students' educational and professional goals, helps in developing talents that nurture scholarly and individual evolution, and reveals partaking in an apprehension of other persons and for

the academic community which was later supported by Burt (2009). Intrusive advising can be useful for some graduate students.

If students know they are obligated to meet with their advisor, students may put more effort into being successful. Interaction with advisors will also give students an opportunity to become more aware of various services offered to assist them in achieving their academic goals. Chowning and Campbell (2009) argued that the goal of intrusive advising is to nurture student-advisor relationships with recurrent contact because the objective is to improve student retention in higher education. Intrusive advising fosters positive graduate student-advisor relationships. Earl (1988) made inferences that by implementing the intrusive model, advising could be very effective in providing the academically at-risk student population with the proper assistance to make progress towards good academic standing, which was later supported by Aiken-Wisniewski (2010). Intrusive advising can assist graduate students that struggle with graduate school. Kroth and Boverie (2009) found that intrusive advisors acquire the skill set of responding to students' situations as a way to strengthen the student-advisor relationship. Intrusive advising requires the advisor to be heavily involved in the student's life, taking the holistic approach, and discussing future goals while building a relationship with that student.

The appreciative advising model target's graduate students' perceptions of advising as well as achieve their goals. Appreciative advising intends to help all scholars by shifting their negative thought process while simultaneously supporting them to discover their true educational potential (Kelly, 2010; Storms, Prada, & Donahue, 2011).

It develops institution networks amongst the student and an advisor and consists of six stages: defuse, discern, vision, plan, distribute, and accept mediocrity (San Martin & Calabrese, 2011). Appreciative advising assists students in altering their opinions into optimism about academic advising since it has the probability to improve student preservation.

The appreciative advising model is helpful, positive, dynamic and holistic. It has a thoughtful influence on the projected multivariate model which includes an all-inclusive set of demographic, intellectual, psychosocial, emotional, and establishment factors (Fitzgerald, Oliver, & Hoxsey, 2010; Tinto, 1986). Calabrese, Hester, Frieson, and Burtchalter (2010) supported appreciative advising exults in the complexities of students, clasps their visions and goals, and creates a strategy to put into works. Grogan (2011) and Storms et al. (2011) provided additional support that in order to make the most of student possibilities, procedures must be set forth by advisors. This model suggests that advisors identify what works for students, and then discuss with the student how to do more of what is working.

Appreciative advising is designed to assist all students by making their thinking pattern positive. Appreciative Inquiry, which was developed by Cooperrider and Whitney (1999), influences appreciative advising. Appreciative Inquiry consists of searching for the greatest in people, governments, and the relevant world in general. Appreciative Inquiry involves probing questions that reinforce a person's or organization's capability to apprehend, expect, and improve positive potential (Bitzer, 2010; Shirley, 2012). It assists people in finding what is the best of what was and what can be, through positive



interactions with a mentor or guide. Bushe (2013) and Peutz and Kroth (2009) supported that there are four stages of Appreciative Inquiry: innovation, vision, plan, and fate. Numerous studies on appreciative advising have been conducted to determine the efficacy of appreciative advising on improving retention rates and program satisfaction for at-risk graduate and distance learning students (Bushe & Marshak, 2014). These phases had also been researched by Howell (2010). Appreciative advising expounds upon the concept of developmental advising while using open-ended questioning to generate deeper feedback, positive psychology to identify better and assess student conditions and aspirations, and designs plans to facilitate goal attainment (Niemann, 2010). Appreciative advising is a model which includes mechanisms and procedures which allow an approach to the graduate student to occur in a positive and appealing fashion.

Appreciative advising is an effective model for academic advisors and graduate students. Dichaba (2013) documented that academic advisors report that appreciative advising helps them to improve their advising skills, strengthens the advisor-advisee relationship, and positively influences their personal relationships. Seebohm, Barnes, Yasmeen, Langridge, and Moreton-Prichard (2010) research supported this concept that the advisor is supportive and uses an enhanced form of problem-solving. It allows the advisor to assist his or her students by integrating them into the graduate school experience, enhancing their confidence, modifying their academic focus, and motivating them through the use of conversation. The appreciative advising model is entirely student-centered with much potential in helping students from various backgrounds to achieve academic success.

**Influences on Perceptions.** One's experiences of an event or encounter develop his or her perception. Brown (2012) and Richardson and Radloff (2014) expressed that students who understand the reasoning behind having an advisor and having their expectations met tend to have a greater level of satisfaction with their advisor. Student perceptions are contingent upon the students' institutional experiences (Hu, 2011). Student engagement is a factor in student satisfaction with advising. However, students may have different expectations of their advising program (McCuen, Akar, Gifford, & Srikantaiah, 2009). Academic advisors and administrators who understand their students' expectations can better design and implement programming to meet those expectations or help students revise those expectations to suit the student and the school better.

Effective advisors are accurate and build positive relationships. De Jager and Gbadamosi (2013) and Khan and Matlay (2009) noted that an operative academic advising program is one that not only delivers precise degree and curriculum program information, but also pinpoints students' gifts, aids students' plans to conquer trials, ponders and reassures improvement selections, and assists with uniting the student to the college or university. Both levels of satisfaction and perception of quality will likely determine students' retention at higher education institutions. According to Carey (2013) and Maringe (2011), the official change to the scholar as the customer and the related anticipations cause institutions to place cautious thoughtfulness to the conveyance of services to their students. College administrators need to acknowledge this shift to consumerism to remain a contender. Developing an environment of provision and amiability among advisors could have an optimistic impression on students' outlooks and

accomplishments (Tinto, 2012). The extent to which graduate students' needs and expectations are satisfied determines the quality of an advising program.

Positive interaction is an important factor in graduate student satisfaction. Student-advisor interaction has consistently shown to be a contributor to student success in being persistent and gaining educational attainment; however, it was notified to have the least percentage of satisfaction amongst students (Jacobs, & Hundley, 2010; Sharkin, 2012). Allen et al. (2014) and Teasley and Buchanan (2013) found that students' satisfaction with advising is a problem. This problem affects colleges and universities in the U.S. as it relates to retaining and recruiting students. Sutton and Sankar (2011) concluded that ineffective academic advising and a general privation of career counseling are two significant dynamics that students consistently report as major obstructions from pursuing certain degrees. Astin, Korn, and Green (1987) and Jackson (2010) had shown that academic advising could be a driving force in college students' academic success, yet, national surveys show consistently that academic advising is the area students are least satisfied. Nitecki (2011) discussed the challenges that successful graduate advisors face when devoting their time, energy, and expertise into empowering graduate students to be successful completers. These challenges include academic advisors feeling fatigue and being overwhelmed with their caseload.

Student retention involves students remaining at a college or university until successful degree completion. Since the retention of students is a primary concern for most institutes of higher education, retention is positively tied to academic advising (Bai & Pan, 2009). An effective advising program can have a positive effect on student

retention. Drake (2011) stated that academic advising is far more than rote data collection to students' educational progress. It was truly an art form on relationship building and assisting students in correlating their personal talents and interests with their educational objectives. Graduate students require valuable academic advising, but not the same advising style as undergraduate students. Carver (2013) and Garza, Ovando, and Seymour (2010) found that the student-advisor relationship is important when it comes to students' success, and they studied graduate students' perception of their advisors' use of comicality. The results showed a statistically significant positive relationship of advisees' perception of advisors' use of humor and their perception of advisors' silent intimacies, social support, and counseling. For colleges and universities in the U.S. to have a successful advising program, both students and advisors must communicate effectively. Students should be able to express to their advisors their academic needs. Since all students are not the same nor have the same needs, the institution's advisors need to cater to the advising the students need for them to be satisfied with the advising program. Some graduate students may need intrusive advising, appreciative advising, or prescriptive advising.

Academic advisors are essential to graduate students' satisfaction with advising programs. Five themes emerged that advisors need to take in order to optimize graduate students' academic experiences and students' satisfaction: care for students and their success, be accessible, individually tailor guidance for students, serve as a role model, and proactively integrate students into the profession (Barnes, Williams, & Stassen, 2012; Finch & Fernández, 2014). Mullen, Fish, and Hutinger (2010) and Stevens, Gerber, and

Hendra (2010) also found these themes to be important for successful advising. In 1940, Bousfield had students to list traits of importance in a college professor. Amongst this list was humor, indicating having a personality and being approachable was important. Therefore, a mentor being able to have interpersonal skills is important for communication purposes. Students view that advisors need to possess a clear skill set to be effective.

Advising programs have had several areas of ineffectiveness that have had a negative impact on graduate students' satisfaction. Brock (2010) and Lala and Priluck (2011) found that the main problems associated with advising are the ineffective accessibility of advisors, advisors' failure to view their role as important to student development, and inadequate training received by those who function as advisors. Bringula and Basa (2011) and Wardley, Bélanger, and Leonard (2013) found that advisors fail to provide up to date information to their students, are being overloaded with advisees and other competing responsibilities, are failing to relate and identify with their students, and there is little to no institutional value placed on advisement. These factors can also have an adverse effect on graduate student satisfaction. Haimovitz and Henderlong Corpus (2011) identified high counselor-to-student ratios, and lack of adequate funding due to the economic crisis are the main reasons that advising programs are failing to meet the needs of student populations. Jones-Reed (2013) and Marr, Nicoll, von Treuer, Kolar, and Palermo (2013) also supported these findings that advisors that have a large case load with minimal funding are less effective. Graduate student satisfaction relies on effective and supportive advising.

### **Implications**

Low graduate student satisfaction with the academic advising program at Riverside College may have had an impact on the student dropout numbers. Based on the findings of this study, it may strengthen advising styles and practices, which may have an effect on student satisfaction and retention. Improved student satisfaction could also benefit the college in its relationship with donors, accreditors, and government agencies. The study may also identify training opportunities for academic advisors to increase students' satisfaction and strengthen the advising program.

### **Summary**

Advising has several models in higher education. Paying close attention to what students look for characteristically in advisors is crucial when building an advising program. Advising can have an effect on student motivation to accomplish goals successfully, perceptions of their school, and willingness to plan properly for academic success.

Section 2 discusses the methodology used in this project study, including the qualitative case study design and the rationale for choosing this type of design. Also covered in section 2 are the data collection method, analysis, participant selection, and participants' rights.

## Section 2: The Methodology

This section describes the methodology that I used to explore my study problem. I provide an overview and justification of my research design and approach. Additional topic areas include the descriptions of the setting and sample, steps taken to protect participants' rights, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. The findings of this study are also discussed in this section.

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

The purpose of my study was to learn how to improve student satisfaction with academic advising. An aside related to this focus was student retention and tuition income. To engage students in their learning environment and improve academic achievement, Riverside College also had a renewed interest in developing a campus climate and services that were student focused. Several researchers emphasized the need for colleges and universities recognize meaningful advising programs and their effect on students' satisfaction (Ambrose & Williamson, 2013; Anantatmula, 2010; Gasiewski, Eagan, Garcia, Hurtado, & Chang, 2012; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Successful advising programs are directly linked to positive student satisfaction, which could have positive ramifications for colleges and universities.

I chose a case study method so that the administration could make an informed decision on whether to make modifications to the advising program for the upcoming year or not based on the findings. A case study design provides readers with insight into this student satisfaction with advising issue in a natural setting (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2009). A natural setting requires participants to be in a familiar

nonintrusive setting. According to these researchers, case studies are a suitable method for exploration when the researcher's purpose is to explore a program, event, individual, group or procedure in depth. This support makes the case study appropriate for my research because I sought to identify and examine the underlying issues of graduate students' satisfaction with advising. Bernard and Bernard (2013) and Punch (2009) found that case studies primary goal is to get to the essential issue of concern through minimal discomfort for the researcher and participants. A case study provides a thorough investigation of a situation or event (Pickard, 2013). It allows for the reader to understand the problem below the surface level. A case study is a holistic method; the objective is to capture all of the aspects of a specific individual or group (Bustos & Arostegui, 2012). Gravetter and Forzano (2011) and Marshall and Rossman (2010) found that case studies are an appropriate methodology to assess college advising. Because colleges and universities in the U.S. need to review the issue with graduate student satisfaction with advising in depth, a case study method is appropriate.

However, quantitative studies could also be used to improve graduate student satisfaction. But, according to Delice (2010) and Spaulding (2014), quantitative studies do not have narrative accounts to allow a deeper understanding in the way that qualitative studies do. Quantitative studies focus on the general case as the researcher considers a potential cause of something and hopes to verify its effect. Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2013) and Lindlof and Taylor (2010) found that open-ended questions and a follow-up inquiry allow research participants to describe experiences and interactions in their words. This is also supported by May (2011) who found that probing questions can



allow participants to provide more details about and experience or interaction. These details assist the researcher to have a better understanding. By using a case study method, researchers are able to thoroughly explore participant responses because the depth or breadth of their responses are not limited, which differs from the quantitative method (Glense, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Quantitative methods do not allow researchers to go into detail about the problem or to explore other factors that may contribute to the problem being studied. A quantitative method would not help me to drawing conclusions regarding why students' perceptions of academic advising were low.

Another approach is a phenomenological design. A phenomenological design offers the researcher an opportunity to focus and build meaning from the human experience (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Stringer (2013) found that the phenomenological design is applicable for addressing significances and viewpoints of research participants. This description was not the essence of my study. This phenomenological design shows phenomena through participants' perceptions (Yin, 2013). Even though the focus of my current study was to explore students' experiences with academic advising, the research questions and focus group questions do not align to students' perspectives of academic advising through a phenomenological design.

Some researchers only want to understand a problem, which was not my intention when conducting my study. A phenomenological design researcher does not seek to solve the problem, just to understand the problem (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010; Khandker, Koolwal, & Samad, 2010). I examined events primarily to describe rather than clarify a situation or event from the participant's perspective (Webb & Scoular, 2011). Therefore,

I did not choose a phenomenological design as it did not align with my purpose for my study.

Another design is the grounded theory design. A grounded theory design researcher concentrates on the progress of a concept and its inception (Abowitz & Toole, 2009; Mertens; 2014). Grounded theory researchers focus on how something changes over time (Chatterjee, Athawale, & Chakraborty, 2011). They place emphasis on conceptualizing data and closing the gap between theory and empirical research. That was not the focus of my study. I wanted to collect data, look for themes, and create a project that best suited the results of my study. Grounded theory is very subjective meaning the research aligns to themes based on the interest of the researcher, and there can be difficulty in establishing reliability and validity (McNabb, 2013). Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong (2013) found the subjectivity of data for grounded theory was too biased; therefore, making the results less valid. Qu and Dumay (2011) stated that grounded theory is a complex process. As a result, it was inappropriate for my study due to the lack of reliability associated with grounded theory.

An ethnographic design is another research approach. An ethnographic design focuses on societal and cultural influence on an event (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Knox & Burkard, 2009). A researcher's objective in using an ethnographic design is to describe communities or cultures under investigation (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012). Ethnography is the study of cultures through close examination, analysis, and elucidation (O'Reilly, 2012). I was not studying a culture; therefore, this design was not appropriate for my study. Ethnography is a research method involving gathering data within a normal

setting with several factors (Horn, Plazas Snyder, Coverdale, Louie, & Roberts, 2009). I searched for an in-depth reason as to why graduate students were not satisfied with the advising program at Riverside College. This search was not aligned with the ethnographic design in that I was not focused on a culture or societal effect on the problem I studied.

I selected a qualitative case study. I chose this approach in particular because it involved a thorough analysis of data to provide insight as to what recommendations needed to take place for improving the advising program at Riverside College. The central research questions focused on identifying the role of advisors in promoting graduate students' satisfaction with advising and discovering methods to improve student satisfaction. The research questions offered me an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to get a deeper understanding as to why graduate students were not satisfied with academic advising. This opportunity is why a qualitative case study was chosen as it allowed me to delve deeper into the problem, while conducting my study in a natural setting at the institution.

### **Pilot Study**

I decided to conduct a pilot study to test for flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses in the design. My proposal had to be approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Riverside College's IRB before I could conduct my pilot study. The pilot study allowed me to make appropriate adjustments before the start of the study. Maxwell (2012) found that a pilot study can be helpful when planning a study as you can better prepare for any errors that may occur. The pilot study assisted me

with refining the research questions discussed in the data collection section. Individuals who had similar characteristics as the participants in the actual study were selected to be in the pilot study.

Ten students, three administrators, two advisors, and five mathematics professors from a local college were randomly selected based on convenience to participate in the pilot study. The individuals who participated in the pilot study did not participate in the actual research study. These participants were asked the focus group questions to get their input on the clarity of each question and how the tone of questions. None of the questions were altered based on the responses from the pilot study before implementing the focus groups in the actual research study.

### **Setting**

Riverside College is a private nonprofit organization that offers academic programs to the nontraditional graduate student. It is located in a suburban community outside a rapidly expanding southeastern city in the United States. This location is a small college situated in an office building. The college occupies the entire fourth floor. Riverside College only offers a Master's in Education with a concentration in School Guidance Counseling, Early Childhood, Elementary Education, Mathematics 7-12, Special Education, and School Administration with no licensure or certification attached. The College offers an environment where employed adults can shape their schooling in a lifetime of learning. Classes are only offered on Saturdays and Sundays from 8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. ([REDACTED] website, 2015).

### **Role of the Advisor**

The advisor's role was similar to a guidance counselor serving as a liaison by linking students with fitting paths of study to accomplish their academic objectives. Barnes et al. (2011) described graduate advisors as being "reputed to be the most important persons that a graduate student will interact with during his/her graduate training" (p. 1). Brown (2012) studied that academic advising serves as a means to provide students somewhat individualized guidance and support to navigate college successfully. The role of the advisor is to aid graduate students in completing their program in at least two years. The advisor informs the graduate students on which classes to take, updates them on new policies and procedures, and assists in job searches for the students to best fit their needs once they complete the program. The advisor is a guide who helps retain graduate students and also a resource to recruit more students. The advisor also works closely with the professors and other administrators to stay current on program dates, deadlines, and course selections available.

The advisors' success depends on the advisors' ability to keep students satisfied. Student satisfaction is defined by Letcher and Neves (2010) as the bias appraisals of the numerous consequences and practices associated with education. The advisors are separate from the professors and the administrators. Advisors work full time with the graduate students. Advisors must attend professional development meetings to obtain adequate information about novel platforms, provisions, and teacher licensure necessities. The advisors are also required to collaborate with the graduate network, to improve innovative student and professional linkages, and to gather student recommendations.

## **Participants**

The population for my study consisted of four groups—students, advisors, administrators, and professors. There were approximately 30 second-year students enrolled at Riverside College. There were 2 advisors, 3 administrators, and 30 professors. The purpose of four focus groups was to obtain a diverse perspective related to the low satisfaction with student advising.

### **Access to Participants**

My proposal had to be approved by Walden University's IRB before I could collect any data. This approval was needed to ensure that my project study was ethical and to ensure the protection of the participants. I received approval from Riverside College's IRB and they agreed to serve as the IRB of record. Once my IRB application was approved by Walden University, I contacted Riverside College's IRB to prepare to conduct my study at the college.

I had access to all employee and student email addresses because I was a faculty member at the college. Prospective participants were e-mailed inviting them to participate in this study (Appendix B). I obtained the contact information for potential participants from the college email addresses. I sent an email invitation to all second-year students receiving their Master's in Education in Mathematics, mathematics professors, administrators, and advisors. This group of students was chosen based on the college's data that showed they had the highest percentage of dissatisfaction (Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, 2015).

Riverside College's data department identified a list of students, professors, advisors, and administrators that met the criteria for email purposes only. All participants had to be at least 18 years old. I selected 10 students because the fewer the students, the more in-depth I could investigate the nature of the dissatisfaction (Morse, 2012; Stake, 2010). A small sample size paralleled to a more detailed examination of the outcomes in qualitative research designs (Check & Schutt, 2011; Shin, Kim, & Chung, 2009). A purposeful sample consisted of participants chosen because of a specific characteristic pertinent to the study. Since the intent of this project study was to ascertain a thorough investigation of the participants' perceptions of the advising program, a smaller sampling size of participants was appropriate.

### **Protection of Participant Rights**

I obtained written permission from the institution where the study took place and received a signed informed consent form from each participant before any focus groups met. I informed each research participant of the objectives of this research investigation. I informed each participant that his or her participation was voluntary and that he or she could elect to withdraw from the study at any time. No one withdrew during this study. Each participant was over the age of 18. It was essential to follow these protocols to ensure compliance at the institution for research purposes (Glesne, 2011). Any study approval requires following the proper protocol.

To further protect the participants' rights, the focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed exactly. The transcribed data were investigated and coded and did not comprise any participant names or other identifying material. To ensure confidentiality

and privacy of all participants and the study site, all research documentation and data were digitized, password protected, and secured in a locked cabinet only accessible by me. After five years, this material will be shredded, destroyed, and discarded

### **Students**

The average age of the students was 36 years. The student body was 75% female and 25% male (██████████ website, 2015). The majority of the students were not practicing teachers; they were striving to become teachers.

I was interested in the perceptions of second-year students in the Master's in Education in Mathematics regarding their thoughts about the advising program based on the results from the college's data, which showed this group having the greatest percentage of dissatisfaction with the advising program. I used purposeful sampling to select 10 participants, 6 were female and 4 were male, who were second-year students working on their Master's in Education in Mathematics. The inclusion criteria for students were second-year students working on their Master's in Education in mathematics who had never been students in any of my classes past nor will they take my class in the future.

### **Professors, Administrators, and Advisors**

At Riverside College, the professors must have at least a master's degree in education, mathematics, or psychology and also have a state license. The professors have an average of at least 10-years working experience in their field, teaching experience on the collegiate level, or both. The faculty consists of 70% female and 30% male professors.



There were four female professors and one male professor. The inclusion criteria for math professors were that their students expressed the highest level of dissatisfaction with the advising program. There were only six mathematics professors, including myself, at Riverside College, and I conducted a focus group based on professors' availability and willingness to participate. All five math professors were invited to participate, were eligible to participate, and participated in my study.

There were two male administrators and one female administrator. The inclusion criteria for the administrators were that they essentially impact the infrastructure of the advising program. The administrators are accountable for educational programs and organization for students and faculty. They also monitor the budget, reassuring acquiescence with academic mandates of sanctioning and government agencies, and provision additional services. They are required to have a doctorate in education, psychology, or mathematics. Since the administrators are responsible for managing the advising program; it was imperative to secure their input on why they thought the students were dissatisfied with the advising program. All three administrators were invited to participate, were eligible to participate, and participated in my study.

There were one male and one female administrator. They are required to have at least a master's of arts in counseling or mass communications with at least three years of working experience in the advising field in higher education. Since the advisors have a strong association with students' satisfaction, it was important to get their opinion on the issues students had with the advising program. Both academic advisors were invited to participate, were eligible to participate, and participated in my study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Because of my role as a mathematics professor at Riverside College, I had to ensure my position did not interfere with my role as the researcher. A significant initial phase of my study was to take cautious concern of the researcher's role in the study (Schreier, 2012). I have served as an adjunct mathematics professor at Riverside College for six consecutive years. I have a high interest in the arena of academic advising. Additionally, my experience may have been an advantage in establishing positive relationships with the research participants.

There was a researcher-participant working relationship because I did not hold any authority with any of the participants nor did I know them personally. I held no authority over the students as I taught first-year mathematics students. The students were currently not in my class and would not have taken my class based on their previous courses. None of the students participating in this study would be my students in the future. Therefore, my position did not have an effect on their responses as this was a reflection of the academic advising program and not the professors.

My relationship with the participants was as a researcher. I worked with each participant to ensure that his or her story was told the way he or she saw fit. I only had a working relationship with professors, administrators, and advisors. I met with the other mathematics professors during full faculty and departmental meetings. I met with administrators during the full faculty meetings where we discussed new information as far as curriculum, syllabi, grades, and attendance. These relationships did not negatively affect data collection in any manner.

Every effort towards maintaining professional and personal distance throughout the research process occurred. A particular focus was necessary to avoid any personal biases. I took additional steps to minimize any perceived biases by acknowledging the potential for bias. My study strengthened my aptitude to recognize and describe the insights of my study participants. I informed the participants that their anonymity would be protected, which helped them to be more relaxed when expressing their opinions. To prevent colleagues and students from being pressured to participate in the study, I also informed the participants that the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Data Collection**

My study consisted of three data collection methods: the pilot study, focus groups, and journal reflections. These methods enabled me to explore more deeply the problem. The raw data were made available upon request. The data collection for this research took place over the course of three weeks. The focus groups were conducted on campus in an empty classroom at a time that was most convenient for participants.

### **Focus Groups**

My study included four focus groups totaling 10 students, 2 advisors, 3 administrators, and 5 professors. The student group consisted of second-year students in the Master's in Education in Mathematics program at Riverside College. The professor group consisted of five mathematics professors at Riverside College. The administrator group consisted of the administrators at Riverside College. The advisor group consisted of the advisors at Riverside College. I used a qualitative approach to data collection for

my study. I conducted four focus groups that lasted 60-90 minutes each. Focus group transcripts were organized, compared, and analyzed according to the advising models as it relates to the psycho-developmental perspective of the transformative learning process and the personal construct psychology theory.

Open-ended questions allowed for me to ask questions that brought me to a better understanding of the issue being studied. Mertens, Holmes, and Harris (2009) and Creswell (2012) stated that semi-structured questioning assisted researchers with maintaining consistency for each research participant. Chenail (2011) and Turner (2010) stated that probing questions were an effective method of following up with a participant's response and assisted researchers in clarifying, gaining more detail, or asking for examples. For my study, I used semi-structured questions with my focus groups.

The focus groups for the research took place over the course of three weeks. During the focus groups, I encouraged participants to interact with each other in reflecting on the advising program by asking them what they thought about other participants' statements. This interaction fostered constructive discussion among participants. When appropriate for me, follow-up questions were asked to stimulate additional information from the participant's original answer. Data from the focus groups provided detailed descriptions of the participants' perceptions and levels of satisfaction with the advising program.

Another reason that I used focus groups was that it was an alternative method of collecting data when participants could not be observed directly. I did not directly

observe participants as it violates the student-advisor privilege set forth by the institution which stated that conversations must be held privately. Since direct observation of study participants would infringe upon their rights, focus groups provided an alternative process of data collection.

I led each focus group, and each lasted approximately 60-90 minutes in duration. The focus groups occurred in the same neutral location in an empty classroom towards the back of the campus. I closed the door, and the blinds in the room were shut to help maintain participants' confidentiality. This procedure also promoted a quiet environment free from distractions. I reminded participants to keep information from the focus group confidential.

I audiotaped the focus groups. The responses were transcribed to a typed copy within 24-hours after each focus group concluded. Each participant was asked to review his or her own transcript carefully and provide feedback on the findings from member checking.

I used open-ended questions (Appendix F) to encourage the study participants to explicate their specific viewpoints on the advising program and their satisfaction with the advising program more fully. The questions were sent to the participants ahead of time so they could come prepared for the session. I watched and listened for cues that may have revealed deeper meanings. Banister, Bunn, Burman, and Daniels (2011) and Johnson and Christensen (2010) stated that while researchers may begin with structured questions, they could produce additional inquisitive inquiries as a result of the participants' responses to discover profound significances. I followed up with open-ended questions to

gain a deeper understanding of participants' areas of interest. I managed each focus group in an orderly fashion by ensuring that participants did not speak over one another. I gave all participants the opportunity to answer each question as honestly as they could.

Participants were very respectful to one another and did not interrupt each other.

I developed a focus group guide (Appendix F) to keep the focus groups consistent. Each focus group question was created to align with the project study's research question and sub-questions. The primary research questions were: What is the role of academic advisors in promoting student satisfaction at Riverside College? What are processes of the academic advising program that impact student satisfaction at Riverside College?

### **Focus Group Coding**

Within 24 hours of finishing each focus group, voice recordings were transcribed to a Microsoft Word document and saved onto my computer hard drive. Focus group participants were labeled with pseudonyms on the transcription to guarantee participant discretion and to contribute to coding. Coding was used to recognize likenesses and differences between participant answers to the focus group questions.

The coding process started with an initial reading of each transcribed focus group to familiarize me with each case and to keep the primary research question and sub-questions in thought. I reviewed each transcript multiple times, and I hand coded using different colors to focus on words and phrases that paralleled to the research questions and the participants' perceptions of the advising program. The Dedoose computer application was used to organize qualitative data and to retrieve and identify possible

codes in the study (SCRC, 2011). This computer application assisted me with my thematic analysis.

After I had acknowledged codes in the documents, data were examined to warrant the codes were a precise representation of the data. I identified the following key themes through an examination of the codes. They were satisfaction, perception, overall experience, qualities, duties, approachable, and suggestion. I discussed the key themes in more detail in the findings section. I also developed a codebook for my study.

**Reflective Journal.** I also kept a reflective journal as a system to document data and my thought process throughout this study. Keeping a reflective journal was a strategy that helped me inspect subjective suppositions and objectives and elucidate any personal bias. I wanted to form a clear description of the research process by keeping a journal. To avoid being blatantly bias, I recorded my thoughts about the focus groups in my journal and did not express it to my participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcripts from the focus groups were the primary data source. The data analysis included a standardized coding format to categorize participants' responses. I concentrated the focus of the analysis on the findings through the coding procedure. I construed the research data and acknowledged themes.

I used a systematic approach to analyzing the qualitative data. I accomplished this focus through an in-depth analysis of the transcribed focus groups. I generated descriptions, categories, and themes based on the transcripts and deduced the significance of the data.

## **Reliability and Validity**

The data generated in my study must be trustworthy and reliable with the findings of the research. It is critical for researchers to conclude the precision and trustworthiness of the results of their study (Davey, Gugiu, Coryn, 2010; Seymour, 2012). My research study incorporated the following methods to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study data and findings.

**Reliability.** To increase the reliability of my study, I took the following steps: I reported the detailed descriptions of data collection, findings and analysis, and *triangulation*. I completed the pilot study conducted on the focus group questions for reliability purposes to make revisions to any research questions or procedures before the actual study took place.

One method I used to strengthen the reliability of the findings was to use direct quotations from the research participants. This approach was used to provide an accurate voice to participants' responses during the focus group session. The use of direct quotes from the participants' replies was a shared technique of guaranteeing reliability in qualitative research (Feilzer, 2010; Small, 2011; Tight, 2012). Another method I used to strengthen reliability was triangulation. Triangulation was the use of many sources of information, which were collected and equated for uniformity (Boeije, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). When performing triangulation, categories and themes were paralleled from various sources to provide proof subsidiary to the acknowledged themes in the study. This study used focus groups with students, professors, administrators, and advisors. I conducted triangulation was for all groups by matching



and grouping focus group transcripts. Figure 1 shows how the triangulation process incorporates the focus groups, member checking, and reflection to verify the results of my study.

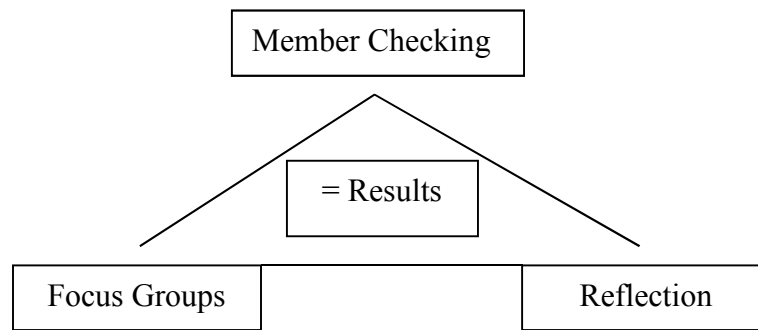


Figure 1. The Triangulation Research Process

**Validity.** I addressed validity by *member checking* the data. Member checking is a procedure researchers use to validate research data by having participants review their responses for truthfulness and credibility (Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). In this study, each participant was asked to review his or her transcript to determine accuracy and interpretation of data. This review was done one week after the focus groups had taken place. I emailed focus group transcripts to each participant with any requests for changes.

Member checking and triangulation improved the validity of the research findings. The use of various sources of information strengthens research findings and results in a more substantial report (Leech, Dellinger, Brannagan, & Tanaka, 2010; Petty, Thompson, & Stew, 2012). There is a necessity for research studies to be dependable or to create steady outcomes if examined in a related method and over a period of time

(Saini & Shlonsky, 2012). For my study to be valid, I ensured that I took the necessary steps make my study valid so that it would be deemed credible on the academic platform.

A final strategy that I used to strengthen the validity of the study was to include an account of the discrepant cases. There were some discrepant cases in my study. Discrepant cases are participant viewpoints that conflict with the recognized themes (Du, 2012). Discrepant cases were included in the findings section of my study.

**Data security.** All raw data, notes, recordings, and other documentation were digitized, and password protected. All files will be stored in locked cabinet in my office and shredded, destroyed, and discarded after five years.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was that it took place at a single institution of higher education. Therefore, the results of this study would only be pertinent to Riverside College. The results could not be generalized to other institutions. The case study was only pertinent to Riverside College. A second limitation was that this study was limited to second-year students in the Master's in Education Mathematics program, and results may not be representative of the entire student body at Riverside College. A third limitation was the potential for subject motivation, where participants may have responded in particular ways that they thought the school desired. A fourth limitation was that this study was a qualitative study. The definition of satisfaction may differ per participant. Other variables that might impact student satisfaction were not controlled in this study.

## Findings

After triangulating the data from focus groups, member checking, and journal reflections, it became clear that students' satisfaction was low with the advising program. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to learn how to improve students' satisfaction with academic advising and to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the role of academic advisors in promoting student satisfaction at Riverside College?
2. What are the processes of the academic advising program that impact student satisfaction at Riverside College?

This approach provided an understanding of students' perception of the advising program; advisors' training, availability, and knowledge; and administrators' and professors' perception of the advising program. This approach also allowed for the study to generate multiple perspectives on the advising program. Obtaining multiple perspectives gave the study a more holistic approach.

Table 2 and Table 3 show the seven prominent themes that I identified through the analysis of the responses. I composed findings from my project study through collecting qualitative data. I identified themes in alignment to the corresponding focus group question based on the findings from my study.

Table 2

## Focus Group Themes Part I

Theme	Code	Students	Professors	Administrators	Advisors	Grand Total
Satisfaction	Lack of Knowledge	10/10 (100%)	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	0/2 (0%)	18/20 (90%)
Perception	Somewhat Helpful	8/10 (80%)	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	18/20 (90%)
Overall Experience	Weak Relationship	9/10 (90%)	4/5 (80%)	N/A	N/A	13/15 (87%)
	Meets Rarely	N/A	5/5 (100%)	2/3 (67%)	2/2 (100%)	9/10 (90%)
Qualities	Knowledge	10/10 (100%)	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	20/20 (100%)
	Hands-On	10/10 (100%)	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	20/20 (100%)
	Resourceful	10/10 (100%)	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	20/20 (100%)
	Meets Frequently	N/A	5/5 (100%)	N/A	N/A	5/5 (100%)
	Constructive Listener	10/10 (100%)	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	20/20 (100%)
	Shows Interest	N/A	N/A	3/3 (100%)	N/A	3/3 (100%)

Table 3

## Focus Group Themes Part II

Theme	Code	Students	Professors	Administrators	Advisors	Grand Total
Duties	Scripted Model	9/10 (90%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	9/10 (90%)
	Encourage Students	N/A	N/A	N/A	2/2 (100%)	2/2 (100%)
	Meet Frequently	N/A	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	N/A	8/8 (100%)
	Proper Schedules	N/A	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	N/A	8/8 (100%)
	Collaborate	N/A	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	N/A	8/8 (100%)
	Provide Outside Resources	N/A	5/5 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	N/A	8/8 (100%)
Approachable	Limited Access	10/10 (100%)	5/5 (100%)	2/3 (67%)	1/2 (50%)	18/20 (90%)
	Students' Motivation	N/A	N/A	N/A	2/2 (100%)	2/2 (100%)
Suggestions	More Detailed Assistance	9/10 (90%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	9/10 (90%)
	Stronger Relationship	9/10 (90%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	9/10 (90%)
	More Training	9/10 (90%)	N/A	3/3 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	14/15 (93%)
	Meet Frequently	N/A	5/5 (100%)	N/A	N/A	5/5 (100%)

**Satisfaction.** Focus group question one asked: What do you think about students' level of satisfaction with the advising program? The professors, administrators, and advisors were aware the students' satisfaction was low with the advising program. The focus groups confirmed the advisors were not as hands-on or as knowledgeable about the student-teacher positions or academic programs as students preferred.

According to 90% of the participants, advisors needed to be more knowledgeable about the student-teacher requirements for the local school districts. However, it was noted that students evaluated the advising they receive lower than the advisors evaluated the advising they provide. The majority of the participants identified advisor-student meetings as being an important source of information, but the advisors lacked knowledge about particular programs that the students needed to move forward. Participant 7 stated:

I have never met with my advisor and gotten any of the issues resolved about joining with a local school district to complete my student-teacher training requirements. I have always found this area to be lacking in the advising program. I have always had to contact district personnel to get this information, and I feel that it is the advisors job to do this task.

Participant 19 stated:

Students should be able to make contact with the local school districts about information that could possibly help move them forward. I believe in students being more independent, which may have caused low student satisfactory ratings amongst the advising program.

Participant 13 stated, “I know that students having meaningful and productive meetings with their advisor are a crucial moment in my students’ educational career. I hope the advising program improves for my students’ sake.” Participant 15 stated, “My students have expressed that they believe advising is very important in their academic career and that the advising program needs to be handled with expertise.” Participant 3 stated, “It would make the process much smoother if the advisors knew more about us as students partnering successfully with the local school districts.” Participant 9 stated, “I would be more satisfied with the advising program if I felt that the advisors took the time to learn the logistics for students to successfully enter the school districts.” Participant 10 stated, “I believe my satisfaction would improve if I felt the advisors could answer more of my questions.” According to the results, the students, professors, and administrators expressed that the advisors lacked knowledge and skills that could be useful to the advising program.

**Perception.** Focus group question two asked: What is your perception of the advising program? The results from Table 2 suggested the advisors were helpful to a certain degree. Students and professors often spoke about the advisors not always being as knowledgeable or prepared as they would like when it came to meetings with students and professors. Participant 2 stated:

My perception of the advisors is that they are not knowledgeable of the courses that I need to graduate. I too often have to rely on my classmates to figure out which classes I need to take next in order to reach my goal of completion.

Participant 5 stated, “My advisor appears to know the information, but when I ask the serious questions they get lost.” Graduate student perceptions alter when the experiences differ from the expectations.

The administrators also stated that the advising program did not have the best perception amongst the students; however, the administrators agreed that the administration was not putting forth enough effort to change that perception.

Participant 16 stated:

We know that the students are not showing a high level of satisfaction with the advising program, yet we have not addressed the advisors directly about this issue nor have we tried to solve this issue thoroughly. We do not want to lose potential students due to our lack of detail in resolving students’ issues.

Participant 17 stated, “We just don’t have the time to delve deep into the advising program concerns. We rely on the advisors to be the fixers of their own issues.” In my study, the administration gives the advisors autonomy which is ineffective.

The advisors believed that the students had a positive perception of the advising program, but the advisors acknowledged that they needed to be more knowledgeable about the classes students needed to take and which order the students needed to take their classes.

Participant 19 stated, “My students do not appear to have a problem with my tactics and I believe we both are perceived well amongst the students.” Participant 15 stated, “Many of my students have complained about the advisors not knowing how to properly place them with the local school district’s student-teaching program.”



Participant 12 stated, “Every time I meet with an advisor, which is not that often, they always seem to not be as knowledgeable about the programs and how to align the programs with the courses that I offer.” The students perceived the advising program was ineffective.

**Overall Experience.** Focus group question three asked: How has your experience been overall with the advising program? The students stated the advisors did not know who they were and that the advisors did not take the initiative to learn who they were when arranging meetings with the students. According to 90% of the students and 80% of the professors, the advisors did not take the time to match the students’ learning styles to particular courses, course sections, or professors. Advisors were considered to be friendly, but never too personal with students to learn the students better. Students also felt that the advisors did not express interest in them as an individual.

Experiences that students expressed dissatisfaction with were related to the confusion of information received, inconvenient appointment times, inconsistent information, and lack of personal attention. Participant 6 stated, “I feel like just another number to my advisor. He does not take the time to know my strengths and weaknesses before placing me in courses.” Participant 1 stated, “My advisor does not take the time to discuss my interests or learning styles.” Participant 2 stated, “I want to be able to schedule my meetings more frequently during the semester with my advisor.” Participant 8 stated, “Sometimes I get different information from my advisor than what is listed in the catalog, which can get frustrating at times.”

The professors met with advisors only once an academic year to discuss their courses or teaching strategies. The only experience the professors had with the advisors is what the students would tell the professors about the advisors. Participant 11 stated, “I would like to meet with the advisors on a steady basis in order to get to know their process better and to give them better insight on the type of learner I cater to in my course.” Participant 13 stated, “The only real experience I get from the advising program is what I hear from my students, which is not always that promising.” The administrators only meet with the advisors every six months to debrief about students’ progress, students’ needs, resources available, and possible training opportunities. Only 67% of the administrators stated they had a very positive experience with the advisors and the program. Participant 16 stated, “My experience with the advisors has always been positive. They are prepared when we meet and meet my expectations.” Participant 18 stated, “Even though we had a good experience with the advisors, our main focus should be on the students being satisfied with the program.”

Both advisors expressed they had a positive experience with the advising program. Participant 19 stated, “I had a positive experience with the administration and the students here. I believe we have both been received well.” Participant 20 stated, “I had a positive experience with the advising program because we both get along well and work well together.” These statements revealed that advisors viewed themselves much differently than the students, professors, and administrators about services rendered.

**Qualities.** Focus group question four asked: What do you think are the qualities of a good advisor? All participants agreed on the qualities of a good advisor, which were

that a good advisor needed to be knowledgeable of classes, outside resources, and rules and procedures. A good advisor needed to be hands-on and available. Students stressed that they believed advisors should get to know the students and their situation to service the student better. Participant 6 stated, “A good advisor attempts to understand student concerns from a student’s point of view.” Participant 1 stated, “Advisors should take the time to know the policies and procedures of the local school districts and take the time to get to know the students.” Graduate students had concerns with the advisors lack of interest in the students’ as individuals.

According to the results from Table 2, 100% of the professors stressed that the advisors needed to meet with professors more than once a year to become more knowledgeable of the courses offered and to be able to network with the local school districts. Participant 11 stated, “A good advisor should meet with professors frequently in order to better understand the courses being offered at the school.” Participant 12 stated, “I feel that good advisors should meet professors much more than what we meet now, once a year is simply not enough.” Professors viewed the qualities of an advisor as having the ability to network frequently with other staff.

The advisors agreed that a good advisor listened constructively; arranged adequately regularly scheduled time to meet the counseling requests of the students sufficiently, and willingly and energetically participated in advisor training programs. Participant 19 stated, “A good advisor is organized, provides constructive criticism, and actively seeks training to strengthen his or her craft.” Participant 20 stated, “Advisors should make themselves available to their students, be flexible with their schedules, allow

professional growth through training and conferences, and provide good feedback.”

Advisors viewed their qualities as being available to graduate students and knowledgeable about the various degree programs.

The administrators added that a good advisor was personally and professionally vested in serving as an advisor. Participant 16 stated, “Advisors should actually want to be good in their craft by taking the time out to grow professionally. Advisors should have a personal interest as to why they chose their profession.” Participant 18 stated, “I agree that advisors should personally and professionally be vested in their craft as it can become very time consuming when dealing with individual students and ensuring he or she is on the right academic journey.” Based on the results, the participants thought that a good advisor took the time to listen to student issues and concerns.

**Duties.** Focus group question five asked: What have you noticed about the advisor’s duties as it relates to providing services? The results show that 90% of the students stated that advisors used a scripted model of advising. The advisors met officially with the students once a semester and provided a general schedule with limited outside resources. Participant 8 stated, “I feel that academic advisors provide little assistance if any for students to find a job in one of the local school districts.” Participant 9 stated, “Most of the time it feels like the advisors use a one size fits all approach to advising, which does not work for every student.” Participant 4 stated, “I would like for my advisor to get to know me more holistically to ensure that I am being serviced properly.” Participant 3 stated, “I think my advisor is not as helpful as he thinks he is due to his limited access to resources.” Graduate students and professors viewed advisor

duties as prescriptive, indicating they did not individualize the advising to fit the needs of the students.

According to 100% of the advisors, their duty was to help the students take a more active role and encourage students to achieve their educational goals.

Participant 20 stated:

It is my duty as an academic advisor to take the initiative in arranging meetings and to being on time for appointments. I also believe it is my duty to be knowledgeable about courses, which I wish I could receive more training in that area.

Academic advisors performed individualized advising sessions, but they did not take all facets of the student's life into deliberation when advising students.

All of the administrators and professors mentioned that academic advisors' duties were to meet formally with students on a steady basis, provide students with a proper schedule, work collaboratively with the professors and local school districts, and provide students with outside resources. The administrators acknowledged that the academic advisors were lacking in collaborating with professors and local school districts. The administrators also acknowledged that local school districts had student-teaching positions available for students that attended Riverside College, but the advisors lacked knowledge on the local school districts' process and how to get the students enrolled in the program. The student-teaching process was a graduation requirement for Riverside College where graduate students volunteer part-time in a classroom based on their

concentration in education as a graduation requirement. Graduate students earn field experience volunteering as a teacher while being overseen by a certified teacher.

Participant 17 stated:

Academic advisors should be able to provide students with accurate and current information related to institutional, general education, and major requirements. It is our job to provide academic advisors with more training, which we have yet to do.

Participant 16 stated, “The advisors must collaborate with our professors and local school districts more. There is a clear gap in communication amongst these groups.” These statements suggested that advisors did not have the time to meet with and follow up with local school districts on a regular basis, and they did not take the time to build relationships with the students.

**Approachable.** Focus group question six asked: How do you view advisors’ approachability at your school? The results suggested that academic advisors were available to students in a variety of methods including in-person, e-mail, and telephone. However, academic advisors were only meeting with students once per semester. The academic advisors have an open-door policy, but it was the students’ responsibility to set up meetings outside of their formal meetings with the academic advisors. I identified a reoccurring theme that students lacked motivation when it came to attending advising conferences. Participant 20 stated, “Many students do not want to take time to visit an academic advisor in his or her office outside of their designated meeting.” Participant 19 stated, “Students need to take more of an initiative to setup meetings with us. We don’t

expect to have to remind students to schedule more appointments.” Participant 1 stated, “Advisors make themselves available through several ways, but face-to-face meetings once a semester simply isn’t enough for effective communication.” Participant 2 stated, “I am not always available to set formal meetings with my advisor; however, if I could just walk in to speak with my advisor, that would be great.” Graduate students and advisors have different views of approachability reflecting as one of the factors of dissatisfaction.

Table 3 shows that 90% of the participants concluded that academic advisors were considered as reachable and friendly, but they were not considered for going the extra mile to assist students.

Participant 9 stated:

I would like for my academic advisor to get to know me and where I live, how long of a commute I have. I think it’s good for academic advisors to get to know their students so that they know what the students are juggling.

Students want advisors to humanize the advising experience a bit more.

Participant 10 stated, “My advisor is approachable, but I really don’t feel a connection from my advisor in reference to my advisor having a passion for my educational career.”

Participant 7 stated, “I want to be able to laugh and talk with my advisor sometimes, just to vent would be nice occasionally.” These statements suggested that advisors did not humanize the academic advising experience by displaying caring attitudes.

**Suggestions.** Focus group question seven asked: What suggestions do you have for advisor services? According to the results in Table 3, 90% of the students would like

to know how to register and schedule classes, be seen quickly for walk-in appointments, have detailed transfer information, and have a friendly and knowledgeable advising staff willing to answer questions. Students would also like to build stronger relationships with academic advisors, meaning they would like to have a more personal relationship where they can talk about their concerns, issues, and interests. Participant 1 stated:

I would like for the advisors to show me how to schedule classes so that I can begin creating schedules on my own. I would also like to be able to walk-in to see my advisor instead always having to make appointments.

Participant 2 stated:

I would suggest that the advisors become more knowledgeable about the local school districts' rules and procedures for the students to become a student-teacher. This would really speed up the process for the students to be placed in a working environment.

All of the professors would like to meet more frequently with the advisors to keep them abreast of the courses offered, teaching techniques, and pre-requisites required.

Participant 13 stated:

We should meet with the advisors at least once a semester to keep them abreast of our courses, teaching strategies, and what we expect from our students. This way, the advisors could better place the students to our classes. Many times, I receive students that lack the prerequisites they need to be in my course at the time, which can throw the student's schedule off.



Participant 15 stated, “We need to have more two-way communication with the advisors as we may possess information pertinent to them and they may possess information pertinent to us as well.” Professors stressed the importance of meeting with advisors frequently as they interact more with the graduate students and could give the advisors insight as to some of the reasons why students are not satisfied.

All of the academic advisors and all of the administration would like for academic advisors to be more knowledgeable, participate in more training opportunities, and network with the local school districts. Participant 19 stated, “All we know is what our administration tells us or stuff we think we know.”

Participant 20 stated:

I would like to get more involved with getting to know my students so that I may better serve them. I also want to become more familiar with the local school districts’ policies and procedures in order to get our students properly placed with the student-teaching process. It seems like each district has a different set of rules.

Participant 17 stated:

I would recommend that the advising program receive thorough training on building positive relationships with students and gaining a stronger network with the local school districts.

These data suggested that academic advisors may not have comprehensive knowledge of the curricular requirements, college policies and procedures, and college resources. The findings of my study supported that student satisfaction was low for the advising program at this institute as perceived by students, professors, and administrators.

Also, the advisors indicated they did not have enough time to advise effectively. They also thought more time should be devoted to training.

The findings from my study supported the problem and research questions of my study. The role of the academic advisor and the process for academic advising were discussed as aligned to the research questions. The findings further suggested why students' satisfaction was low and the possible causes for this low satisfaction. There were also suggestions that were made that could improve students' satisfaction with the advising program, which led to the project of my study.

### **Relation to the Larger Body of Literature**

My study is related to a larger body of literature. The literature suggests that an effective academic advising system begins with the creation of a new culture of advising (Barron & Powell, 2014). For advising to take on a revised structure, a new culture of advising must be implemented effectively by the academic advisors and administration. A new culture of advising includes a commitment from all members of the college to be engaged in the process of academic advising (Teasley & Buchanan, 2013). This commitment also includes a clear connection between the institution's mission and the vision of academic advising. Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) found that for an institution to create a culture of advising, a comprehensive plan must be developed which includes both institutional and faculty level changes. Administrative support to enable academic advisors to be involved and engaged in providing consistent advising set in the core values of the new culture of advising will assist the advising program to be more successful and to improve graduate student satisfaction.

Positive advisory changes in colleges and universities in the U.S. can improve the higher education experience. Institutional changes occur at the administrative level and include policy and procedural changes (Punyanunt-Carter, Nance, & Wrench, 2014). An institutional change that could be used to promote the development of a new culture of advising would be providing support to the academic advisors through professional development. Academic advisors need to change thought processes about academic advising. They need to understand the importance of their role as an advisor and they are an important member of the institution.

In addition to institutional level changes, there also needs to be academic advisor changes to promote the development of a new culture of advising. Academic advisor changes are smaller changes that directly affect the advisor (Kohle Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Punyanunt-Carter and Carter (2015) believe that advisors need professional development training to be an effective academic advisor. Study participants identified that they need mandatory and optional training so that they could be an effective academic advisor. Advisors need ongoing training on institutional policies and procedures, program and curricular requirements, college and community resources, and referral information. By providing advisors with training, they can create a network with another faculty at the institution. This network may enable advisors to have a sense of connection to their role as advisor. The network also helps the advisor develop additional knowledge and skills that can be shared among colleagues at the institution.

## **Conclusion**

I collected data from focus groups. Open-ended questions served as a guide for the focus groups. The participants were encouraged to speak openly about the topic, and I probed for additional details when I determined it to be necessary based on participants' reactions to questions. The discovery and documentation of themes from the focus groups' responses were color coded and analyzed for organization. I used thematic analysis to identify and connect any emerging patterns and themes through Dedoose. I established validity and reliability through member checking the participant responses, the use of descriptive narratives and quotes, and triangulation of the data.

Section 3 contains a detailed description of the project including a literature review, data collection, and implications for social change. The project outlines specific policy and procedural changes that will be necessary to increase the effectiveness of academic advising at the institution.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

Section 3 includes the proposal for the final project based on the data analysis from this study. I introduce the proposed project, project goals, rationale, a literature review, proposed implementation, and evaluation tools. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to learn how to improve students' satisfaction with academic advising at Riverside College. The results of my study suggest that academic advisors had both strengths and weaknesses in their working with students at the college. I found several issues concerning student dissatisfaction surrounding academic advising.

Using findings from my study, I designed a 3-day professional development (PD) for advisors at my study site, Riverside College. My objectives are for advisors to learn the student-teaching process offered by the local school districts, to build effective relationships with their students, and to correctly align student learning styles with professors. The following section provides a description of my project goals.

#### **Description and Goals of My Project**

To achieve my study purpose, I used a set of goals to guide my project. These goals helped me to align my project to my finding of my project. PD for academic advisors should address conceptual, informational, and relational paradigms (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2011). PD is needed for academic advisors for all aspects of a new culture of advising. A set of goals to develop a new culture of advising at Riverside College were (a) to improve student satisfaction with the advising program, (b) to increase the effectiveness of the academic advisors, and (c) to present tools to support

academic advisors. I created these goals based on the areas of improvement according to the results of my findings.

I used the findings from my study to design, develop, and deliver the PD workshop for the advisors. The proposed project is titled “The New Advising Project.” This project is a 3-day PD workshop. I designed it so that academic advisors at the College would have the opportunity to interact with one another as well as school district personnel, other academic advisors from surrounding colleges and universities, and professors at Riverside College. The purpose of the workshops is to provide time for academic advisors to reflect on their ideas, beliefs, and practices as it relates to academic advising and how it aligns with the new culture of advising.

I chose the workshop and development genre for my project based on my study findings. I selected this genre because my findings suggest that an effective way to support academic advisors is through intentional workshop sessions. The success of the 3-day PD will be assessed by surveying participants about whether project goals were met. During each session, participants will be given time to ask questions and learn how to create a new culture of advising (Denison, Hooijberg, Lane, & Lief, 2012). I will now describe the agenda for each PD day.

Day 1 – The target audience for my project will be the academic advisors. This session will focus on showing the student-teaching process of each local school district and how to properly get students involved in the student-teaching process. Various local school district personnel will present their student-teaching process and how they can help Riverside College students properly enter the student-teaching process. This day will

consist of networking with representatives from the local school districts to show advisors how to help their students navigate the student-teacher process. The local school districts' personnel will inform the academic advisors of all of the necessary requirements to become a student-teacher for each local school district. Each district may have different policies and procedures for graduate students to enter their schools. After the session completes, a survey (Appendix A) will be distributed to participants for feedback.

Day 2 – The target audience will be the academic advisors. This session will focus on topics which enable advisors to understand better graduate students and how to build positive relationships. School advisors from surrounding colleges and universities who specialize in relationship building and have been successful based on their school's data in establishing personal relationships with their students while demonstrating appropriate advising behaviors will train Riverside College's advisors. This session will also include the stress and personal challenges that come with the job. This day consists of relationship building activities that other academic advisors from local colleges and universities have implemented successfully. After the session completes, a survey (Appendix A) will be distributed to participants for feedback.

Day 3 – The target audience for the third day of my project will be the academic advisors. This session will focus on building better communication with professors. Riverside College's professors will train the advisors. This day will consist of a collaborative discussion among academic advisors and professors at Riverside College. During this discussion, professors will relay to the academic advisors their various teaching styles and strategies, course outcomes, and how students could be placed in their

courses based on learning styles and achievement capabilities. Academic advisors will discuss a more feasible schedule where they can meet more frequently with professors. After the session completes, a survey (Appendix A) will be distributed to participants for feedback for the entire 3-Day PD.

### **Rationale**

The findings of this study revealed that, in spite of academic advisors' various interventions, students' satisfaction with the advising program was still low. I identified areas of improvement including lack of training on program specific information, policies and procedures, campus resources, relationship building, and communication skills. These areas of improvement provided me reasoning as to why a PD was appropriate for my project.

The data analysis in Section 2 showed that academic advisors needed to be more knowledgeable about the student-teacher requirements for the local school districts, take the time to get to know their students, and meet more frequently with the professors. I designed the project to provide training on different aspects of academic advising, which allows participants an opportunity to become more effective (Dill & Hunter, 2010). Academic advisors may not use what they learn in the PD, but they will have an opportunity to learn from the PD presenters and practice implementation of changes during each session. Attending PD related to academic advising may increase the advisors' at Riverside College advising knowledge and skills.

By implementing large and small scale changes, a potentially positive impact on academic advising could occur at Riverside College. These changes may lead to



improving student satisfaction with the advising program. The advising program may also become more effective. All of these changes may lead to students and academic advisors understanding their value as important members of the institution.

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide evidence to support for the proposed project genre based upon findings from my data collection and analysis. The review begins with a rationale for the PD as an appropriate way to increase student satisfaction with the advising program. PD should provide time for reflection on ideas, beliefs, and practices (Powers, Carlston, & Hughey, 2014; Robins & Zarges, 2011). Academic advisors, administration, and professors must share a common vision of assisting students with being successful at Riverside College. The qualitative data analysis indicated the need for an interactive PD to engage academic advisors with networking skills, relationship building skills, and communication skills.

The literature review focuses on the suggested PD and design of this project. I separated this literature review into three sections: a discussion of how culture influences specific behavior, formal support that is essential to developing a new culture of advising, and assessment of the support provided. The information provided in the review of the literature offers evidence to support the opening steps required for the progress of a new culture of advising at Riverside College. I explored Walden University's online library, ERIC database, Education Research Complete database, Sage database, ProQuest Central database, Teacher Reference Center database, and the Google Scholar search engine for this literature review. I used Boolean phrases. I searched these key terms: *academic*

*advising, student-advisor relationships, degree audit, advising caseload, advising culture, self-reflection, professional development design, and advisor responsibilities.*

### **Cultural Influence**

Academic advisors are mostly prone to operate in the conditions that the intuition has set forth if no change has been encouraged or sought after by administration based on the findings from this study. Culture refers to the ideals, principles, opinions, practices, and expectations that directed the actions of a collective group, assembly, or institution (Cholewa, & Ramaswami, 2015; Fullan, 2014; Hrabowski 2014; King, 2011; Miller, 2015). An institution's culture offers individuals with a sense of guidance and stability that is implanted in the institution's operation and fundamental beliefs (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff, & Thakor, 2014; Denison et al., 2012; Lorange, 2013; Robbins, 2013). It is the collaboration between precise practices, activities, past involvements, and guidelines that form an institution's culture. According to Kowch (2012) and Morgan (2011), an institution's culture considerably influences the actions that can be reformed and applied at an institution. For institutions to create and maintain an effective academic advising system, institutions need to focus on creating a new culture of academic advising (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Karr-Lilienthal, Lazarowicz, McGill, & Menke, 2013, Teasley & Buchanan, 2013). Implementing institutional and advisor level changes to increase the level of commitment from all members of the institution develops a new culture of academic advising.

When changes occur on any level, it is more effective when incrementally implemented. Dunn, Wilson, Freeman, and Stowell (2011), and Skidmore, Slate, and

Onwuegbuzie, (2010) found that grand scale fluctuations are more difficult to accomplish. However, by concentrating on minor scale alterations, supporters of the institution would begin to revolutionize their interpretation of advising and a new culture of advising would unavoidably cultivate. The changes needed to develop a new culture of advising includes policy and procedural changes related to academic advising and changing the way individuals viewed academic advising (Barron & Powell, 2014; Jones & Hansen, 2014; Waters et al., 2015). The initial step of developing a new culture of advising at Riverside College is to change the way advisors of the institution view academic advising.

### **Institutional Support for Academic Advisors**

Academic advisors perform a variety of activities including providing students with support, encouraging students to think and learn, and assisting students in setting both academic and career goals based on the findings from my study. The next step in developing a new culture of advising is to inspect the institutional support structures that exist for academic advisors to successfully carry out all of their duties. This process involves examining the institution's support of academic advising. Institutions should provide comprehensive PD workshops and ongoing support for the academic advisors. This support assists advisors in anticipating potential problems, working effectively with students to manage risk, and understanding their own responsibilities (Ferris, Johnson, Lovitz, Stroud, & Rudsille, 2011; Handel, 2013; Lundberg, 2014; Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Once it is clear that the institution supports

academic advising, the administrators can implement small and large-scale variations to increase the efficiency of the academic advising system.

To obtain a clear picture of how academic advising is supported by institutions of higher education across the nation, it is necessary to conduct a needs assessment from the academic advisors at Riverside College. I want the academic advisors to understand that they are a part of the PD process. Data analysis provided a glimpse of what academic advisors' perceptions were to facilitate their learning needs.

According to the social constructivist framework, researchers use qualitative data collection and are actively involved with their participants to comprehend meanings and viewpoints. Social constructivists use observation, interviews, pictures, videos, and individual history to collect their data and to get closer to the participants. Adults learn best when they are respected, allowed to participate in their learning, and encouraged to share their experiences with others (Farmer, 2011; Levin, Cox, Cerven, & Haberler, 2010; Perin, 2011; Siddique, Aslam, Khan, Fatima, 2011). The academic advisors I interviewed voiced an interest in being part of an interactive PD only if their feedback about the sessions were used to improve possible future PD. Academic advisors wanted to share their experiences and actively engage during PD based on the findings from my study.

PD has several strategies to train individuals. Block (2014), Hatch and Bohlig (2015), and McLeskey (2011) described PD as having a variety of intentions to include providing knowledge and awareness to new procedures, educational issues, or providing faculty members new strategies for instruction and skill training. Ashraf (2012),

Christesen and Turner (2014), Hill and Flores (2014), and Kataria, Garg, and Rastogi (2012) described how networking and collaborative relationships provide positive working relationships. Delprino (2013), Conrad and Poole (2011), Rogers (2010), Suskie (2014), and Wilson (2015) described how an active participatory workshop could provide opportunities for idea sharing and emotional support. I designed a PD to implement sessions for academic advisors at Riverside College based on the findings from my study.

### **Assessment of Support**

Data analysis of the PD involves participants' feedback about the daily sessions and overall 3-day PD. Feedback is crucial for an adoption of new strategies and reforms based on the findings from my study. Evaluations lead to possible changes based on results.

Informed decisions are made based on formal and informal evaluations. Evaluations are used for decision-making purposes (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Pang, 2012; Smith & Allen, 2014). The research builds a general understanding and knowledge of a particular topic and best practices. Ewell (2011), Lukas, Whitwell, and Heide (2013), Mehaffy (2012), and Saba and Zafar (2013) described how the evaluation process helps to define worth and refer for future programmatic adjustments and success. Criticisms, designing new programs and making changes to the existing approaches are the goals of evaluations. Evaluations require data collection (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2014; Brinkerhoff, Brethower, Nowakowski, & Hluchyj, 2012; Calder, 2013). Evaluations are a factor of decisions. The evaluation data collection includes surveys for my study.

Evaluation goals are used to implement new PD or make changes to existing ones. A goal of evaluations is to determine the overall effectiveness and efficacy of the program. Evaluations can be used in both qualitative and quantitative studies to collect data based on the audience and rationale of the evaluation. Basak and Govender (2015), Bennett (2011), Betts and Heaston (2014), and Long (2011) described survey data as collected and reported by the participant throughout the study or as data collected from standardized test scores, surveys, interviews, and shared at the end of the project. Surveys will be provided for participants to reflect upon the daily content of my PD (Blyth & Davis, 2013; Bovill, 2011; Cowan & George, 2013; Kingston & Nash, 2011). A survey will be provided at the end of the 3-day PD to capture participants' perceptions of the overall PD. Adjustments to possible future PD will be based on the feedback participants provide.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

In summary, the literature review indicated a new culture of advising supported by PD focused on academic advisor training needs and promoted a collaborative environment. A structured PD is viewed as helpful for academic advisors to understand how to incorporate a new culture of advising based on the findings from this study. These articles stressed how knowledge and a PD would promote self-confidence allowing for networking, relationship building, and communication.

### **Implementation**

Before I implement the PD, the advisors will receive a needs assessment, which will help with the planning of the sessions to focus on areas where the emphasis is needed

most. A classroom will be reserved for the 3-day PD to allow academic advisors to get a good understanding of the concepts of a new culture of advising and have the opportunity for a face-to-face experience with the presenters in a familiar location. This project consists of a 3-day PD conducted during the first week before classes start for the spring semester.

The group will be comprised of the academic advisors, professors, academic advisors from neighboring colleges and universities, and local school district representatives. Appendix A outlines the 3-day PD. This PD will be held the week the academic advisors return, which is a week before classes on campus start. Creation of the 3-day PD would not cost the institution any additional funds. Because the workshop is built into the budget for PD, the College will cover the cost of the workshop. I developed the 3-day PD and all of the supporting documentation. I have also spoken to the local colleges and universities and they have agreed to have their academic advisors provide PD to Riverside College's academic advisors in exchange for being able to place the workshop on their resume. The professors have stated that they would like to meet with the advisors during this time to discuss how they can better communicate with one another.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

Potential resources and existing supports include assistance from the local school districts, academic advisors from surrounding colleges and universities, professors from Riverside College, and access to a classroom to reserve for the 3-day PD. As the PD coordinator, I will act as the facilitator during the workshop. Materials (post-it chart

paper, pens, etc.) are part of the current event budget and are not anticipated to run over the currently allotted amount. Appendix A includes the agendas, PowerPoints, and surveys for my project.

### **Potential Barriers**

Whenever a change occurs, there is the potential for opposition. One potential barrier is that academic advisors may not buy into the changes to promote new culture. Another potential barrier is that the PD workshop is not mandatory for advisors. The advisors may not see the relevance in attending the workshop. Barriers that may hinder implementation of the PD workshop could include the topic itself, which for the academic advisors may have negative connotations; the extended time-frame, which may seem cumbersome to those individuals who are used to the one-day approach instead of a three-day approach; and additional planning time for the facilitator. One potential solution to the barriers would be a pre-workshop session to justify the need and explain potential benefits of the workshop.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The PD will take place during the week before classes start in January. Planning for the event would begin in early October. Save the date, follow-up invitations, and reminder announcements would occur once every three weeks, starting mid-November. Pre-assessment phone calls and correspondence indicating the extended length of the session and to elicit participant input would take place in early October and would then be used to shape specific planning efforts, based on participant feedback.



The workshop will begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. each day over a 3-day period to allow participants time in the afternoon to plan and prepare for implementation strategies. Daily continental breakfast and snacks will be provided as participants take their breaks during the workshop. There will be multiple activities presented as participants go through the sessions.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of the Researcher and Others**

The overall goal of developing a new culture of advising is to improve student satisfaction with the advising program. Therefore, many individuals at Riverside College will have responsibilities as a new culture of advising is being developed. Students will be responsible for evaluating the academic advising program once a semester. As a key member of this project, I will develop the PD and serve as the facilitator of the PD. Academic advisors will be responsible for attending the 3-day PD workshop, increasing their knowledge and skills through attendance of the 3-day PD workshop, maintaining close contact with graduate students, implementing and regularly evaluating graduate students to determine achievement of student learning outcomes, and meeting with the professors. The administration will be responsible for providing the necessary support to the academic advisors as necessary.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The end product of this project is to develop a new culture of advising so that student satisfaction with academic advising program improves. The key stakeholders who are needed for successful implementation of this project include the academic advisors, local school district representatives, other academic advisors from surrounding colleges

and universities, administrators, and professors. Surveys of the project will be used to determine if participants thought the learning objectives were met and identify recommendations they may have for possible future PD (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

At the completion of each day, a survey will be given seeking feedback on the quality of the session. After the third day, a survey will be issued to get the participants' feedback about the "New Advising Project" and to see if the goals were met. The surveys are listed in Appendix A. The surveys each consist of a 1- page combined Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and open-ended questions.

The surveys will be used to determine the effectiveness of the sessions and to identify additional topics of interest related to academic advising. The overall evaluation goal for the proposed project is to find ways to improve student satisfaction with the advising program based on the findings from Section 2. The surveys will also allow participants to provide suggestions for improving academic advising. Once the survey data have been collected, I will make the anonymous data available.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

This project has the potential to impact student satisfaction with the advising program at Riverside College. By participating in developing a new culture of advising, academic advisors will potentially understand the value in the change of advising. This process could lead to increased student success, student retention, and graduation rates.

Another consideration related to improving student satisfaction is that the reputation for Riverside College will be improved. Students will be better prepared when

graduating to go into the workforce. Satisfied students will recommend Riverside College to their friends, family, and co-workers who are looking into furthering their education. As a result, more income will be generated for the college because more students will attend and persist to completion. Additional income for the college means that faculty and staff will continue to have jobs and students will continue to have the resources they need to be successful in college.

### **Far Reaching**

The results of my qualitative case study were only pertinent to Riverside College. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to other institutions. One of the limitations were that this study was limited to second-year students in the Master's in Education Mathematics program, and results may not be representative of the entire student body at Riverside College. Another limitation was that this was a qualitative study. The definition of satisfaction may have differed per participant. However, other institutions might benefit from the study results by conducting their PD workshops and continuing on this research in their particular setting.

### **Conclusion**

Section 3 provides a depiction and scientific rationale for the proposed project. A review of the literature was given to support how the project genre and workshop and development aided as a suitable opportunity to address both research problem and findings. A discussion of the project itself described needed resources and current support systems that will make implementation possible. Potential barriers to implementation, as well as an evaluation plan, were also described. Section 3 concluded by making

connections between the project and social change that could be expected for stakeholders in the local community and within a larger, global context. In Section 4, concluding reflections about the project, as well as the scholar practice of the researcher will be discussed.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this project study is to learn how to improve student satisfaction with academic advising at Riverside College. Based on the results of the case study, I developed a 3-day PD workshop to improve academic advisors' knowledge and skills. PD will allow academic advisors to implement a new culture of advising (Fullan, 2014) at the College, which will increase the effectiveness of academic advising and improve student satisfaction. Through the gradual release of change, academic advisors should be better able to perform their advisor role effectively and be more supported in doing so. They should view academic advising as a priority. I believe that student satisfaction will increase based on these changes.

The purpose of this section is to address the project's strengths and limitations and address my personal reflections about the research process. This section also focuses on my doctoral study experience emphasizing scholarship, leadership, and change. I will address the potential for social change arising from my study as well as implications for future research.

#### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The effectiveness of the advising program at different colleges and universities in the U.S. affects graduate student perception of advising. The literature showed how academic advising varies among value and performance per institution and is also interdependent with the institution's culture (Jones, 2013). Kaur (2013) found that for academic advising to be effective, there must be a culture of advising, which enables the academic advisor to view advising differently. A new culture of advising is needed for

Riverside College to have the opportunity to improve graduate student satisfaction. By implementing a project to promote the development of a new culture of advising (Lorange, 2013) at Riverside College, I hope to provide academic advisors with the resources, understanding, and institutional support to effectively perform their academic advising role. When academic advisors effectively perform academic advising, student satisfaction, success, retention, and enrollment, as well as graduation rates, may increase (Settle, 2011). Effective advising not only impacts graduate student satisfaction but also has other positive effects on student retention, student performance, and time to graduate.

A strength I identified with this project is that academic advisors will view themselves as being an important part of the development of a new culture of advising, and they will take ownership of the process. As a result, advisors will be more likely to implement the new culture of advising into their advising practices (Bustos & Arostegui, 2012). This view is due to academic advisors completing a needs assessment before the PD, actively participating in the PD, and having their feedback recorded. The more a participant understands that he or she is a part of the change, the more likely he or she will go along with those changes (Cherry, 2013). When participants are involved in the planning of a PD, it offers the participants an opportunity to see the benefits in participating in the PD and possibly incorporating the new strategies learned from the PD.

With every qualitative study, limitations are a factor in altering plans for a project. Time was a limitation. The 3-day PD sessions may not be enough days for adequate training for the academic advisors. A second limitation of this project was that I did not

seek input from any outside resources for my study. All of the work was done by me, which could be considered somewhat biased.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Academic advisors may request additional time to meet with the local school districts, academic advisors from surrounding colleges and universities, and professors at Riverside College. Applegate (2012) considered holding refresher workshops because academic advisors need the opportunity to stay up to date on policies and best practices. For a PD to be effective, participants need enough time to be actively involved to gain adequate information from the sessions offered to learn.

Before implementing this project, I will discuss the results of my study with the administration. Feedback from the administration will guide future changes to the project. After administrators have provided me with feedback, I will share the results of my study and the upcoming changes with the academic advisors at Riverside College. An academic advising committee will also be created to evaluate the effectiveness of academic advising continually and to identify alternative strategies to increase the effectiveness of academic advising at the Riverside College. I centered all aspects of my project on my study and study site.

### **Scholarship**

My doctoral passage indicated to me the significance of scholarship and how it can support educational development. This passage was the most challenging and rewarding process that I have ever experienced. Because scholarship is grounded in human capability and life-long learning (Ashraf, 2012), I found that one cannot know

everything. Scholarship should consist of one always searching for knowledge and connecting with others to share that knowledge to encouraging the growth of the academic community.

As a researcher, I developed an even stronger appreciation of the importance of academic articles and the significance of peer-reviewed works. This appreciation has been an important influence on my development as a researcher. I supported my study by examining the literature, which both validated and disregarded various options discussed. Therefore, I supported my study by relating it to the literature to validate my study. I have learned a great deal about research through the process of conducting research in the doctoral program.

Identifying a problem for my study was not difficult. I had been teaching in higher education for 5 years when I overheard many of my students voicing dissatisfaction with the academic advising program. They described their advisor as not having knowledge in crucial areas, not being valued as a student, and not having a positive outlook on advising. These concerns sparked my interest; therefore, I searched to see literature conducted on academic advising. To my surprise, there is a vast amount of literature on academic advising (Allen et al., 2013; Ambrose & Williamson; 2013; Barbuto et al., 2011; Barron & Powell, 2014). I found many of my concerns in the literature, which consisted of graduate students not being satisfied with academic advisors' availability, knowledge, and approachability.

As I began writing the prospectus, I was unsure whether I should conduct a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods study. Through the research process, I learned



that collaborating with colleagues and my doctoral study committee critical. I used feedback from my doctoral study committee and my colleagues to help identify the type of study that I was going to conduct. I also learned that collaboration is helpful when reviewing my procedures for my focus groups and creating my project study as I have found other scholar's insights to be valuable resources throughout my study.

My experience as an undergraduate and graduate student provided me with a foundation for scholarly writing. However, I had some difficulty writing clearly and precisely. I overcame those difficulties by using the Grammarly website. I learned how to write and revise on an ongoing basis. At the beginning of my doctoral study, I would become frustrated with all of the revisions. After I had spoken with my doctoral chair, I learned that the revisions make your writing better. The doctoral study is like any other form of writing; it is a work in progress.

Another point that I learned through my doctoral study was to set realistic goals. I had no idea that conducting research would take such a significant amount of time. I learned that conducting research takes time, dedication, and perseverance. Without realistic goals, I could easily become overwhelmed and frustrated. My chair helped me identify and set realistic goals so that I could be successful.

As a scholar, I also learned the importance of using the literature to support research. If I had not reviewed the literature, I would not have been able to devise a plan for developing a new culture of advising at Riverside College. I also learned that research is ongoing. Research in the field of academic advising is ongoing and needs to continue

so that changes can continue to be made to improve the effectiveness of academic advising.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Project development and evaluation occurs when a researcher identifies a research question, and a review of the literature provides a compass on past research designs and recommendations. When the problem is understood, then a plan can be created to address the problem. A researcher needs to decide the goals and outcomes of a project (Bernard & Bernard, 2013). The project should consider the needs of the stakeholders participating in the project. To establish the best way to evaluate the project objectives, a researcher needs to understand the quantitative and qualitative measures (Ary et al., 2013). When the problem is understood, then a plan can be created to address the problem.

Developing my project made me realize how important it is to search the literature and identify best practices that have been effective at solving similar problems in other institutions. Developing my project also reinforced the importance of evaluation in education. The evaluation must be ongoing so that changes throughout the project the possibility of changes can occur. Finally, I was able to reach the conclusion that key stakeholders at the institution must support projects for the projects to be viewed as successful. If key stakeholders are not in agreement with the project, the goals of the project will be impossible to accomplish.

### **Leadership and Change**

As I advanced into the finishing phases of my doctoral work, opportunities opened up for me to develop my leadership capability at my educational institution.

There was perhaps not a single day in the HEAL program that I did not have anxiety about some facet of the work and become apprehensive about my attitude to keep moving through my proposal. However, I recognized that if I relied on my study and envisioned the ability to help graduate students better after I received my doctoral degree, I could persevere through this process.

As I transition my roles into grander leadership and perceptibility, I discovered myself attracted to the examples from professors in my courses and from the works and educational tasks we practiced as HEAL students. I occasionally had to remind myself to focus on my study and one in on my skills I learned at Walden University. I have also learned to collaborate with colleagues and associates to be a part of my academic journey. I have been enriched by the cooperative energies and enthusiasm to use other's assets on behalf of my desired initiative. I am also more receptive to change and try to remain current and scholastically engaged with others as I have realized that changes are about present experience with real people and needs. I can use the previous experiences to help advise future leadership choices, but the present is all I have with which to expedite quality in advanced education.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

Completing my doctoral study provided me with many opportunities to grow as a scholar. This process provided me with chances to develop my research skills and knowledge, to explore educational problems and identify potential solutions, and to develop my writing skills. The process also enabled me to identify solutions to increase the effectiveness of academic advising at Riverside College. Even though I still consider

myself a novice researcher, I am confident in conducting research. I will continue to seek current best practices in the literature, and I plan to conduct research on a regular basis to promote positive social change for students, Riverside College, and higher education.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner, my self-confidence greatly increased. I extremely appreciate having had the particular involvements of taking my intuition through an orderly process in the HEAL course work and creating a project study to enhance my skills. The wisdom I have gained through my experience while completing this project study has aided me to develop and enhance my talents so that I can be self-assured in encouraging change in academic advising. A continuous emphasis on my goals obligated me to refine my work repeatedly until it grasped a level of specificity that would harvest findings that could help create a project of importance. I was flabbergasted by the length of time this research took to finish and similarly astonished at my degree of satisfaction while gathering the qualitative data. I honestly appreciated guiding the focus group discussions. My drive as a practitioner is to implement the 3-Day PD workshop I had created from my project.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer, I would need to present my plan to the stakeholders. Implementation strategies and realistic timelines are essential for a successful orientation program. Upon acceptance of my project implementation plans, I understood I needed to be fair and flexible concerning changes that might be necessary for the orientation plans to be successful. Project development is a time-consuming task. It requires consideration

of many components including identification of the problem, goals, key stakeholders, resources, budget, timeline, and evaluation procedures. I will use the skills that I learned from developing this project for future projects. I can successfully develop other projects as a result of my doctoral study.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The development of a new culture of advising at Riverside College could create positive social change. First, it could positively impact students' satisfaction with academic advising. By allowing change to occur slowly, I consider academic advisors, based on the data analysis, would embrace the PD. The change could occur when academic advisors are supportive and supported with the proper infrastructure.

From the data analysis, I found that the successful integration of a new culture of advising needed proper infrastructure such as time, resources, academic advisor input. For the success of the academic advising program, academic advisors need to understand their input is crucial. Without academic advisor input or support, changes might not occur. When academic advisors are part of the organization, positive changes could occur and have a ripple effect through the program to other institutions that have a connection to the college of study.

Another way to develop a new culture of advising at Riverside College could create positive social change is by increasing student retention. McGinn, Niemczyk, and Saudelli (2013) and Nitecki (2011) found that academic advising directly links to student satisfaction and retention. When students are pleased with their institution, they are more

likely to persist toward degree completion. Therefore, when students persist toward degree completion, student retention rates will increase.

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

The results of this study led to the development of a proposal for creating a new culture of advising. Developing a new culture of advising required numerous large and small scale policy and procedure changes. I focused these changes on ensuring student satisfaction improved with the academic advising program and ensuring academic advisors had institutional resources and support so that they could effectively advise students. Disseminating the results of this study and the proposal for promoting the development of a new culture of advising in academic journals will enable other institutions of higher education to replicate the study and potentially develop a new culture of advising at other institutions. Furthermore, the results could assist other institutions of higher education with increasing student retention and graduation rates, as well as increasing faculty and student satisfaction with academic advising. Future research is needed to analyze the effectiveness of developing a new culture of advising as a strategy for increasing student retention rates and faculty and student satisfaction with academic advising.

### **Conclusion**

Section 4 provided a reflection on the project study's strengths. It also addressed limitations of the study with other recommendations found in the literature. A self-reflective investigation involved discussion about the notion of scholarship and the spirit of being a scholar. In investigative project development and evaluation, other perceptions

were shared about the evolution I experienced as a project creator. A development of me as a leader and one with the attitude to efficiently deal with adjustments was another cause of consideration. While deliberating the significance of my study, I consistently learned new information while on my doctoral path and had time for thought and reflection. Finally, insinuations of the study were shared and accentuated by submissions already made and possibly approaching. I also made recommendations concerning future directions for research which could further influence the field of higher education and adult learning.

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## Appendix A: Professional Development Workshop

**Title:** The New Advising Project

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to provide an orientation and training PD workshop for academic advisors to strengthen their abilities to network, build relationships and communicate.

**Goals:** The goals are to (a) to improve student satisfaction with the advising program; (b) to increase the effectiveness of the academic advisors; and (c) to present tools to support academic advisors.

**Desired Outcomes:** The desired outcome is for academic advisors to incorporate the strategies discussed and activities implemented during the trainings and improve student satisfaction.

**Target Audience:** The target audience is the academic advisors.

**Timeline:** A 3-day PD training. Details are listed in the agenda.

**Training Activities and Presentations:** Specific activities and presentations include efficiently learning the student-teaching process offered by the local school districts, building more effective relationships with students, correctly aligning student learning styles with professors, and workshop surveys. A description of activities and presentations are outlined on each agenda starting on page 147.

## **Professional Development Training Agenda**

### Day 1

- 9:00 a.m.-9:10 a.m.- Welcome
- 9:10 a.m.-9:25 a.m.- What Drives Us
- 9:25 a.m.-10:10 a.m.- Student-Teaching to a Halt
- 10:10 a.m.-10:25 a.m.- Break
- 10:25 a.m.-10:45 a.m.- Student-Teaching in the Making
- 10:45 a.m.-11:30 a.m.- Staying on Track
- 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.- Student-Teaching Process
- 12:30 p.m.-1:45 p.m.- Lunch Break
- 1:45 p.m.-3:00 p.m.- Preparation is Key
- 3:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.- Break
- 3:15 p.m.-3:45 p.m.- Creating an Effective Plan of Action
- 3:45 p.m.-4:00 p.m.- Day 1 Survey
- 4:00 p.m.- Dismissal



## Day 2

- 9:00 a.m.-9:05 a.m.- Welcome and Questions from Previous Day
- 9:05 a.m.-9:55 a.m.- Importance of Relationship Building
- 9:55 a.m.-10:10 a.m.- Break
- 10:10 a.m.-10:50 a.m. - Why Can't We Get Along?
- 10:50 a.m.-11:20 a.m.- Starting the Conversation
- 11:20 a.m.-11:50 a.m.- Establishing Rapport
- 11:50 p.m.-1:05 p.m.- Lunch
- 1:05 p.m.-2:05 p.m.- Relationship Building
- 2:05 p.m.-2:20 p.m.- Break
- 2:20 p.m.-3:45 p.m.- Win-Win Situation
- 3:45 p.m.-4:00 p.m.- Day 2 Survey
- 4:00 p.m.- Dismissal

## Day 3

- 9:00 a.m.-9:15 a.m.- Welcome and Questions from Previous Sessions
- 9:15 a.m.-10:00 a.m.- The How's and Why's of Alignment
- 10:00 a.m.-10:45 a.m. - Should Learning Styles be Taken into Consideration?
- 10:45 a.m.-11:00 a.m.- Break
- 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.- Teaching Styles and Course Outcomes
- 12:00 p.m.-12:45 p.m.- Possible Potential for Alignment
- 12:45 p.m.-2:00 p.m.- Lunch
- 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. - What Would You Do?
- 3:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.- Break
- 3:15 p.m.-3:45 p.m.- Summarize and Question/Answer
- 3:45 p.m.-4:00 p.m.- Day 3 Survey

## **Training Activities and Presentations**

Day 1

**What Drives Us:** All participants will turn to their partner and take one minute to answer each question. This activity will be a total of five questions for five minutes per participant. Participants will be expected to share responses.

Minute 1: Why did you become an academic advisor?

Minute 2: What is one thing you are most excited about for this year?

Minute 3: What is one concern you have about being an academic advisor?

Minute 4: What has served you most effectively in your role as an academic advisor?

Minute 5: What do you need most from your administrator for you to be an effective academic advisor?

The presenter will ask for participants to share their response to one of the questions.


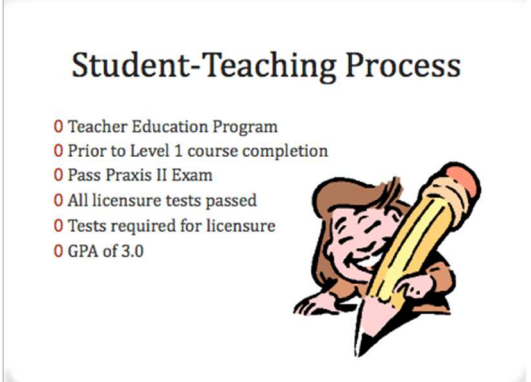
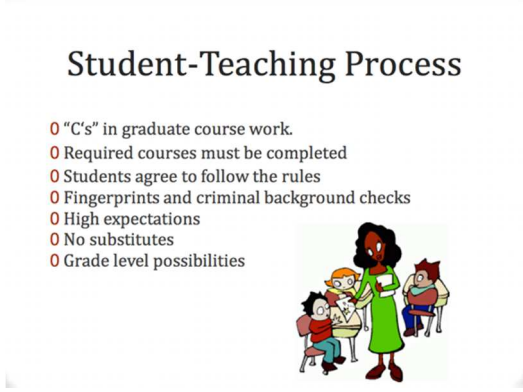
**Student-Teaching to a Halt:** The researcher will discuss how the student-teaching process has come to a halt at Riverside College. According to the results, 100% of the participants agreed that advisors should be knowledgeable of classes, outside resources, and rules and procedures. According to 90% of the participants, advisors needed to be more knowledgeable about the student-teacher requirements for the local school districts. Local school districts and academic advisors will discuss issues surrounding students being able to enter student-teaching in general.



**Student-Teaching in the Making:** Local school districts will discuss their different requirements for students entering student-teaching. Academic advisors and the local

school district will discuss issues and concerns with there being various requirements for each district.

**Staying on Track:** The presenter explains that groups of 10 will work together to analyze a transcript to determine if the student meets the requirements to enter the student-teaching program with a local school district. The purpose of the activity is for academic advisors to see the importance of analyzing transcripts, collaborating with the local school districts, and knowing when a student can enter the student-teaching process. The presenter will ask the academic advisors and local school district representatives to share what they learned during the activity. The presenter will explain how this activity reveals how the collaboration between academic advisors and the local school districts can assist students with successfully entering the student-teaching process.

**Student-Teaching Process Presentation**

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 1</p> 	<p>The presenter will open with the importance of knowing the correct steps of the student-teaching process and how this can make the transition less complex for students</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 2</p> 	<p>Discuss key student-teaching points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students must be in teacher education program (TEP) one semester before student-teaching.</li> <li>• Before completing Level 1 courses in their program, the TEP must admit the graduate student.</li> <li>• Pass Praxis II Content Knowledge Area Exam before beginning student-teaching semester.</li> <li>• Take all licensure tests before the end of the student-teaching semester.</li> <li>• Pass all tests required for licensure but not for graduation.</li> <li>• Students must have 3.0 GPA.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 3</p> 	<p>Presenter will discuss the following key points for the student-teaching process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may have no more than seven credit hours of “C’s” in graduate course work.</li> <li>• Graduate students must complete all required courses before student-teaching.</li> <li>• Student-teachers agree to follow rules of the school system and College’s policies.</li> <li>• Students will not receive any student-teaching complete criminal background check before being assigned to a school district.</li> <li>• Student-teachers are to be at their assigned school every day for the entire teacher work day, including faculty</li> </ul>

	<p>meetings, PTA meetings, parent-teacher conferences and other assigned duties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-teachers may not serve as substitute teachers.</li> <li>• Depending on the licensure area, most students will have one top and one lower grade student-teaching placement.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 4</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <h2>Student-Teaching Process</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Academic advisor responsibilities</li> <li>◦ Develop a plan between student and teacher</li> </ul>  </div>	<p>Presenter will discuss the following key points for the student-teaching process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is the academic advisor's responsibility to communicate with the classroom teacher about any concerns.</li> <li>• Develop a remediation plan with the classroom teacher and the student-teacher.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 5</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <h2>Questions and Concerns</h2>  </div>	<p>The presenter will open the floor for questions and concerns from the academic advisors.</p>

**Preparation is Key:** Preparation activities are discussed between the local school districts and academic advisors to devise an effective plan to ensure that all students meet the requirements for the student-teaching process. All participants will create a timeline and a checklist to determine when a student becomes eligible to enter the student-teaching process. All participants will have defined roles and communicate at least once a month to determine which students are on track and which students need an intervention before entering the student-teaching process.

**Creating an Effective Plan of Action:** Local school districts and academic advisors list on chart paper what activities will take place to keep academic advisors informed on the student-teaching process. They will also list who is responsible for monitoring student progress and how this approach can help improve student satisfaction.

Day 2

**Importance of Relationship Building:** The presenter will ask academic advising groups by table to begin at an assigned chart paper and go to each numbered question to discuss and write answers about their campus on each chart paper to answer the following questions:

- 1) What do you believe is the current attrition rate for graduate students and why?
- 2) What do you believe is beginning students' greatest challenge at being effective at graduate school?
- 3) What kinds of supports do you provide at your campus to support students? To what extent are these supports effective?
- 4) How often do you conduct formal meetings with students?
- 5) What are you doing personally to help your students to be successful academically?

The presenter will ask a representative to read the answers academic advisors charted about each question.

**Why Can't We Get Along:** The researcher will engage the academic advisors in a discussion as to why relationships are not improving between academic advisors and students overall. Based on the findings, students stated the advisors did not know who they were and that the advisors did not take the initiative to learn who they were when arranging meetings with the students. Students would also like to build more effective relationships with academic advisors, meaning they would like to have a more personal relationship where they can talk about their concerns, issues, and interests.



**Starting the Conversation:** The presenter explains that participants will get with a partner and practice how to start a conversation with a graduate student. The participants will practice starting the conversation to facilitate students' transition

These are a few conversation starters:




- 1) I noticed that...
- 2) I wonder if we could take about...
- 3) Would it be okay if we talked about...?
- 4) What concerns do you have about...?
- 5) I hope you don't mind my asking, but is there something you'd like to talk to be about? I've noticed some changes in your performance/behavior/appearance lately.
- 6) "I have noticed that you've missed the last \_\_\_\_\_ classes, which is unusual for you. If there is something going on that you'd like to talk about, I'm here."




The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to learn how to have-courageous conversations with their students so students will understand that the academic advisor has their interest in mind. This activity shows how academic advisors can be supportive and trusted.

**Establishing Rapport:** The participants will practice establishing rapport with their students. This process will help set the foundation for the new culture of academic advising and subsequent learning experiences to take place. Each participant will get with a partner and engage in the discussion by role playing and ask questions about the student's background, sharing about their academic career, or facilitating an activity such as an academic journey timeline. The realization that a friendly smile and meeting in a

less formal setting will help. Taking some time to get to know your students before diving directly into academic matters shows that you care. When students sense that you care, they care more about the advising experience. This process will lead us into the second half of our day where we will talk about what relationship building activities and supports academic advisors can provide to help all graduate students on their campus.

**Relationship Building Presentation**

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 1</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic advisors will be asked to discuss what they think relationship building consists of and why it is important.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 2</p> 	<p>Participants will watch a 3 minute video clip on how positive relationship building with students improves student satisfaction and assists students with completing school promptly. Participants will then take 5 minutes to reflect on what they notice with their group.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>How do you build relationships?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Build relationships one at a time.</i></li> <li>• <i>Be friendly and make a connection.</i></li> <li>• <i>Ask students questions.</i></li> <li>• <i>Tell students about yourself.</i></li> </ul> 	<p>Presenter will discuss student/teacher relationship building activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletters are a tool, but not a substitute for getting to know students.</li> <li>• A friendly word can make a student's day.</li> <li>• Common interests help develop close connections with other people</li> <li>• Ask students about themselves and take the time to listen attentively</li> <li>• Trust students to have them trust you.</li> <li>• Share about yourself with students.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter will discuss the following way to build relationships with students:</li> <li>• You don't have to agree with them all the</li> </ul>

<p><i>How do you build relationships?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accept students the way they are.</i></li> <li>• <i>Invite students to get involved.</i></li> <li>• <i>Learn about the student's culture.</i></li> <li>• <i>Pay attention to students.</i></li> <li>• <i>Communicate openly.</i></li> </ul> 	<p>time to form a relationship with them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one likes judgment.</li> <li>• Students want to become part of something bigger than themselves.</li> <li>• Students look for an opportunity to meet other students who share common goals.</li> <li>• At the worst, students will be flattered that you invited them to join.</li> <li>• Show that you care enough to find out about students' lives.</li> <li>• Check in with students each week.</li> <li>• Set a time to talk how things are going.</li> <li>• Talking about important issues reduces misunderstandings and tension.</li> <li>• Practice communication regularly; it's like doing push-ups.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 5</p> <p><i>Practices of Implementation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are you already implementing that has been discussed?</i></li> <li>• <i>What could you work on in order to build stronger relationships?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are your next steps?</i></li> </ul> 	<p>The presenter will ask the academic advisors these questions and give them five minutes to share with the group.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 6</p> <p><i>Questions &amp; Concerns</i></p> 	<p>The presenter will open the floor for questions and concerns.</p>

**Win-Win Situation:** Academic advisors will create a planning calendar to schedule relationship building activities that they plan to implement with their students.




Participants share with the group their plan for how they will begin and maintain supports for their graduate students to build more effective relationships and improve student satisfaction.




Day 3

**The How's and Why's of Alignment:** Participants will watch a video clip on teaching styles aligned with learning styles. Academic advisors will focus on how to align students' learning style with teaching styles and how this could tie into student satisfaction. Participants will discuss what they noticed about the various learning and teaching styles and how this alignment supports student satisfaction.


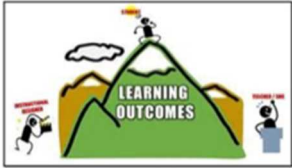

**Should Learning Styles be taken into Consideration?:** According to 90% of the students and 80% of the professors, the advisors did not take the time to match the students' learning style to particular courses, course sections, or professors. Professors and academic advisors will actively engage in the debate on the possible benefits and nuisances of assigning students to particular professors based on learning styles.

**Teaching Styles and Course Outcomes Presentation**

<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 1</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic advisors will be asked to discuss what they think relationship building consists of and why it is important</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 2</p> <p><b>TEACHING STYLES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most effective teachers vary their styles depending on the nature of the subject matter, the phase of the course, and other factors.</li> <li>No two teachers are alike, and any teacher with classroom teaching experience will agree that their style of teaching is uniquely their own.</li> <li>Traditional teaching styles have evolved with the advent of differentiated instruction, prompting teachers to adjust their styles toward students' learning needs.</li> </ul> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By so doing, they encourage and inspire students to do their best at all times throughout the semester.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 3</p> <p><b>DIRECT INSTRUCTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening and following directions</li> <li>Lectures and assigned readings</li> <li>Listening and taking notes</li> <li>This style is acceptable for certain higher-education disciplines and auditorium settings with large groups of students.</li> </ul> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes learning through listening and following directions.</li> <li>Teachers impart information via lectures, readings, presentations, demonstrations, role playing, etc....</li> <li>Students learn by listening, taking notes, role playing, and practice.</li> <li>Ask students about themselves and take the time to listen attentively.</li> <li>Students won't trust you unless you are willing to trust them.</li> <li>Tell them what you genuinely care about and what you think.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 4</p>	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes learning through interaction.</li> </ul>

<p><b>SOCRATIC METHOD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◉ Interaction</li> <li>◉ Critical thinking</li> <li>◉ Teacher is the facilitator</li> <li>◉ Opinions with evidence</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher encourages critical thinking and lively discussion by asking students to respond to challenging questions.</li> <li>• The teacher is a facilitator guiding the discussion to a logical conclusion.</li> <li>• Students learn to have opinions and back them up with facts.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 5</p> <p><b>DELEGATED INSTRUCTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◉ Empowerment</li> <li>◉ Work independently</li> <li>◉ Best-suited for curriculum that requires lab activities</li> <li>◉ Guided discovery and inquiry-based learning places the teacher in an observer role that inspires students by working in tandem toward common goals</li> </ul> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes learning through empowerment.</li> <li>• With this style, the teacher assigns tasks that students work on independently, either individually or in groups.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 6</p> <p><b>TEACHING STYLES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◉ Aligning styles could improve student motivation</li> <li>◉ Learning styles can be learned best when matched appropriately with teaching styles</li> </ul> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When students' learning preferences match their instructor's teaching styles, student motivation and achievement usually improve.</li> <li>• Each of us has a specific learning style (sometimes called a “preference”), and we learn best when information is presented to us in this style.</li> </ul>



<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 7</p> <p><b>COURSE OUTCOMES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Understanding math</li> <li>• Make connections to other content areas</li> <li>• Technology to serve as a tool</li> <li>• Proficient in computation</li> <li>• Understand statistics</li> </ul> 	<p>The presenter will discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher candidates will understand and apply mathematical problem-solving processes and construct rigorous mathematical arguments.</li> <li>• They will understand how mathematics is best learned and taught, supporting positive attitudes towards the subject.</li> <li>• They will make connections among ideas in mathematics and other fields. They will use varied representations of mathematical ideas to communicate mathematical thinking and deepen students' understanding.</li> <li>• They will embrace technology as an essential tool for mathematics.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 8</p> <p><b>MAXIMIZING COURSE OUTCOMES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we maximize our course outcomes by matching student learning styles with various professors?</li> </ul> 	<p>The academic advisors and professors will discuss how they can work together to maximize the outcomes and improve student satisfaction.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Slide 9</p> <p><b>QUESTIONS &amp; CONCERNS</b></p> 	<p>The presenter will open the floor for questions and concerns.</p>

**Possible Potential for Alignment:** Academic advisors and professors discuss advisor and professor meetings, course offerings, and aligning students with professors' teaching style, meaning students being matched to certain professors. Participants will also discuss the consideration that aligning learning and teaching styles could help improve student satisfaction.

**What Would You Do?:** Participants will work in pairs with advising scenarios dealing with aligning student learning styles with the various professor teaching styles. One participant will act as the student, and the other will act as the academic advisor. Based on the scenario, the advisor has to determine the student's learning style and which professors would best fit the student's learning style.

## Surveys

“The New Advising Project” Survey for Days 1 & 2				
Please check the box that best matches your answer:				
1. The facilitator(s) had expert knowledge of content presented.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. The facilitator(s) provided adequate opportunities for questions and discussion.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. Activities were relevant to my needs.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. The information presented was useful.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. Time allotted was adequate				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. The strengths of this workshop session were:				
7. Suggestions for improvement:				

“The New Advising Project” Survey for Day 3				
Please check the box that matches your answer:				
1. “The New Advising Project” will assist in improving student satisfaction with the advising program.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. “The New Advising Project” will assist in increasing my effectiveness as a professional.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. I feel supported in my role as a professional.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. This PD helped me to view my profession as a priority.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. The strengths of this workshop were:				
7. Suggestions for overall improvement:				

## Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participate in the Study

Date:

Greetings Student of [REDACTED],

I invite you to participate in my study about graduate students. I am interested in learning your perspective on the academic advising program.

I am a doctoral student at Walden University and I would like your assistance as I work to complete my doctoral project study. I have received permission from Walden University IRB and [REDACTED] IRB to conduct my research on students' perception of the advising program [REDACTED] IRB will serve as the IRB of record (approval number 002-2015).

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate students on the academic advising program and how it has impacted their level of satisfaction with the advising program. The benefit to participating in this study is the opportunity to provide insights that may lead to improving the delivery of academic advising services to students and improving students' satisfaction.

If you graciously agree, I will send you a consent form for you to review and sign. Involvement in the study will require no more than 90 minutes of your time. Each participant will be asked a series of questions during a pre-arranged focus group. These questions will be sent to you ahead of time. After the focus group, you will be asked to review your transcription to ensure accuracy.

I would like to begin this focus group activity April 14, 2015. If you are willing to assist me, please reply to this e-mail promptly so that I can coordinate our arrangements.

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope you have a great day.

Respectfully,

Jamie L. Green, MAT

## Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

### **Introduction**

I'd first like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be recording what we discuss today. This audio recording will then be transcribed verbatim so that I can use this information in my study. After our conversation has been transcribed, I will ask you to review the transcription to make sure that it accurately reflects our conversation. Although I have a set of formal questions to ask, I would like this focus group activity to be informal and comfortable. Therefore, we will probably use language like "uhs" or "ahs" or other remarks. These will also be transcribed to maintain authenticity, but if I use any direct quotes in my final report I may delete them.

I am interested in discovering how you truly feel about the academic advising program here at Riverside College and how your experience has effected your satisfaction. Your perspective is very important to this study so please share your true feelings. You will not be identified through your participation in this focus group.

### **Focus Group Questions:**

1. What do you think about students' level of satisfaction with the advising program?
2. What is your perception of the advising program?
3. How has your experience been overall with the advising program?
4. What do you think are the qualities of a good advisor?
5. What have you noticed about the advisors' duties as it relates to providing services?
6. How do you view advisor's approachability at this school?
7. What suggestions do you have for advisor services?