

**Redesigning Academic Advising at an Urban Community College System:  
Implementing a SSIP Model to Support Student Success**

by  
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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, and life partner, Taehwa Kyoung. Tae, you have sacrificed much to embark on this journey alongside me. Your support and belief in me has been unwavering. When I began to drift, you anchored me. During moments of self-doubt, you championed me. Each day I strive to do better following your example. I am inspired by your dedication to achieve your goals, and more importantly, your capacity to love, care, and serve others while in pursuit of those goals. I am so proud of you.

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## Abstract

**Background:** As community colleges across the nation engage in efforts to implement student success initiatives (e.g., pathways), these institutions are also engaging in academic advising redesign to support the success of said initiatives. Academic advising is a vital component to the success of community college students, and especially essential to the success of current success initiatives. **Purpose:** The purpose of this dissertation was to examine how college leaders at Urban Community College (UCC, a pseudonym) may redesign academic advising throughout the UCC system. Specifically, I examined how current organizational structures, processes, and attitudes align, and/or inhibit, efforts to redesign academic advising, and what changes are necessary to implement a sustained, strategic, intrusive and integrated, and personal (SSIP) model of academic advising. I answered the following research questions: 1) What are the challenges to a successful reform of academic advising across the UCC system? 2) What measures should UCC take to successfully reform academic advising across the institution? 3) How can leaders and other academic advising stakeholders at UCC overcome challenges to realize successful academic advising reform across the institution? **Methods:** This qualitative case study drew from extensive interview and focus group data collected from students, academic advisors, and administrators over a three-year period. Specifically, data were collected from 78 students, 33 academic advisors, and two administrators. All participants were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Data analysis involved the constant comparative method and utilized the qualitative analysis software NVivo to manage and organize the data analysis. From the low- and high-level inferences which emerged from the data analysis, I

constructed key themes and subthemes which address this case study's research questions. **Findings:** Overwhelming advisor workloads, an emphasis on top-down leadership, and inconsistent academic advising processes and attitudes are the three key challenges to successful academic advising reform which emerged from the data analysis. To overcome these challenges to reform, the data suggest UCC prioritizes reducing academic advisor workloads and moving beyond leaders and silos to promote cross-functional and cross-hierarchical involvement. Furthermore, the data show several areas where academic advising at UCC aligns with the SSIP model. It is, therefore, necessary for leaders and academic advising stakeholders to identify where the processes and attitudes do not align in order to bring them into alignment and ensure consistency across the system. Finally, although the support and involvement of system-level leadership is required for successful academic advising redesign, leaders and academic advising stakeholders should take a shared leadership approach to increase the chances for long-term, second-order changes to take hold. **Conclusion:** The data collected from academic advisors, administrators, and students suggests UCC possesses many of the integral structures (e.g., early alert system, online degree planning, and a required student success course) for implementation of the SSIP model of academic advising. The significant challenge to academic advising redesign lies in bringing together stakeholders from across the institution to engage in a prolonged, shared leadership effort to enact lasting, transformational change across the UCC system.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Jordan recently graduated from high school. He decided to enroll at the local community college for the upcoming fall semester. Although neither of his parents attended college, throughout Jordan's life they encouraged him to continue his education after high school expressing their desire for him to earn a bachelor's degree. Jordan, however, lost sight of his academics during his Junior and Senior years of high school graduating with a 2.5 GPA. He also missed the deadline to take the ACT. Without his test scores and with a GPA of 2.5, Jordan recognized he would likely not be accepted by some of the better-known colleges or universities in the state making the local—just a few miles down the road—community college his only option.

While Jordan is unsure of his exact major, he sees himself studying business. He believes a business degree will allow him to work for a corporation in the future, which should provide a decent—possibly six-figure—income. So, Jordan searches online for business majors at the community college in which he plans to enroll. He learns the college offers AA and AAS degrees as well as certificates in various business specializations. From the information on the website, Jordan is unsure of which major is right for him or if he should be pursuing any of the certifications mentioned. As he scrolls down to the bottom of the site, he happens upon a link which directs him to student support services where, at the top of the page, he reads about academic advisors who help students like him create a plan for their future. Out of the several options available to contact an advisor, Jordan decides on the most convenient for him—virtual videoconferencing platform.

Jordan waits about 10 minutes in a virtual lobby before he is connected with an academic advisor—Tabitha. He explains to Tabitha he would like to study business but is unsure of which major is right for him, or whether he should pursue any of the listed certifications. Tabitha provides a comparison and explanation of the degrees as well as explains differences between the workforce certifications and associate degree plans. After listening to the comparison between the AA and AAS degrees, Jordan relays that he is quite interested in pursuing the AAS in Business Management degree.

Tabitha then goes over the degree plan and explains how many credits in which Jordan will have to enroll to complete the degree on time in two years. After learning Jordan intends to enroll full-time while working a part-time job, Tabitha probes to learn more about Jordan's plans to pay his tuition and about other life circumstances. She learns Jordan plans to live with his parents but will have little financial support. Tabitha also learns Jordan has not yet taken his placement exams. Before ending the meeting with him, the advisor connects Jordan with the financial aid office and testing center on campus. She walks him through how he will register for courses online once he has visited financial aid and sat for the placement exams. Tabitha schedules a follow-up appointment with Jordan. She also ensures he knows how to directly contact her if he has questions or concerns in the meantime.

Although not all the mysteries of enrollment were unveiled during his meeting with Tabitha, Jordan is now more confident to embark on his collegiate journey. Importantly, he now has someone to whom he can reach out and work with when he encounters the unexpected forks and ruts in the road. With the beginning steps of his

journey laid out before him, Jordan plans to visit the financial aid office on campus and schedule a placement exam in the morning.

Jordan's situation is similar to that faced by thousands of potential community college students across the nation—desiring to pursue a college education but unsure of what that education will be and/or how to begin. Academic advisors at community colleges are crucial to student success even before the students enroll in, or begin, their first college course. O'Banion (2020) asserts:

Academic advising is the second most important function in the community college. If it is not conducted with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness, the most important function in the college—instruction—will fail to achieve its purpose of ensuring that students succeed in navigating the curriculum to completion. (p. 1)

The essential purpose of academic advising is to assist students in determining what it is they want to study to achieve their career and life goals (O'Banion, 2020). While the essential purpose of academic advising remains constant, the role and responsibilities of academic advisors continue to evolve.

Community colleges now increasingly task advisors with performing functions which contribute to student success (e.g. course/degree planning and assessment) (Smith & Allen, 2014; Waiwaiolo & Adkins, 2020). Community colleges are right to involve academic advising with efforts related to improving student success. Academic advising can contribute significantly to student success as studies have shown it to relate to improved student persistence, completion, and transfer (Bahr, 2008; Bai & Pan, 2009; Kot, 2014; Seidman, 1991; Swecker et al., 2013; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Academic

advisors, therefore, serve as guides for navigating the community college journey and as cultural ambassadors assisting students' integration into the community college (Strayhorn, 2015).

Community colleges provide access to millions of students—like Jordan—across the United States. Providing access to a higher education to hundreds of thousands of students who otherwise would not pursue a higher education if not for community colleges is certainly a commendable achievement. However, as Strayhorn (2015) comments, “Access without success is useless, but access with success is everything” (p. 58). In this dissertation, therefore, I examine how one community college can engage in transformational advising reform aimed at improving the chance of student success, especially for students who enter the community college facing the most obstacles to achieving their goals (e.g. first-generation students and underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities). I turn now to a brief explanation of access and success at community colleges in the U. S.

### **Student Access and Success at Community Colleges**

Baber et al. (2019) comment, “Like jazz music and baseball, community colleges endure as a uniquely American innovation” (p. 203). The ‘uniquely American innovation’ of community colleges to which Baber et al. (2019) refer is the democratization of higher education. What are the democratic qualities of community colleges in the United States? Baber et al. (2019) assert, “The core purpose of the community college system—regardless of demographic background, previous education record, or geographic location, the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed is a short drive or click away” (p. 203).

Educational deserts—geographic areas with no, or limited, access to public higher education (Hillman, 2014; Klasik et al., 2018)—certainly exist across the U. S.; albeit, community colleges abound across the country located quite evenly across community types (e.g., city, suburban, and rural) compared with four-year colleges and universities, which are more commonly found in cities (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). We refer to community colleges as open-door institutions due to the vast diversity of academic backgrounds and academic goals of the students they serve. Community colleges provide courses, certificates, and programs for high-school graduates and non-graduates alike, for folks who are bachelor-degree bound or associate-degree bound, for those who want to take developmental courses or those seeking certification to enter into, or seek promotion within, the workforce. According to the Community College Research Center (CCRC), community colleges enrolled approximately 6.6 million undergraduate students in fall of 2019 (Jenkins & Fink, 2020). For comparison, four-year publics, four-year private, not-for-profits, and private for-profits enrolled 6.4 million, 2.9 million, and 1 million, respectively (Jenkins & Fink, 2020). The democratic purpose of community colleges is to provide an open-access postsecondary education for all who desire to enroll.

Community colleges are centers of educational access and a means of upward economic and social mobility for a great number of underrepresented, minoritized, and marginalized individuals and communities in the United States. Public two-year institutions serve more vulnerable and underrepresented populations than other higher education institution-types (e.g., four-year, public institutions). In fall 2018, about 800,000 Black students and 1.8 million Hispanic students enrolled at community colleges (Jenkins & Fink, 2020) accounting for 44% and 55% of Black and Hispanic

undergraduates, respectively. During the 2015-2016 academic year, 50% of students enrolled at community colleges were non-White second only to private for-profits (58%) among institution types (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). A Pew Research Report found that 27% and 23% of students attending community colleges in spring 2016 were in, or near, poverty, respectively (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). According to an ACCT Now analysis of the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 30% of students enrolled at public, two-year institutions in fall 2015 were considered first-generation students (Beer, n.d.).

Clearly community colleges democratize postsecondary education as open-access institutions, especially providing access to underrepresented populations. However, are these students finding success at America's public, two-year institutions? The question of success is sobering to consider despite the optimism pondering issues of access may evoke. The majority of students who enroll at community colleges do not receive a college-level credential within six years (CCRC, 2021). For the 2015 cohort of first-time, full-time degree or certificate seeking students entering public two-year institutions, only 27% graduated with a degree or certificate within four years (Hussar et al., 2020). When accounting for race/ethnicity, however, just 16% of Black students, 19.5% of Pacific Islander, 20.4% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 24% of Hispanic students graduated with a degree or certificate within four years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). First-generation college students are more likely to drop out three years after they first enrolled than their peers whose parents had some college or earned a bachelor's degree (Cataldi et al., 2018) and are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential within 10 years of enrolling than their continuing-generation peers (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017).

## **Study Purpose and Research Questions**

Academic advising is a vital component to the success of community college students, and especially essential to the success of current student success initiatives. There is a body of empirical literature which demonstrates the positive relationship quality academic advising has on student retention, persistence, and success in higher education (Bahr, 2008; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Metzner, 1989; Smith & Allen, 2014; Swecker et al., 2013; Tovar, 2015). Numerous scholars have sought to develop theory, detailed frameworks and models, and put forth best practices for quality academic advising which centers student success (Crookston, 1994/2009; Donaldson et al., 2016; Habley, 2009; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp, 2013; Klempin & Pellegrino, 2020; Mayer et al., 2019; Mechur Karp, 2016; Museus & Ravello, 2010; O'Banion, 2020; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Zhang et al., 2017). There is, however, a significant gap in the literature when it comes to detailing and recommending ways in which community colleges can utilize organizational theory and academic advising frameworks to reform academic advising at the organizational level.

The purpose of my dissertation was to examine how change agents at Urban Community College (UCC, a pseudonym) may enact transformational change (Karp et al., 2016) to academic advising throughout the UCC system. Specifically, I examined how current organizational structures, processes, and attitudes align, and/or inhibit, the reformation of academic advising to implement a sustained, strategic, intrusive and integrated, and personal (SSIP) model of academic advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013a). The purpose for reforming academic advising with a SSIP model is to improve student success at UCC, especially for racially/ethnically underrepresented, first-generation, and



non-traditional students. I drew from extensive interview and focus group data from students, academic advisors, and administrators to examine the academic advising structures, processes, and attitudes at UCC. It is through the voices of students, academic advisors, and administrators in which I answered the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges to a successful reform of academic advising across the UCC system?
2. What measures should UCC take to successfully reform academic advising across the institution?
3. How can leaders and other academic advising stakeholders at UCC overcome challenges to realize successful academic advising reform across the institution?

### **Current Policy Context Influencing Academic Advising Reform**

The current impetus for community colleges is to increase student success while maintaining and improving access. Policymakers, philanthropic foundations, researchers, and colleges are focusing their efforts to improve student completion rates across American higher education. I now turn the discussion to three examples of initiatives aimed at improving student success in higher education—specifically at community colleges—across the country. I explain how strong academic advising can positively impact these student success initiatives.

#### ***College Promise Scholarships***

In 2015, the Obama Whitehouse announced the America's College Promise program inspired by, and modeled after, the Tennessee Promise Scholarship (Davidson et al., 2020; Office of the Press Secretary, 2015). The aim of the program was to enable qualified students to attend the first two years of college tuition-free through a

combination of federal and state financial aid. Students enrolled in academic programs that fully transfer to four-year colleges and universities as well as high-demand technical programs with high graduation rates would be eligible (Office of the Press Secretary, 2015).

College Promise initiatives are gaining momentum across the U. S. According to Complete College America (CCA), 16 states have instituted statewide College Promise programs, while Promise programs are implemented at some level in 44 states (Complete College America, 2017). While College Promise initiatives increase access to a postsecondary education (Perna & Leigh, 2018; Pierce, 2015), empirical research shows that these programs likely do not address student success when not coupled with interventions which promote student success such as structured and streamlined curriculums, co-requisite remediation, and enrollment planning which highlights time-to-degree (CCA, 2017). Community college researchers, furthermore, raise concern that last-dollar programs—College Promise programs which provide aid only after other forms of gift-aid are exhausted—are not equitable in increasing access as many students from marginalized populations (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities and low-income) receive the most need-based aid that will often fully cover their tuition and fees leaving them ineligible to receive last-dollar aid (Davidson et al., 2020; Perna & Leigh, 2018). Nevertheless, there is promising evidence which suggests Promise initiatives can contribute to student success when accompanied with the appropriate interventions (e.g., educational planning, peer mentoring, and bridging the transition from high school to college) which support student success (Page et al., 2019; Pierce, 2015; Pluhta & Penny, 2013).

Regarding College Promise scholarships, advisors are crucial to ensuring students enroll in programs eligible for receipt of funds while guiding them to enroll in courses which meet program requirements. Advisors also can guide students to enroll in the number of credits in which they must take to meet the time-to-degree requirements to maintain eligibility. If students are at risk of receiving a grade which could result in ineligibility for a Promise scholarship in the following semester, academic advisors may assist students with talking to a faculty member about how, or if, the grade can be rectified. Importantly, academic advisors can connect students with the financial aid office to learn about Promise Scholarships or to address any question or concern the student may have regarding the Promise funds.

### ***Guided Pathways***

As open access institutions, community colleges inherently provide a plethora of course, degree, and certificate choices as well as various enrollment and course schedules to maximize meeting the needs of a wide variety of students. Due to the multitude of complex choices students must navigate when it comes to enrolling and making their way through the community college, Bailey et al. (2015) refer to community colleges as the ‘cafeteria college.’ There are no nutritionists, nor even wait staff, in the cafeteria to assist diners in making choices which will result in an optimally delicious and nutritious meal out of the various items on the daily menu. This does not, albeit, present a problem for the majority of diners at a cafeteria when the stakes of selecting the correct dishes for a decent lunch are not in the least bit high. When it comes to the incredibly high-stakes decisions involved with navigating choices which determine the likelihood of a student’s

success in college and future vocational endeavors, surely a ‘cafeteria’ model does not suffice.

Across the United States, there is a concerted effort to systematically reform community college curriculum and student support services from the traditional, ‘cafeteria’ model into highly structured and delineated programs of study—known as guided pathways—where students receive integrated and prolonged support throughout their course of study at the community college (Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2018). Implementing a guided pathways framework involves mapping out all available programs of study from start to finish, assisting students in selecting and enrolling in their chosen course of study (i.e., pathway), ensuring that student learning aligns with academic and vocational goals, and continuously providing support to students to maintain their path (Bailey, 2015; Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2018). Essentially, guided pathways simplify the choices presented to students as well as increase both the availability and accessibility of academic, and non-academic, support services. Over 250 U. S. community colleges are in the process of implementing guided pathways reforms as of 2018 (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Guided pathways support student completion by enrolling students in a program of study during their first semester and by mitigating enrollment errors by simplifying choices (Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins & Cho, 2012; Scrivener et al., 2015). Highly structured and delineated courses of study, however, are certainly not a panacea for guiding all students to completion, especially for students who lack the social capital which supports integration into a postsecondary education (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Karp, 2011; Museus et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2015). Although, studies promisingly show that

intrusive and sustained academic and non-academic supports which assists students in determining a course of study, engages them in discussion on career aspirations, supports them to complete college-level courses, and monitors their progress throughout their pathway significantly improves student completion (Bahr, 2008; Donaldson et al., 2016; Karp, 2013; Mechur Karp, 2016; Ran & Lin, 2019; Tovar, 2015).

Designing and implementing a system of academic advising with the structures, processes, and attitudes to provide the necessary prolonged support for students is required for any guided pathways reform (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2018; Karp et al., 2016). Although the primary purpose of advising is to assist students in selecting and enrolling in a field of study, that first conversation must include discussion on the student's career aspirations (O'Banion, 2020). Discussing students' vocational goals is a key function of academic advising within a guided pathways framework, which must occur when advisors assist students in selecting their chosen meta-major (i.e., broadly focused areas of study) (Jenkins et al., 2018). Once a meta-major is selected and students have a grasp on the career aims, advisors are essential in assisting students in navigating the selection of their major, degree planning, and avoiding enrollment errors among other tasks in which students may need support (CCCSE, 2018).

### ***15-to-Finish Initiatives***

Often accompanying, or implemented as a component of guided pathways reforms, is an initiative to boost students' academic momentum (Jenkins & Bailey, 2017). Academic momentum accounts for students' decisions and behaviors which dictate credit accumulation rate and the time in which they satisfy important milestones towards

successful college completion (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016). A substantial body of literature shows students' academic momentum during their first semester and year to be significantly related to their persistence and completion at community colleges (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Jenkins & Bailey, 2017; Mechur Karp, 2016; Tovar, 2015; Wang, 2017).

States such as California, Indiana, and Nevada established financial incentive programs which encourage students to complete 30 credit hours during the academic year: 15 credit hours in the fall and spring semesters, or 12 credit hours during the fall and spring semesters and 6 in the summer (Smith, 2018). Empirical studies show that these 15-to-Finish programs—coined and popularized by CCA (Jones, 2015)—can increase students' academic momentum generating increases in the number of credits attempted and total credit completion (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016; Belfield et al., 2016; Klempin, 2014; Miller et al., 2011; Monaghan et al., 2018; Scott-Clayton, 2011a; University of Hawai'i Institutional Research Office, 2013). Approximately 455 institutions across the country currently implement some form of 15-to-Finish program (CCA, 2019). Converse to conventional wisdom, studies find that for many students—some exceptions being students working 30 hours or more and parents with pre-school age children (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016; Wladis et al., 2018)—enrolling in heavier credit loads is predictive of persistence, completion, and transfer (Adelman, 2006; Attewell et al., 2012; Attewell & Monaghan, 2016; Bahr, 2009; Belfield et al., 2016; Crosta, 2014; Doyle, 2009; Doyle, 2011; Scott-Clayton, 2011a; Szafran, 2001).

Academic advising is an essential component to 15-to-Finish programs as advisors are instrumental in providing students with knowledge on the positive impacts associated with increased academic momentum. It is important students understand that

taking the minimum 12 credit hours required for full-time enrollment will not be sufficient to complete an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year institution in two years. Many students, furthermore, may fear the perceived negative consequences increasing credit load may have on their GPA not knowing that just one semester of full-time enrollment is predictive of increased credential attainment and completion of gateway courses (CCCSE, 2017). Academic advisors can be crucial to educating students with this knowledge. Academic advisors can, furthermore, play a vital role in connecting students with available resources which may support them with enrolling in, and finding success with, an increased course load.

It is clear academic advisors play an integral role in initiatives aimed at improving student success. As guided pathway reforms continue to proliferate at community colleges across the nation, these institutions will need to engage in advising reform at the institutional level. This dissertation is timely as it advances research on academic advising reform at an organizational level. To undertake such a substantial task, community colleges should understand what type of change is necessary within their current system of academic advising, discover how the change should be undertaken, identify individuals best suited to lead the reform, and employ the appropriate organizational framework(s) to approach diverse changes within the redesign (Kezar, 2014). It is, furthermore, my hope this dissertation provides community college administrators and staff with an example of how a large, urban community college system could potentially enact large-scale, transformational change to its academic advising systems with the intent to better support students in navigating their collegiate pathways to success.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

My review examines three areas of academic literature. First, I provide a historical summary of academic advising within higher education in the United States. Prior to examining how a community college may undertake advising reform, it is necessary to grasp how academic advising in the US evolved over time including the theories, frameworks, and models of academic advising as well as academic advising's standing as a profession. Second, I review key findings from the literature on academic advising's relationship with student success in higher education. Furthermore, in this section, I highlight approaches to academic advising which empirical studies have found are particularly promising when it comes to contributing to student success. Next, I review literature pertaining to current approaches to academic advising. I provide overviews of the various approaches and discuss empirical studies which examine the approaches. I conclude the literature review by detailing the conceptual frameworks which guide this dissertation.

### **History of Academic Advising in the United States**

#### ***A Brief Overview: Harvard to NACADA***

Cook (2009) states, "The history and development of academic advising in the United States paralleled and reflected the history and development of higher education and student personnel work" (p 18). Beginning with the establishment of Harvard College in 1638 and continuing on through the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the primary educative purpose of the colonial colleges was to provide an education rooted in Christian theology with the purpose of cultivating Christian virtue in young men who would assume roles of civic



leadership after graduation (Lane, 1987; Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2011). Advising students in the colonial colleges, therefore, placed significant emphasis on advisement over theological and moral issues along with students' intellectual pursuits (Cook, 2009; Durnin, 1961; Lucas, 2006). Advising of students at the colonial colleges was the responsibility of college presidents, and to a lesser extent, faculty who acted in loco parentis (Cook, 2009; Durnin, 1961; Lucas, 2006).

The student body of American higher education expanded and diversified in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the passage of the Morrill Acts of 1863 and 1869 (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2012; Herren & Edwards, 2002). The Morrill Acts established land-grant colleges and universities—including Black and Tribal colleges and universities—and broadened the curriculum to include agricultural, vocational, and technical courses to meet the industrial and economic needs of the time (Geiger, 2015; Goldin & Katz, 1999; Herren & Edwards, 2002). Higher education responded to the expansion and diversification of institution-types, student bodies, and curriculums with increasing bureaucratization (Lucas, 2006). The bureaucratizing provided more specialized student supports, although faculty were the main source of academic advisement for students (Cook, 2009). Albeit, Thelin and Hirschy (2009) assert, “In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, administrators had little knowledge of genuine academic advising. To the contrary, the faculty often displayed counterproductive behavior in proctoring dormitories and in classroom teaching” (p. 11).

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, higher education increasingly concerned itself with students' extracurricular life and socioemotional development (Lucas, 2006). This emerging focus on the education of the whole student led to the expansion of student-

centered personnel on campuses establishing specialized positions in areas such as residence life, financial aid, and counseling (Lucas, 2006). With the end of World War II and the passage of the GI Bill, campuses across the US met an influx of veteran students who were older, often married, and who demanded a more practical, vocational-focused, and streamlined pathway through college and into the workforce (Clark, 1998). Cook (2009) recognizes, “After World War II, the almost overwhelming influx of veterans on campus . . . solidified modern student personnel work as an important component of higher education” (p. 18).

It was not until the 1970s, however, with curricula increasing in complexity, community colleges rapidly emerging, and racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse enrollments increasing on campuses did academic advising as a role served by specialized personnel gain emphasis at institutions across the US (Cook, 2009; Grites & Gordon, 2009). Although faculty remained the primary source of academic advisement for students, institutions increasingly began to hire full-time staff whose primary responsibility was to academically advise students (Grites & Gordon, 2009). Near the end of the decade, in 1977, the first national conference solely dedicated to academic advising at postsecondary institutions was held in Burlington, Vermont (Grites & Gordon, 2009).

The first national conference for academic advising laid the groundwork for the formation of a national, professional organization for academic advisors in higher education: The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) (Cook, 2009; Grites & Gordon, 2009). Academic advisors, faculty, scholars, and other student support staff concerned with student counselling, guidance, and development now had an “association for the development and dissemination of innovative theory, research, and

practice of academic advising in higher education” (NACADA, n.d.). Beginning with just over 400 members in 1979, NACADA boasted nearly 14,000 members in 2019 representing nearly 2,000 institutions with over 3,300 in attendance at the 2019 national conference (Grites & Gordon, 2009; NACADA, 2019a; NACADA, 2019b). I now provide a brief, historical overview of the development of academic advising theories, frameworks, and models as well as the state of academic advising as a profession.

***Development—or Lack Thereof—of Academic Advising Theory and Models***

Even prior to the first national conference and formation of NACADA, scholars developed and published models in the early 1970s to guide the practice and scholarship of academic advising (Cook, 2009; Crookston, 1994/2009; Grites & Gordon, 2009; O’Banion, 1994/2009). The first academic advising models draw entirely from student development theory of the 1960s (Crookston, 1994/2009; O’Banion, 1994/2009). Crookston (1994/2009) developed a model for developmental advising which explicitly counters a prescriptive advising approach and argues for a developmental advisor-student relationship. The seminal article provides 10 integral components to developmental advising and delineates how each component contrasts with prescriptive advising. Crookston’s (1994/2009) model foregrounds the immediate establishment of a collaborative, advisor-student relationship which entails setting parameters on responsibilities, limits, and contacts. A developmental approach to academic advising, furthermore, emphasizes students’ potential rather than limitations while viewing the student as striving and maturing rather than lazy and immature (e.g. prescriptive advising).

Just two years after Crookston (1994/2009) published his academic advising model, O'Banion (1994/2009) published a seminal article which provides a model for academic advising at community colleges. Like Crookston (1994/2009), O'Banion's (1994/2009) model for academic advising derives from student development theory and emphasizes advising the whole student. O'Banion (1994/2009) provides five dimensions central to the process of advising the whole student: 1) exploration of life goals, 2) exploration of vocational goals, 3) program choice, 4) course choice, and 5) scheduling courses.

Although Crookston (1994/2009) and O'Banion (1994/2009) published academic advising models in the 1970s which directly draw from student development theory, the term 'developmental academic advising' was not explicitly defined until the 1980s (Grites, 2013b; Winston et al., 1982; Winston et al., 1984). As cited in Grites (2013a), Winston et al. (1984) defined developmental academic advising as follows:

Developmental academic advising is defined as a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources. It both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life. Developmental advising relationships focus on identifying and accomplishing life goals, acquiring skills and attitudes that promote intellectual and personal growth, and sharing concerns for each other and for the academic community. Developmental academic advising reflects the institution's mission of total student development and is most likely to be realized

when the academic affairs and student affairs divisions collaborate in its implementation. (pp. 18-19)

Developmental academic advising heavily influenced the advising literature throughout the 1980s maintaining its relevancy throughout the 1990s; however, scholars began to question the practicality of implementing developmental academic advising in practice (Grites, 2013b). Recently, Gordon (2019) acknowledged few institution have fully implemented a developmental advising approach since Crookston's (1994/2009) landmark article. She recognizes lack of time, expertise, integration, and support among other reasons for why institutions fail to employ developmental academic advising.

In the 2000s, scholars argued it was time for academic advising scholarship to end its dependence on student development theory asserting academic advising should forge an identity as a distinct academic field and profession (Burton, 2016; Grites, 2013b; Habley, 2009; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Academic advising scholars, such as Habley (2009), Lowenstein (1999), and Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008), state that academic advising scholarship must draw from various academic disciplines in order to develop a distinct identity and to progress the scholarship and theory of academic advising. In their scholarly paper in which they argue for the development of a scholar-practitioner model of academic advising, Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) use the analogy of archaeology's development as a distinct field from anthropology. The authors assert that academic advising should develop its own theories, research agenda, and practices which distinguish itself as a unique discipline and profession. The lack of theory and research agenda particular to academic advising is a significant obstacle to academic advising becoming recognized and respected as a profession within academia (McGill,

2019; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Shaffer et al., 2010). I now briefly discuss academic advising's standing as a profession within higher education.

### *Status as a Profession*

It is necessary to provide a disclaimer before I review the literature on academic advising as a profession. I am not discussing—or, more importantly, questioning—the professionalism, expertise, or dedication of academic advisors. When I refer to academic advising's status as a profession, I do so from the standpoint of how the sociological literature and academic advising literature defines the term 'profession.' Shaffer et al. (2010) draw from sociological literature to define 'profession' as “a white-collar occupation that confers on workers a relatively high level of prestige and that requires extensive formal education as a condition of entry-level employment” (p. 67).

Where does academic advising stand as a profession? According to the literature, academic advising has made steps towards professionalization but is still far from gaining the status of a profession (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Habley, 2009; McGill, 2019; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Shaffer et al., 2010). Wilensky (1964), who examined 18 occupations' trajectories to professional status, outlined four common dimensions associated with establishing a profession: 1) originating a full-time occupation, 2) establishing a formal education, especially university and graduate education, 3) forming a professional association, and 4) establishing a formal code of ethics.

Shaffer et al. (2010) conducted a historical overview of the professional status of academic advising through a sociological lens. The authors draw from Wilensky's (1964) dimensions of professionalization to examine the professional state of academic advising. Shaffer et al. (2010) assert the lack of an established graduate education and credentialing

as well as a nearly nonexistent body of theory and scholarship for academic advising are considerable obstacles to the professionalization of academic advising. The authors recommend expanding graduate education and credentialing for advisors, which they insist will require the development of a theoretical base of knowledge for academic advising.

In his systematic literature review of 17 publications between 1981 and 2016, McGill (2019) also found a lack of scholarship and graduate programs to be barriers to the professionalization of academic advising. He, furthermore, cites the lack of an administrative home for academic advising at higher education institutions as an obstacle to professionalization. Similar to Shaffer et al. (2010), McGill (2019) recommends expanding training and education as well as distinguishing and defining academic advising as a field as necessary steps to professionalize academic advising. He goes further to insist that refining the role of the professional organization (i.e., NACADA), establishing a consistent administrative base for academic advising across institutions, and providing academic advisors with greater autonomy must occur for academic advising to reach the status of a profession.

Academic advising does not meet the standards of a profession from a sociological perspective or in the academic advising literature. How then, do advisors characterize their occupation? Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) conducted a phenomenological study examining how academic advisors perceive and experience the occupation of academic advising. Through focus groups conducted with 47 academic advisors at 10 regional conferences, the authors found that academic advisors do not view academic advising as a profession. Academic advisors were unable to consistently define

the practice of academic advising; moreover, due to the ambiguity of their professional responsibilities, participants do not identify advising as a career path. Rather, the academic advisors viewed advising as a stepping-stone occupation to an eventual career. Aiken-Wisniewski et al. (2015) learned that the academic advisor's viewed their lack of accreditation as an obstacle when it comes to professional autonomy and gaining the respect of their colleagues whose positions carry a professional status (e.g., faculty and deans).

Academic advising carried out by specialized personnel is a recent development within higher education in the US (Cook, 2009). Although academic advising as an occupation and as an area of research in higher education has made steps towards professionalism and in distinguishing itself as a distinct field of inquiry, there are still significant strides to be made (McGill, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2010). It is concerning that academic advisors' expertise may not be recognized or that administrators may not include them in making decisions regarding academic advising policy and practice. The cause for concern is due to academic advising's potential to be instrumental in improving student success at an institution (Elliott, 2020). Furthermore, as I assert in more detail later in this dissertation, advising reform at the institutional level must secure advisor buy in and count academic advisors amongst the change leaders driving the reform. I now turn to a discussion of literature which examines academic advising's impacts on student success at higher education institutions in the US.

### **Academic Advising's Impact on Student Success**

Before discussing academic advising's relationship to student success, it is necessary to define what I mean when I use the phrase 'student success.' Kinzie and Kuh



(2017) broadly define student success as “students reaping the promised benefits of the postsecondary experience” (p. 19). The meaning of student success is more nuanced, however, and generally dependent on the stakeholder envisioning student success. As this dissertation is primarily concerned with academic advising reform across a community college system, I use the term ‘student success’ to account for first-to-second year persistence, student retention, degree or certificate completion, successful vertical transfer (e.g., two- to four-year institution), job placement, and achieving sufficient proficiency in the knowledge and skills associated with a higher education and a selected course of study (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017).

Among higher education organizations, institutional administrators, and scholars, academic advising is overwhelmingly considered a crucial student support service instrumental to the success of students (ACT, Inc., 2010; CCSE, 2018; Cuseo, 2003; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Thomas & McFarlane, 2018; Tinto, 2004). ACT, Inc. (2010) surveyed chief academic officers at community colleges across the US to explore administrators’ perceptions on which student support interventions were most impactful towards increasing success amongst their students. The authors of the report consistently found practices associated with academic advising to rank in the top 10 out of 94 practices when it comes to the administrators’ perceived contribution of the practices to student success. In a recent report, CCCSE (2018) called advising “the cornerstone of student support” (p.1). CCCSE (2018) goes on to explain the importance of advising to student success stating, “Advising is powerful because it attends to core elements of each student’s success: setting academic goals based on transfer and/or career interests,

developing an academic plan to attain those goals, and staying on track until those goals are met” (p. 1).

Despite the overwhelmingly popular assertion that academic advising is highly important to the success of students, there are a limited—but growing—number of articles providing empirical evidence of academic advising’s direct link to student success (Cuseo, 2003; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Smith & Allen, 2014). Examining academic advising’s direct impact on student success (e.g., persistence, retention, and/or completion/transfer) can be messy as students generally engage in academic advising in tandem with other forms of student support (Smith & Allen, 2014). I did, albeit, come across studies which examined the direct effects of academic advising on student success. Seidman (1991) conducted a controlled trial at a community college in New York to examine the effectiveness of an academic advising program on student retention, satisfaction with faculty and the institution, and academic performance. Students were assigned to either one of two groups: 1) students attend a general orientation or 2) students participate in pre- and post-admission advising. The study found that participants from the test group were 20% more likely to persist than the students who participated in only the orientation.

Bahr (2008) analyzed student data collected by the Chancellor's Office of California Community Colleges from 107 of the state's community colleges to test Clark’s (1960; 1980) cooling-out hypothesis. Clark (1960; 1980) proposed that a central function of academic advisors at community colleges is to 'cool out' students (e.g. redirect into a less rigorous program of study) "whose academic ambitions exceed their abilities" (Bahr, 2008, p. 705). The author conducted a three-level hierarchical discrete-time event

history analysis on a subset of the 1995 cohort of first-time college students who required math remediation and on a subset of the 1995 cohort of first-time college students who declared their intent to transfer to a four-year institution. The analyses found no evidence of academic advisors actively 'cooling out' students in general, nor was there evidence that academically underprepared students or racially/ethnically underrepresented students were being 'cooled out.' Rather, findings indicate that advising positively impacts students' academic success, especially for those requiring academic remediation.

Academic advising has also been shown to contribute more to persistence than other types of academic support interventions. Bai and Pan (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects four different types of student support interventions had on student retention for first-time-full-time freshmen ( $n=1,305$ ) at a large, Midwestern university over a three year period. The four interventions examined were academic advising, social integration programs, academic assistance, and First Year Experience courses. The authors compared the effects on student retention of the four programs with the effects the general freshman orientation had on student retention. The results from a three-level hierarchical modeling analysis showed that students who participated in the academic advising program were 24% more likely to enroll the following fall semester than students who only attended the freshman orientation. The effect on retention over the three years, however, was not statistically significantly different than the three-year effect of the general orientation programs. The authors also found that students from more selective majors who attended the advising supports were 22% more likely to return the following year than other student participants.

Hatch and Garcia's (2017) study examining the effect various advising activities have on students' persistence intentions during the first few weeks of their collegiate career found academic advising to have some positive impacts on students' intentions to persist but in nuanced ways. The authors analyzed data collected from the 2010 Survey of Entering Student Engagement from nearly 4,000 first-time community college students. The results of their analyses found advising early on has a minimal impact on the majority of students' intentions to persist, and only a small number of students who are undecided about their plans may positively benefit. Furthermore, the authors found that different types of advising may be more beneficial at different times with information-focused advising more beneficial early on with more in-depth developmental advising activities occurring over the course of a student's time at the community college. Overall, Hatch and Garcia (2017) found that of all the student engagement factors analyzed, the academic and social support network factor (e.g., academic advising) "was most consistently related to lower odds for all three kinds of non-persistence intentions" (p. 380).

In addition to having a positive impact on student GPA, Kot (2014) found that first-year, university students who utilized centralized advising during their second semester were significantly more likely to persist into the second year than their peers who did not seek advising. The author employed propensity score matching then an OLS regression model to analyze GPA and enrollment data from a cohort of first-year students (n=2,745) enrolled at a research university. Findings indicate students who used centralized advising had statistically significant higher GPAs in both the fall and spring semesters as well as a higher cumulative GPA for the academic year than students who

did not engage with centralized advising. Not only were students who sought advising more likely to persist into their second year, these students displayed a net GPA gain of around 31 percentage points during fall semester and 22 percentage points in the spring semester. This finding emphasizes how important academic advising can be to students' success early in their collegiate career (Metzner, 1989; Robbins et al., 2009; Swecker, et al., 2013).

Rather than conducting experimental studies (e.g., Seidman (1991)) and/or examining the direct effect academic advising has on student success, much of the literature examines ways in which advising impacts predictors of student success. This literature constantly uncovers the benefits advising has on student success (Mayhew et al., 2016). Research shows a student's GPA is a significant predictor of success in college (Lounsbury et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2016). Studies which examine academic advising's impact on student GPA found that academic advising can benefit GPA (Kot, 2014; Robbins et al., 2009; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Robbins et al. (2009) analyzed how student risk and students' use of campus resources and services influenced student first-year GPA and re-enrollment the following fall semester. The authors categorized the resources and services across four areas: 1) academic services, 2) recreational resources, 3) social resources, and 4) advising sessions. The authors analyzed student data collected from a Student Readiness Inventory (n=1,534) and institutional data of student utilization of resources and services. Controlling for race/ethnicity, academic and dropout risk, gender, time living on campus, and enrollment status, the analyses show that use of academic and advising services was related to an increase in GPA. Furthermore, the increase in GPA was more significant for

high-risk students. The study also found advising sessions positively influenced student retention the following fall semester. More frequent attendance of advising sessions positively impacted retention; on the other hand, increased use of advising services indicated slight declines in GPA. The authors do not provide a reasoning for why advising services would relate to increases in GPA in general but indicate a slight decrease in GPA for students who meet with an advisor more frequently. The data analyzed provides the number of meetings with an advisor but does not detail what type of advising session occurred. One explanation could be that students who feel the need to meet more often with an advisor may be those that are struggling academically and/or unsure of their academic plan. Thus, students struggling academically are more likely to receive a lower GPA; however, frequent engagement with an academic advisor provides students with the support needed to persist.

Rather than study the direct relationship between academic advising and GPA, Young-Jones et al. (2013) examined students' self-reported academic attitudes, behaviors, and habits—which are predictors of GPA—to gain a better understanding of how academic advising may indirectly influence students' GPA. The authors also examined students' expectations of academic advising. The study collected data from students (n=611) enrolled in various psychology courses at a Midwestern university through an online survey. The survey required students to self-assess their behaviors, attitudes, and habits pertaining to their studies, share expectations of advising, and provide demographic information. The authors conducted principal axis factor analysis, multiple regression analyses, and ANOVA to find that meeting with an advisor is predictive of scoring higher in several categories predictive of GPA (i.e., student

responsibility, student self-efficacy, student study skills, and perceived support).

Moreover, students who reported higher scores for study skills and self-efficacy were found to have better GPAs.

Research shows the learning that can occur from participating in academic advising is a contributor to student success (Erlach & Russ-Eft, 2013; Smith & Allen, 2014). Smith and Allen (2014) examined whether students who engage in academic advising are more likely to score higher on cognitive and affective outcomes. The cognitive outcomes examined relate to institutional and educative knowledge students may gain from advising such as how and where to locate resources, knowledge of the requirements of their studies, and creation of an academic plan. Affective outcomes investigated include expressing value for the advisor-advisee relationship and making a significant connection with faculty or other personnel at the institution. The authors conducted ANCOVA analyses on survey data collected from n=22,305 students from two community colleges and seven universities. Results showed students who met with academic advisors scored significantly higher on all outcomes examined; moreover, students who met with an advisor more frequently scored higher than students who met less often with advisors. Furthermore, students who used formal advising tools to obtain information on course selection scored higher in all but two outcomes— support for mandatory advising and value for the advisor-advisee relationship—than students who received the bulk of their information from informal social or family networks.

Although Robbins et al. (2009) found that more meetings with an advisor related to a decrease in GPA, studies show that more encounters with academic advising can translate into improved persistence and retention (Klepfer & Hull, 2012; McFarlane,

2013; Robbins et al., 2009; Swecker et al., 2013). For instance, participants in Smith and Allen's (2014) study who met with an advisor more frequently were more likely to report greater knowledge of academic requirements, institutional policies and procedures, and where and how to access resources. Furthermore, the participants were more likely to have an academic plan.

Students who are not academically prepared for college may meet more frequently with advisors than students who are academically prepared. We do not know whether students in Robbins et al.'s (2009) study were struggling academically. Though, this could potentially account for Robbins et al.'s (2009) findings that declines in GPA related to an increased frequency of meeting with academic advisors. Many schools have policies in place which require struggling students to meet with academic advisors. If we take into account Smith and Allen's (2014) findings, students meeting more frequently with an advisor are taking away crucial lessons for success at the higher education institution which translates to greater student persistence and retention. Additionally, Thompson and Prieto (2013) found that students enrolled at an HBU spend more time meeting with academic advisors when they lack motivation signifying that struggling students are likely to meet with academic advisors to work through complicated issues. Certainly, further research should examine this discrepancy by exploring the optimum frequency for academic advising sessions as well as what type of advising encounters are most optimum at various points throughout a student's collegiate career (e.g., Hatch & Garcia, 2017). The optimum frequency of academic advising sessions is likely to vary based on students' circumstances and needs.



Importantly, studies show that some of the student populations most at risk to attrition benefit from increased frequency of academic advising. For instance, Klepfer and Hull (2012) examined data from a nationally representative data set of just over n=9,000 recent high school graduates who enrolled into a two- or four-year institution immediately after graduating high school. The authors categorized the students into three groups according to socioeconomic status (SES) and achievement (i.e., prior/high school academic achievement): 1) High SES/Achievement, 2) Middle SES/Achievement, and 3) Low SES/Achievement and examined significant contributors to first-year retention amongst the three groups of students. Findings showed that increased frequency of advising translated to higher rates of retention for all three groups and for both two- and four-year students. Lower SES students received the most benefit to persistence from increased frequency of academic advising.

As stated earlier, first-generation students face a greater threat of attrition, or not completing a postsecondary credential, than many of their peers (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). It is imperative higher education institutions and scholars examine the types of student supports/interventions which will improve persistence rates for first-generation students. Academic advising is a crucial component to efforts of improving persistence and completion rates for first-generation students (Harding, 2008). In their study examining whether meeting with an academic advisor is a significant predictor for retention of first-generation students, Swecker et al. (2013) found that students who met with academic advisors more often were more likely to enroll and remain in good standing the following academic year. Furthermore, the authors' results show that "for

every meeting with an academic advisor, the odds that a student is retained increases by 13%" (p. 49).

The literature also links students' perceived quality of—or satisfaction with—academic advising to student success outcomes (Metzner, 1989; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Young-Jones et al., 2013). These studies find that the perceived quality of advising and that certain advising practices relate to the effect academic advising can have on student success. Metzner (1989) surveyed first-time, university freshmen's perspectives on advising to examine how students' perception of the received quality of advising impacts student attrition. Results showed that regardless of the perceived quality of advising, students who participated in academic advising were more likely to persist. Students who did not receive advising were more likely to dropout and/or not re-enroll the following semester. Furthermore, students who reported a more positive advising experience were more likely to persist than students who reported less positive advising experiences; however, students who reported having more negative experiences with advising were still more likely to persist than students who received no advising.

As previously stated, NCES (2020) data show us that racial/ethnic minority students—save for Asian, non-Pacific Islander, students—are less likely than their White counterparts to earn a credential from a community college within four years. While there is not much literature which examines the impacts academic advising can have on the success of racial/ethnic minority students, especially at community colleges, there are studies which demonstrate academic advising can positively affect those students' chances for success (Bahr, 2008; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Academic advising is likely to have a greater positive impact on racial/ethnic minority students when the advising

practices are viewed in a positive light and take a whole-student approach (Clark & Kalionzes, 2008; Museus & Ravello, 2010).

In their qualitative study, Museus and Ravello (2010) sought to better understand how academic advisors contribute to minority student success at predominantly white institutions that demonstrated an ability to support their racial and ethnic minority students to academic success. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with n=14 academic advisors and n=31 racial and ethnic minority students. Results showed that the participants viewed academic advisors as contributing to the success of the racial and ethnic minority students across three themes: 1) humanizing academic advising, 2) taking a multifaceted, or whole-student, approach to advising, and 3) taking an intrusive, or proactive, approach to advising.

Now that we have discussed literature which provides empirical evidence for academic advising's potential to significantly contribute to student success, it is important for us to better understand which approaches and methods of academic advising scholars recognize as having the most positive impact on student success. In the next section, I discuss literature which provides evidence and argues for various approaches and methods to academic advising. I also provide examples from the literature of how higher education institutions implement these approaches and methods along with the successes of, and obstacles to, implementation.

### **Current Approaches and Models to Academic Advising**

Much of the literature pertaining to academic advising frameworks, approaches, and/or models presents academic advising within a prescriptive v. developmental paradigm (Crookston 1994/2009; Gordon, 2019; Grites, 2013; O'Banion, 1994/2009). On

one hand, developmental advising is characterized as noble but nearly unattainable (Crookston 1994/2009; Gordon, 2019). On the other hand, prescriptive advising is portrayed as automated but efficient (Grites, 2013). The boots-on-the-ground reality, however, is that advising services will resemble various points along the prescriptive-developmental continuum—if it is indeed to be described as such—dependent on a myriad of factors (e.g., student needs and available resources).

In this section, I discuss three approaches to academic advising which are prevalent in the current literature. I present literature which provides empirical evidence for each approach as related to student success. I also provide examples from the literature which detail how these approaches are implemented at higher education institutions. Lastly, based on the literature discussed here for each approach, I consider the pros and cons which may be associated with widespread implementation of the academic advising approach at a community college.

### ***Appreciative Advising***

Derived from social constructivist theory and framed within appreciative inquiry (AI), appreciative advising (AA) is an approach to academic advising which centers the development of the advisee-advisor relationship which aims to cultivate the co-discovery of the advisee's academic plan, academic aims, and life and career goals (Bloom et al., 2013; Hutson & He, 2011). Although not rooted in student development theory, one could situate AA at the far end of the developmental side of the prescriptive-developmental continuum. Crookston (1994/2009) describes prescriptive advising as focusing on student limitations rather than student potential as in developmental advising. Similarly, AI, in which AA is framed, takes a “life-centric and strength-based, instead of

a deficit-based” approach to inquiry (Cooperrider, 2013, p. 5). Hutson et al. (2014) define AA as “the intentional, collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials” (p. 48).

There are six phases to an AA approach to academic advising: 1) Disarm, 2) Discover, 3) Dream, 4) Design, 5) Deliver, and 6) Don’t Settle (Hutson & He, 2011; Hutson et al., 2014). Following the six phases of AA, an initial advising meeting could look something like the following. The academic advisor understands the student may approach the advising session with some trepidation; therefore, the advisor warmly welcomes the advisee to break the ice prior to jumping into advisement (i.e., Disarm). After building an initial positive rapport, the advisor asks the advisee positive, open-ended questions to discover the student’s strengths. The advisor and advisee then discuss the advisee’s future dreams and goals regarding academics, career, and broader life goals. The advisor and advisee then co-design an academic plan rooted in the advisee’s strengths and goals. After arriving on a co-designed academic plan, the advisor reiterates their confidence in the student and encourages future meetings whether the meetings are to report achievements, seek assistance to overcome struggles, or both (i.e., Deliver). Before ending the advising session, the advisor and student agree to not settle and to continuously strive for growth (Hutson et al, 2014).

AA has shown to be particularly beneficial for at-risk students (Hutson & He, 2011; Kamphoff et al., 2007; Saunders & Hutson, 2012). It is clear from the above scenario of an initial AA session that an AA approach requires a significant investment of time, and potentially resources, from both the academic advisor and student. It then

makes sense that an institution would dedicate the resources required for AA advising to support students at risk of attrition.

Saunders and Hutson (2012) examined how an AA program for students on academic probation (n=145) at a large public university impacted the students' academic achievement as well as what aspects of the program were most beneficial. The program required students to meet with an academic advisor several times during the semester and to participate in other student support activities (e.g., attend a strengths-based discovery workshop). The academic advising sessions followed the six phases of AA. The authors conducted a paired-sample t-test to find that students in the program significantly improved their GPA during the semester. Furthermore, Saunders and Hutson (2012) learned from participant responses in an *Appreciative Advising Academic Postview* instrument that all participants in the study were aware of a minimum of three persons on campus to whom they could turn for support when only 60% of participants stated the same in the preview instrument. Likewise, Hutson and He (2011) used the same instrument (i.e., Appreciative Advising Inventory) to examine how a student success program for students on academic probation, which was designed according to the six phases of AA, impacted first-year and continuing university students (n=124) enrolled in the program. Through a correlation analysis, the authors demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between the students' GPA and the students' internal assets (i.e., positive identity, support and connectedness, and constructive use of time) which improved most through their participation in the program.

The University of North Carolina Greensboro instituted a program based on the inspirational/motivational model for students on academic probation in which students

were required to participate in AA (Kamphoff et al., 2007). The program's goals are for students to achieve good academic standing and for them to become interdependent. Since the program began, the university saw a statistically significant increase of 18 percentage points for students who met good academic standing; furthermore, compared to a control group, program participants achieved higher gains in GPA (Kamphoff et al., 2007).

There is a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of AA at community colleges, especially when it comes to AA's impact on community college students' success. That being said, qualitative studies which examine community college students' and academic advisors' experiences with, and opinions on, AA find both students and advisors generally have positive views and experiences with AA (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016; Truschel, 2008). Advisors participating in a qualitative study at one community college reported they became more confident in their advising skills and knowledge, increased their motivation to perform advising functions, increased their effectiveness as academic advisors, and deepened their connection with both students and colleagues after an AA approach was initiated at the institution (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). Community college students (n=112) on academic probation and enrolled in an AA program reported overall positive opinions of their participation (Truschel, 2008). The students were required to engage in three AA sessions during the first five weeks of the semester. After the third advising session, students were asked to complete the Appreciative Advising Inventory. Truschel (2008) found the students overwhelmingly reacted positively to the discovery phase of AA; however, the author, importantly, noted, "The appreciative process was very time consuming and work intensive....Although this is viewed as

positive, it is difficult to accomplish this when there are additional responsibilities as well as students who require attention” (p. 14).

Although universities have found success with AA programs targeting at-risk students, AA may not be the best suited approach to academic advising at community colleges largely due to the time commitment and amount of work involved. Community college students are more likely to work full-time and are more likely have children than students at four-year institutions. Community college students are also more likely to spend significant time commuting to school as residence halls at community colleges are near non-existent. An estimated 6.5 million students attend community colleges part-time across the United States (Civitas Learning, 2017).

For many students at the community college, their collegiate success is certainly a priority; however, the reality is that when students struggle to meet work and child-rearing responsibilities, it may prove difficult for them to dedicate sufficient time to engage in multiple AA sessions within a relatively short time period. For instance, McKinney et al. (in press) conducted a qualitative case study examining factors which influence community college students’ decision-making, and academic advisors’ guidance, on credit-hour enrollment within the context of a 15-to-Finish program. The authors found that both students and academic advisors prioritized immediate concerns, rather than long-term benefits, of increasing credit enrollment. Although AA may benefit community college students in the long-term, students and academic advisors may not emphasize the long-term benefits when faced with the weight of immediate concerns. Thus, a one-size-fits-all academic advising approach which requires more time and work than community college students may be able to afford—especially for those who are



struggling—poses a significant likelihood that the approach (i.e., AA) could have negative, unintended consequences.

Academic advising at community colleges should be agile with the ability to target at-risk students with more in-depth, but efficient, academic advising while also maintaining academic advising supports for students who may require less advising support due to having already developed an academic plan and defined career goals. A very conservative estimate puts the national average caseload for academic advisors at community colleges at nearly double that of advisors at public, four-year institutions (Robbins, 2013). Another report suggests the national average student-advisor ratio is 1000:1 at community colleges compared to 367:1 at public, four-year colleges (Marcus, 2012). Facing massive student-advisor caseloads at community colleges, it is impossible for academic advisors to provide quality academic advising to students if the system of advising in place is not both agile and efficient. Furthermore, for academic advising to be efficient, the academic advising program must be systematic. For instance, the structures, systems, and processes of an academic advising program must be clearly defined to support the training of academic advisors and the provision of advising supports to students at the community college, especially at large community colleges where academic advising functions are decentralized across several campuses. While the process of AA advising is delineated into six distinct phases, the structures and systems involved with implementing an AA program remain undefined. In the following section, I discuss the literature on proactive academic advising (i.e., intrusive advising), which is perhaps a more well-known and more widely implemented approach than AA.

### ***Proactive Academic Advising***

Similar to AA, Proactive academic advising (PAA) is an advising approach focused on intervening to assist students at risk of attrition aiming to improve student motivation and self-efficacy (Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019; Varney, 2013). PAA, as it is defined, is more agile than AA as it “utilizes the good qualities of prescriptive advising (experience, awareness of student needs, and structured programs) and of developmental advising (relationship to a student’s total needs)” (Earl, 1988, p. 27). Although PAA was first established under the term ‘intrusive advising,’ I prefer the term ‘proactive’ due to the negative connotations associated with the term ‘intrusive’ (Varney, 2013). With academic advising playing such an integral role in supporting students’ success, it is important that advisors are not construed as ‘intruders’ into students’ lives, but rather they are viewed as trusted personnel who proactively engage with students to provide academic advising supports.

Glennen (1976) first established the phrase ‘intrusive counseling’ in his work to assert academic advisors must not wait for students to reach out for assistance (Varney, 2013). Glennen (1976) states, “Being intrusive is contradictory to professional counseling....In an academic setting, however, intrusive counseling is essential. Academic advisors provide information about or explanations of academic subjects, procedures, or regulations” (p. 48). Essentially, we know there are college students who struggle to navigate academia whether it be something as menial as locating registration or withdrawal dates, or whether it is an issue which requires more expertise such as assisting a student in establishing a degree plan. Rather than placing the onus of seeking out academic advising on the student, the responsibility is shared. According to Varney

(2013), PAA is a deliberate and structured academic advising approach which purposefully intervenes to support students prior to them seeking assistance; furthermore, PAA emphasizes students become responsible for their academic success and educates them on the advising process and various resources for support.

PAA asserts students benefit from frequent, if not mandatory, academic advising (Glennen, 1976; Varney, 2013). There are ample studies which support the assertion that increased frequency of meeting with an academic advisor translates to improved outcomes for students, especially when students engage frequently early in their academic career (Glennen et al., 1996; Kot, 2014; Metzner, 1988; Robbins et al., 2009; Swecker, et al., 2013). Empirical evidence also finds that proactive advising can be particularly helpful for students who are at-risk of attrition (e.g., students on academic probation) (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Klepfer & Hull, 2012; Rios, 2019; Vander Schee, 2007).

Kirk-Kuwaye and Nishida (2001) provide empirical evidence that students who are more highly involved with academic advising supports are more likely to have better outcomes than students who are less, or not at all, involved with academic advising. The authors conducted three control trials to compare students with a low frequency of engagement with academic advising to students with a high frequency of engagement. Participants in the study were all students (n=427) on academic probation in the Arts and Sciences College of a large, public university. In the first trial, low-involvement students were sent a letter inviting them to participate in advising with an academic advisor, while high-involvement students were required to meet several times with an academic advisor and received other four additional advising supports (e.g., reminder phone calls). In the

subsequent trials, low-involvement students continued to receive only an invitation to participate in academic advising. The high-involvement students continued to participate in several mandatory meetings with an advisor; however, for each subsequent trial, an advising support was taken away (i.e. no study strategy assignments in Trial 2; no study strategy assignments and no reminder phone calls in Trial 3). Kirk-Kuwaye and Nishida (2001) found that high-involvement students in the first trial had statistically significant higher persistence rates and higher GPAs than low-involvement students. Although the study supports the relationship between frequent academic advising sessions and improved student outcomes, the authors' findings also emphasize the need for multiple advising supports beyond frequent meetings with an academic advisor. It is, moreover, important to note that each strategy provided to high-involvement students would be a beneficial activity for most PAA programs: 1) mandatory meetings, 2) additional advising resources, 3) study strategy resources, 4) reminder phone calls, and 5) study strategy assignments.

Although, as discussed above, Hatch and Garcia (2017) found for their community college student participants, academic advising played a minimal role on students' intention to persist, the authors did note undecided students were likely to benefit from advising early on, especially if that advising was informative (i.e., prescriptive) in nature. This particular finding aligns with a PAA approach in so that a PAA program is meant to identify these students without academic and/or career plans. Proactive academic advisors are trained to identify these students so they may provide advising supports understanding that these students may not seek academic advising or even know what supports are available. Institutions can utilize predictive models (Finney

et al., 2017) and faculty identification to send advisors early alerts (Karp & Stacey, 2013a; Waddington, 2019) identifying students who would benefit from proactive advising. Additionally, through developing a personal relationship with students, proactive advisors are better able to gauge the type of advising students require at various points throughout their time in college (Varney, 2013).

The literature overwhelmingly shows that PAA can positively contribute to student success, especially for students who are struggling in college. What, though, do students and academic advisors think of PAA? Donaldson et al. (2016) interviewed 12 students attending a large, urban community college who also participated in a PAA program. The authors learned students' appreciated the requirement to participate in academic advising allowing them to start planning their academic pathway early in their college career. Having an assigned advisor with whom students developed personal relationships contributed to the overwhelming positive view on compulsory advising, especially due to the personalized experience of working with the same advisor each advising session.

Participants, albeit, did report drawbacks to participation in the PAA program. Although though participation in PAA the students learned to appreciate the mandated advising, when students first learned at the start of the program that participation was compulsory, it did not settle well with them. The students felt that a level of autonomy over their educational decisions and future was being taken from them. In the end, however, students recognized the benefits of mandatory advising outweighed the discomfort experienced with relinquishing some autonomy in their degree planning decisions. Other limitations of the PAA program included a lack of training on, and use

of, online advising resources, limited advisor availability, and a lack of focus on assisting students with the new-student transition.

In the case of Donaldson et al.'s (2016) study, students responded quite positively to PAA. Looking at the students' reported limitations of PAA, however, tells us that proactive academic advisors—especially those with massive caseloads at community colleges—face substantial challenges. Proactive advisors are often not only responsible for their required meetings with assigned advisees but must often help walk-in students seeking advising. Juggling required meetings with walk-in traffic and other responsibilities may leave advisors with little time to assist their advisees outside of required meetings. Furthermore, with such an overwhelming workload, advisors may struggle to assist students with learning how to navigate college or contribute to students' sense of belonging at college outside of academic planning.

While there is a gap in the literature pertaining to PAA at community colleges in general, my search of the literature returned two empirical articles reporting findings on how personnel involved with academic advising perceive PAA. Hansen (2014) conducted a narrative inquiry into how community college faculty responsible for academic advising of their students view PAA as it relates to their students' success. The faculty advisors believe PAA positively impacted their students' academic success and contributed to student retention and completion. Similar to the limitations recognized by the students in Donaldson et al.'s (2016) study, Hansen's (2014) faculty participants noted the increased time required for PAA along with minimum resources as considerable challenges to implementation of the program. The faculty also addressed challenges to implementing PAA at the community college such as a lack of faculty buy

in to the initiative. Furthermore, the faculty advisors attributed the increased time required to engage in PAA to be a considerable challenge. The faculty advisors recognized, however, that although resources were limited, they had access to what was needed for implementation and were bolstered by support from the college's administration.

To gain insight into dedicated academic advisors feelings regarding PAA, we turn to a descriptive, quantitative analysis from Johns et al. (2017) who examined how dedicated academic advisors and faculty at a public university perceive PAA's contribution to student success as well as the feasibility of implementing PAA at the institution. The authors distributed surveys to 669 faculty and 45 academic advisors inquiring into the potential participants' attitudes towards PAA and perceptions on the feasibility of implementing PAA. From the 134 faculty and 40 advisors who responded to the survey, Johns et al. (2017) found that while both groups of participants held positive attitudes towards PAA, the academic advisors held particularly positive views towards the benefits of PAA to student success. On the other hand, both faculty and advisors emphasized there would be considerable challenges to implementing PAA primarily due to the considerable time involved with proactively advising students, especially due to the high advisee-advisor ratio; albeit, both parties recognize that with innovation and the correct resources, PAA is certainly feasible at the institution.

PAA can positively contribute to student success, especially for students who may be at risk of not achieving their academic, and in turn, their career goals (e.g., first-generation students, working students, and students requiring remediation). It is a considerable challenge to implement PAA at higher education institutions, especially at

community colleges facing very real challenges (e.g., funding) (Dougherty et al., 2017; Lahr et al., 2014; McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017) where academic advisors are responsible for massive caseloads (Marcus, 2012; Robbins, 2013). Implementation of PAA requires substantial tools, resources, and cooperation amongst academic advisors, faculty, and administrators (Donaldson et al., 2016; Finnie et al., 2017; Hansen, 2014; Johns et al., 2017; Waddington, 2019). While scholars provide evidence on the effectiveness and descriptions for the implementation of tools which support PAA efforts such as early alerts (Finnie et al., 2017; Tampke, 2013) and online degree planning tools (Donaldson et al., 2016), there remains a notable gap in the literature which addresses how higher education institutions—particularly community colleges—can systematically rollout a PAA program. Therefore, in the next section of this literature review, I discuss a relatively recent approach to academic advising developed explicitly for implementation at community colleges: enhanced academic advising programs (EAP). EAPs share similar characteristics and goals as a PAA approach. Although, EAPs are developed specifically to meet the unique challenges of community colleges. The literature on EAPs, though nascent in nature, explicitly addresses the types of resources and tools which can support the successful implementation of enhanced advising at community colleges.

### ***Enhanced Academic Advising***

The CCRC recommends a sustained, strategic, intrusive and integrated, and personalized (SSIP) approach to enhanced advising and defines EAPs along three characteristics: 1) compulsory advising sessions with an assigned advisor with the intensity of the meetings dependent upon student need; 2) academic advising extends



beyond academics (e.g., degree planning) integrating non-academic areas of development (e.g., career planning); and 3) sustained advising over the student's time at the community college (Karp et al., 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013a.; Karp & Stacey, 2013b). Due to the increase in resources required to deliver an EAP, enhanced advising generally targets students at risk of attrition (Karp & Stacey, 2013a). These defining characteristics of EAPs are nearly identical to characteristics of PAA. What differentiates the two approaches, apart from enhanced advising's emphasis on community colleges, are what Donaldson et al. (2020) refer to as 'components,' which are the "specific part of the EAP that supports a given characteristic" (p. 38).

Components which support the first characteristic of an EAP—mandatory participation in academic advising with assigned advisors—include creation of small caseloads, provision of standardized advising guidelines while allowing for flexibility, proactive outreach to students, and integration of online advising resources (Donaldson et al., 2020; Karp & Stacey, 2013a.; Vasquez, 2020; Vasquez & Scrivener, 2020). The overwhelming caseloads at many community colleges will obstruct the success of an EAP. Community colleges rolling out an EAP are encouraged to hire additional academic advisors to keep caseloads small enough for the personalized advising required of enhanced advising (Vasquez, 2020). In order to save on the resources needed to hire additional professional advisors, colleges may designate a core group of EAP advisers targeting only at-risk students for enhanced advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013a.). Providing training on standard advising practices while emphasizing advisors maintain flexibility to fulfill individual needs with students can lead to efficient, yet personalized advising sessions (Vasquez & Scrivener, 2020). Proactive outreach means understanding that at-

risk students have the most difficulty responding to advising contacts and reminders; therefore, it is essential to continue reaching out when not receiving a response—possibly with automated text and/or email reminders—and provide students with incentives to fulfill the academic advising requirements (e.g., bookstore coupons, digital badges/awards, and/or some form of on-campus recognition) (Karp & Stacey, 2013b.; Vasquez, 2020). Integrating virtual advising tools to support compulsory advising includes, but is not limited to, early alerts and online, degree-planning tools which outline the student’s particular degree path along with the corresponding courses which fulfill degree/program requirements (Donaldson et al., 2020; Karp & Stacey, 2013a.; Karp & Stacey, 2013b.; Vasquez, 2020). Many community colleges integrating technology into their advising services are supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) initiative which provides “technology. . .intended to increase advising’s emphasis on a student’s entire college experience” (Mayer et al., 2019, p. iii).

Components which support non-academic development through enhanced advising include required student success courses designed to develop students’ metacognitive skills and assist them in navigating college as well as planning for entering the workforce upon graduation (Donaldson et al., 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013c; Rutschow et al., 2012). It is also crucial that academic advising not exist in a silo apart from other student support services on campus. There should be protocols for advisors to follow when referring students to support services outside of advising as well as best practice on following up with students after referral (e.g., financial aid, career services, and tutoring) (Donaldson et al., 2020). To ensure sustained advising throughout students’ time at the

community college, colleges must strategically utilize their resources by focusing on students who most need assistance. Early alert systems which identify students who may be struggling—prompted by faculty as well as predictive models—along with strong virtual advising tools for students who may need minimal advising (e.g., confirmation a particular course will satisfy a degree requirement) can support sustained engagement (Finnie et al., 2017; Karp & Stacey, 2013b.; Waddington et al., 2019).

Donaldson et al. (2020) conducted interviews with 12 senior-level academic advisors responsible for enhanced academic advising at a large, urban community college. The authors' qualitative analysis revealed advisors believed the EAP improved student participation in academic advising mainly due to the mandatory participation in advising sessions required of students. Furthermore, the authors found that group advising sessions occurring within their student success course reinforced student participation in academic advising. A second primary characteristic academic advisors attribute to the EAP is increased engagement between students and advisors which led to a stronger rapport and more personalized advising. Finally, advisors assert the EAP provides the ability to proactively build an academic plan with students which includes planning for students whose goal is to transfer to a four-year institution. Importantly, however, although academic advisors recognized the virtual advising tools were beneficial, they also recognized the many shortcomings of the technologies were problematic. This finding emphasizes that for virtual advising tools to support the EAP, it is necessary to ensure online tools are up-to-date and are easily navigable.

Karp et al. (2016) explored the progress six higher education institutions—four community colleges and two open access universities—made on their journeys to

integrate iPASS technologies into their student services systems. The institutions sought to integrate iPASS with the intention of transforming student supports to be intrusive, sustained, and personalized. Although the study found only three of the six institutions were successful in instigating transformational change, the authors identified shared characteristics among these institutions which were indicative of supporting transformational change: 1) well-functioning technologies supported by a positive relationship between the technology vendor(s) and the institution; 2) an institutional emphasis on student success; 3) a well-articulated vision for what it means to successfully integrate iPASS technologies to support student services reform; and 4) cross-hierarchical as well as innovative leadership.

Thomas and McFarlane (2018) write:

The long game required, then, investing in academic advisors and creating a culture in which primary-role and faculty advisors have solid professional skills, frequent contact with students, and strong partnerships with colleagues, stakeholders, and administrators who listen to their expert knowledge. In the long game, technology is a tool, not a solution. (p. 101)

Karp et al.'s (2016) findings demonstrate how technological advising supports are not the change in themselves but are tools which can support transformational change if there is a clear vision established for the change. Mayer et al. (2019) conducted a controlled trial study to examine how iPASS technology integrations at three institutions—two public universities and one community college—impacted student experiences and outcomes. The study enrolled 8,011 students in total with 3,760 in the iPASS group and 4,251 in the control group. The authors found only a limited difference in student experience between

the iPASS and control groups; furthermore, at only one of the institutions did the number of students who engaged with an academic advisor substantially increase. Mayer et al. (2019) admit, “Each of the institutions also faced challenges with resource constraints and adviser capacity” (p. ES-2). The findings from Mayer et al. (2019) as well as from Karp et al. (2016) certainly suggest technological supports, or ‘enhancements’, which accompany an enhanced advising approach cannot be the solutions to improved academic advising in themselves. A successful EAP requires technological enhancements, but more importantly, it requires transformational change within student supports at the institution.

As enhanced academic advising is a recent development, more research must be done to gauge its impact on student success to determine whether it is a feasible approach to academic advising at community colleges. The research available, however, provides promising evidence on the positive impact an EAP can have on community college student success, especially for students who are at-risk of not achieving their educational goals (Barr & Castleman, 2017; Bettinger & Baker, 2011; Miller, Headlam, et al., 2020). For instance, Bettinger and Baker (2011) conducted a controlled experiment to assess the impact an EAP had on primarily non-traditional college students’ persistence. Analyzing data from 13,555 students at 17 universities—public, private-not-for-profit, and private-for-profit—the authors found that students who received the enhanced advising—referred to in the study as ‘coaching’—were more likely to persist while receiving coaching and more likely to be enrolled a year after the trial. The results were statistically significant after controlling for demographics and academic preparedness.

Barr and Castleman (2017) conducted a randomized control trial examining how an EAP impacted student college enrollment and persistence. The EAP, referred to as

Bottom Line, consisted of advising low-income students beginning in the summer before their senior year of high school and continuing through the summer after graduation. Additionally, if the students attended an institution partnered with Bottom Line, the students received personalized advising for up to six years after enrollment. The authors found that students who received enhanced advising were significantly more likely to enroll in college and persist than students who applied to the program but did not receive the advising. Importantly, the students receiving the Bottom Line advising were more likely to continue enrollment in college across four years than students who did not receive advising.

As for evidence for how effective an EAP is on positively impacting student outcomes at community colleges, we can turn to the City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative implemented at the system's community colleges. ASAP is a student success initiative which supports students for up to three years. The program requires students to attend full-time, enroll in developmental courses early in their collegiate career, and encourages students to complete their degree within three years (Scrivener, et al., 2015; Strumbos et al., 2018). The ASAP program provides participants with enhanced academic advising as well as financial and other academic supports (e.g., enrollment priority and block scheduling) (Scrivener, et al., 2015). Scrivener et al. (2015) conducted a random control study at three CUNY community colleges to investigate the extent of ASAP's impact on participant's success. The authors randomly assigned low-income students (n=896) who required developmental education courses to either the ASAP group (n=451) or control group (n=445).

Scrivener et al. (2015) found ASAP to be incredibly beneficial in supporting students in attaining their educational goals. ASAP participants' graduation rates within three years were nearly double that of students in the control group. Furthermore, students in the control group earned nine less credits on average than ASAP students. The percentage of ASAP students who earned a degree at the conclusion of the study was 40%, which is nearly double that of students who did not receive the treatment. It is also encouraging to note the study found that by the third year of participation in ASAP, the cost per degree was less for ASAP students than for the control students.

On the heels of the inspiring success of ASAP at CUNY community colleges, three community colleges in Ohio implemented ASAP modeled closely on CUNY ASAP (Miller, Headlam, et al., 2020). Miller, Headlam, et al. (2020) replicated Scrivener et al.'s (2015) study to examine the effectiveness of ASAP at the Ohio community colleges. Student participants (n=1,501) were assigned to participate in ASAP (n=806) or to a control group (n=695). Just as in New York City, ASAP significantly contributed to the success of community college students in Ohio. ASAP students earned nearly doubled degree attainment compared to students who did not receive the treatment; moreover, the cost per degree was less for ASAP students than for students in the control group.

Neither the Scrivener et al. (2015) nor Miller, Headlam, et al. (2020) studies measure the impact the enhanced advising support had compared to other ASAP supports. We know that early completion of developmental courses, full-time enrollment, and completion of required courses—all required under the ASAP program—are significant predictors for college completion (Adelman, 2006; Doyle, 2011; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Jenkins & Bailey, 2017; Mechur Karp, 2016; Tovar, 2015; Wang, 2015;

Wang, 2017). Albeit, numerous studies discussed here provide evidence that quality academic advising can make significant, positive impacts on student outcomes (Bahr, 2008; Bai & Pan, 2009; Barr & Castleman, 2017; Bettinger & Baker, 2011; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Klepfer & Hull, 2012; McFarlane, 2013; Robbins et al., 2009; Swecker et al., 2013). Barr and Castleman's (2017) study discussed above analyzed only the impact of intensive advising over time—rather than a combination of advising and other supports—and found that intensive advising over time, itself, had a positive impact on student persistence. It is evident that programs such as the CUNY and Ohio ASAP, which integrate various supports we know are predictive of student success, can—if well-designed and properly carried out—prove to be tremendously instrumental in supporting students in the attainment of their college goals.

Certainly, redesigns to student service supports at the institutional level require the support and guidance of a framework for change. In the next section, therefore, I detail the conceptual frameworks which guided this dissertation. Although the model for academic advising and the conceptual framework for organizational change provided below guided this work's examination of potential redesign of academic advising services at UCC, the advising model and conceptual framework may be of use to any higher education institution seeking to reform its academic advising supports.

### **Conceptual Framework**

For this dissertation, I applied the SSIP model of academic advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013a) and Kezar's (2014) theory for organizational change to frame this research examining how UCC may best implement transformational change to academic advising at the institution. I used the SSIP model as it was developed by the CCRC to



clearly define a model of academic advising aimed at tackling the unique challenges faced by community colleges. The SSIP model integrates academic and career advising and “replac[es] the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach with an approach that identifies the level of need for individual students and delivers one-on-one advising when it will be most impactful” (Karp & Stacey, 2013a, p. 4). I selected Kezar’s (2014) theory for organizational change to frame this research for two main reasons: 1) the theory explicitly addresses organizational change within higher education; and 2) the theory is multifaceted accounting for varying types and contexts for change, multiple leadership approaches, and numerous theoretical approaches to organizational change.

### ***The SSIP Model to Academic Advising***

As discussed in the literature review, SSIP (Karp & Stacey, 2013a) is a model for an enhanced advising approach to academic advising and stands for 1) sustained, 2) strategic, 3) intrusive and integrated, and 4) personalized. Research shows that providing continuous student services supports—including academic advising supports—to students throughout their collegiate careers improves their chances of success (Barr & Castleman, 2017; Bettinger & Baker, 2011). A SSIP model, therefore, requires advising services be sustained throughout a student’s time at the college.

The provision of academic advising supports, albeit, must be strategic if colleges are to provide sustained supports. Community colleges work with limited resources often struggling to do more with less. Colleges, therefore, must strategically meet students where they are with the most appropriate, or beneficial, form of personalized academic advising support for students’ current needs (Karp & Stacey, 2013a; Karp et al., 2016). Furthermore, colleges must be intrusive, or proactive, in ensuring students engage with

the advising supports. Many community college students may be unaware they need assistance, or if they are aware, they may not know where to seek it; therefore, colleges should integrate their academic advising services into students' daily collegiate life (Karp & Stacey, 2013a; Karp et al., 2016).

In this dissertation, I examined ways in which UCC may integrate a SSIP model into its academic advising system. I, therefore, analyzed the data to understand the ways in which academic advising at UCC either diverges with, or conforms to, the SSIP model. I then looked to Kezar's (2014) theory for organizational change to analyze ways in which UCC may incorporate the SSIP model into its academic advising systems resulting in institutional-level reform to academic advising.

### ***Theory on Organizational Change***

Community colleges embarking on redesign of academic advising supports must first identify the types of changes required for the redesign. According to Kezar's (2014) theory for organizational change, for higher education institutions to understand what type of change is necessary, it requires reflection and analysis on the content, scope, levels, focus, and forces and sources of change. The content of the change will cause different reactions from stakeholders. For instance, as we have seen in the literature review, stakeholders value academic advising for its integral contribution to student success (ACT, Inc., 2010; CCSE, 2018; Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Change which is perceived as an improvement to academic advising is not likely to be met with much resistance unless, however, that change is viewed as disruptive to stakeholders involved with academic advising.

Identifying the scope of the changes involved with academic advising redesign will impact the efforts of those involved. For instance, first-order changes—changes which involve minor adjustments—can be straight forward to implement. Deep, or second-order, changes involve addressing “underlying values, assumptions, structures, processes, and culture” (Kezar, 2014, p. 49). Thus, to enact second-order change will take significantly more effort and time than first-order change. Next, change agents must identify the levels of change involved when working to affect change. Change is likely to occur across several levels of an organization including the individual, group, enterprise, and organization.

Inherent to any change, is the phenomenon on which the change is focused. According to Kezar (2014), there are three foci for change: 1) structure, 2) process, and 3) attitude/value. The structural focus refers to an institution’s policies and procedures, while the process focus relates to the organization’s implementation of operations (e.g., decision-making). The attitudes and values “are the way people feel about their work within the existing structures and processes of the organization and are closely related to culture” (Kezar, 2014, p. 52). Academic advising reform will include changes to all three foci. The task for change agents involved with the reform will be to identify the focus, or foci, of any implemented change.

Once all the aspects of the type of change are identified and understood, Kezar’s (2014) framework for organizational change requires individuals involved with the change to analyze the context for the change. Understanding the context for change is imperative as the environment in which change occurs impacts the change process. Kezar (2014) names four layers of context which shape change. First, especially within higher

education, are the social, political, and economic factors which affect efforts to create change. Next, external stakeholders within higher education are sure to shape any change process. For instance, when it comes to academic advising redesign, some external stakeholders to consider are NACADA, Achieving the Dream, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and the CCRC. Beyond the external contextual layers, individuals involved in change must consider how higher education as an institution as well as how the specific institutional culture will shape the change process.

Upon analysis of the type and context of change, a form of leadership and approach to change should be combined to engage in the change process. Kezar (2014) delineates four forms of leadership: 1) top-down, 2) bottom-up or grassroots, 3) collective, and 4) shared leadership. The leadership type which is best suited to lead change depends on the type and context of change. For instance, if a change effort is first-order in nature requiring a minor change in a process, top-down leadership will likely suffice. However, if a deep-level change is required, shared leadership—involving both those with more authority as well as those who are generally not in positions of authority—is likely to be more effective at affecting change amongst attitudes and values within the organization. Furthermore, the selected leadership type should complement the theoretical approach taken to enact change. As an example, a scientific-management approach views organizations as purposeful and adaptive while perceiving the change process as rational and linear; therefore, a scientific-management approach to change can be most effective when coinciding with top-down leadership.

Embarking on the redesign of academic advising at the institutional-level is a tremendous undertaking which could take years of effort and require substantial

allocation of resources. Kezar's (2014) framework provides us with an analytical guide to identify changes within the redesign as well as guidance for considering appropriate leadership styles and theoretical approaches to implementing changes. In this dissertation, I applied Kezar's (2014) framework to identify the types and contexts of changes which are necessary for the implementation of the SSIP model for academic advising at the UCC system. I then considered the most appropriate leadership types and theoretical approaches for each change. From this analysis, I provide UCC with recommendations on how the institution may engage in academic advising redesign aimed at positively impacting the success of students.

UCC is currently engaged in academic advising reform. With this dissertation, I aimed to support UCC's efforts to improve its academic advising system. I used the SSIP model of academic advising in my analysis to assist in realizing how UCC can more effectively allocate academic advising resources, identify—and engage with—students in most need of advising, provide a depth of academic advising dependent on students' needs, and integrate academic advising into various aspects of the college experience (Karp & Stacey, 2013a). To fully realize such a large-scale redesign across the UCC system, a framework is required to identify what changes must be made, how the changes will be made, and who will lead the changes. In my analysis, I used Kezar's (2014) theory for organizational change to illuminate what conditions at UCC are necessary for this system-wide redesign effort to be realized.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods**

#### **The Research Team**

This dissertation is part of a grant-funded, interinstitutional study which began with the purpose of examining the impacts of a 15-to-Finish initiative in the beginning stages of its rollout at UCC. The research team is comprised of researchers, staff, and administrators from UCC as well as faculty and graduate students from the College of Education at a neighboring research university. UCC has welcomed faculty and graduate students from the College of Education to conduct research at the institution for years. While numerous studies have been published and dissertations have been written using data collected from UCC, this study is the first to explicitly prioritize a research-to-practice model. Team members from both institutions served as primary investigators for this study. Our research prioritizes the dissemination of our results to UCC with the goal of informing practice at the institution. While researchers from the College of Education are able to provide fresh insights into the data due to being removed from the day-to-day work at UCC, team members from UCC add rich context to the scholarly interpretations.

I have been involved with the study since the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year. I was first employed as a graduate student with the university partner. Then, during the 2019-2020 academic year through the fall of 2021, I was employed by UCC as a part-time project manager for the grant. Although my title may have changed during the three years of the study, my responsibilities have not. Since the start of the grant, I have been involved in coordinating the research as well as conducting the

research by collecting and analyzing data, writing research articles and reports, and disseminating our findings.

### **Institutional Context and Sample**

UCC enrolls over 80,000 students annually across 18 campuses located within a major metropolitan area in a Southwest state. The UCC student body was comprised of 67% racial/ethnic minority in the 2018-2019 academic year. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the student body was 37% Latinx, 27% Black, 12% White, 10% Asian, and 2% identifying as two or more races/ethnicities (Data USA, n. d.). Additionally, 40% of students were considered low-income, 39% were above the age of 25, and 46% were enrolled in developmental education.

At the start of this grant-funded study, UCC was in the process of implementing pathways and transitioning to a case-management style of advising. As the study progressed, however, UCC shifted its focus from establishing a 15-to-Finish program to improving its academic advising system. UCC, therefore, partnered with Excellence in Academic Advising (EAA) with the goal of improving its system of academic advising to more significantly impact student success. EAA works with partnering institutions to conduct an assessment process that will “refine, validate, and establish the aspirational standards of colleges and universities in order to evaluate and improve academic advising” (EAA, 2021, para. 1). The grant-funded study, of which this dissertation is a part, has been collecting and analyzing data from students and academic advisors for over three years at the time of writing. As this data speaks to perspectives on, and experiences with, student success and academic advising, this dissertation is ideally positioned to contribute to UCC’s efforts to improve academic advising across its system.

## **Data Collection**

Students, academic advisors, and student services administrators were recruited to participate in this study. The research team recruited students about one to two months after the start of each of the Fall 2018 or Spring 2019 semesters, the Fall 2019 or Spring 2020 semesters, and the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. The criteria for inclusion in cross-sectional interviews were as follows: 1) Students were new-to-UCC students; 2) Orientation records indicated that students watched the 15-to-Finish informational video; 3) Students were considered to be enrolled full-time in at least 12 semester credit hours; and 4) Students were at least 18 years of age. From the students who matched the criteria during each of the semesters stated above, approximately 300 to 500 students were selected to receive recruitment emails.

At the close of data collection, the research team recruited 78 students—who reflected the UCC’s broader demographic student profile—to participate in the study. Out of the 78 students who participated in the study, 35 participated in cross-sectional interviews, 17 agreed to, and participated in, longitudinal interviews, and 43 students participated in focus groups. In total, this study conducted seven focus groups with students. To recruit students for cross-sectional interviews, the research team distributed recruitment surveys in which students specified their interest to participate and completed a consent form electronically providing their consent to participate in the study. Of course, potential participants had the option of declining consent, in which case, students were not contacted further by the research team. Once students completed the recruitment survey and provided consent, a member of the research team would contact a student via email to schedule the cross-sectional interviews.



The research team recruited participants to longitudinal interviews a semester or more removed from the students' cross-sectional interviews with the exception of one student who was selected for a longitudinal interview due to the insights he provided during his participation in a focus group. That student was recruited approximately one month after his focus group. At the conclusion of their cross-sectional interviews, the interviewer asked participants whether they consented to being contacted in the future by the research team and whether they may be interested in participating in a second interview. Researchers only recruited students to longitudinal interviews if the students answered in the affirmative to future contact as well as interest in a second interview.

Students participating in focus groups during the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 semesters were recruited from a required first-year experience course. Additionally, in the Spring 2019 semester, the research team recruited students enrolled in UCC's Weekend College program to participate in a focus group. Students enrolled in the Weekend College take all courses on the weekend and are primarily older students working full-time many of whom support families. The study recruited students participating in focus groups during the Spring 2021 semester from the Honors College, the Weekend College, and the Men of Honor program. The Men of Honor program is a support program for minority males who are veterans of the armed services. Students participating in focus groups were at least 18 years of age but could be attending UCC either full- or part-time. The research team recruited participants via faculty or college/program directors. The faculty and directors provided the research team with the names and contact information of interested students. The research team then contacted interested students via email to provide details of the study as well as an electronic

consent form. The research team scheduled focus groups with students who responded to the recruitment email and completed the electronic consent form providing their consent to participate.

All students participating in this research, whether in cross-sectional, longitudinal, and/or focus group interviews received a \$40 gift card to either Walmart or Amazon. Additionally, the research team incentivized students participating in in-person focus groups with a free lunch as the focus groups often occurred during lunch time. Once focus groups shifted to an online format—I discuss this shift in format in the next paragraph—the team was unable to provide a free lunch to participants.

Cross-sectional interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each. Each cross-sectional interview was conducted by a single interviewer. During the first year and a half of the study, participants had the choice of participating in-person or over the phone. Since UCC is a large system spread over a sprawling, urban metro area, the research provided an interview-via phone option to broaden access to the study. With the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, all cross-sectional interviews transitioned to a web conferencing format via the software Zoom. Students participated in longitudinal interviews over a phone call prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. All longitudinal interviews conducted after the arrival of COVID-19 occurred over Zoom. The longitudinal interviews each lasted approximately 45 minutes. A single interviewer conducted each longitudinal interview. As stated above, all focus groups initially occurred in person. With COVID-19 making in-person face-to-face meetings impossible, focus groups occurring in the Spring 2021 semester occurred via Zoom. All focus groups lasted about 60 minutes each. Focus groups were conducted by one to two interviewers.

During the first academic year of the study, only researchers unaffiliated with UCC conducted interviews. In total, three team members conducted interviews during the first year. Participants were informed that interviewers were from the College of Education at the neighboring research institution and were unaffiliated with UCC. I continued to conduct interviews after UCC hired me as the program manager for the grant during the second academic year of the study. When I conducted an interview, I disclosed to participants that I was a graduate student at the College of Education and was also a part-time employee at UCC working on this study. I informed participants I was the only UCC employee on the research team that would know their identity. During year two, a PhD student at the College of Education was hired as a research assistant. Therefore, four researchers conducted interviews during years two and three of data collection.

All interviews—cross-sectional, longitudinal, and focus group—were audio recorded. The audio recordings were sent to an outside, professional transcription service for transcribing. Once transcribed, I, along with another researcher from the College of Education, sanitized the transcriptions for participant identifiers as well as references which may easily identify a UCC employee. After the sanitization, the transcriptions were then shared with the entire research team.

The research team recruited academic advisor participants from eight campuses which were purposefully selected to reflect within-system differences in service provision. The academic advisors reflected the broader demographic profile of academic advisors at UCC. The research team recruited academic advisors through the academic advising managers at each of the campuses. Advising managers were asked to share with

academic advisors an opportunity to participate in the study and to emphasize with advisors that participation in the study was not compulsory but voluntary. The research team incentivized academic advisors with a \$25 gift card to either Amazon or Walmart as well as with a free lunch for focus groups which occurred in-person at a campus.

The study recruited 33 academic advisors to participate in focus group interviews. However, due to absences of potential participants to three of the focus groups, interviewers conducted individual interviews with the single academic advisor who attended. Therefore, 30 academic advisors participated across 11 focus groups, while three academic advisors participated in a single individual interview.

The academic advisor focus groups were conducted by one to two interviewers. Prior to COVID-19, focus groups occurred in-person at a campus where academic advisors worked or near to the academic advisors' campus of employment. All focus groups transitioned to virtual conferencing via Zoom after the onset of COVID-19. Each academic advisor focus group and interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded. The audio recordings were sent to a professional transcription service. The transcriptions were sanitized. Sanitation of the transcripts involved removing participant identifiers as well as identifiers for UCC employees not participating in the focus group. I then shared the sanitized transcripts with the entire research team.

Two student services leaders participated in the study. Research team members from UCC purposefully identified administrators with intimate knowledge of student services supports at the institution who would be able to provide significant insights into academic advising services. I emailed the administrators explaining our research and

inviting them to participate. Once the administrators agreed to participate, I provided them with an IRB approved consent form and scheduled the interviews. Interviews occurred over Zoom and lasted approximately 60 minutes each.

All interviews—cross-sectional, longitudinal, and focus groups—were semi-structured. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed us the flexibility to respond to each unique participants' views and experiences while ensuring the topic domains pertinent to the research were explored (Carspecken, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Development of each interview protocol was an iterative and collaborative process. I provide the interview protocols in Appendices A-E. At the start of the study, a member of the research team who specializes in qualitative inquiry composed the first draft of the cross-sectional, longitudinal, and focus group interview protocols for students as well as the focus group protocol for academic advisors. The interview protocols were then shared with the entire research team for further development. Once the research team was satisfied with each interview protocol, the protocol was then shared with student services leaders at UCC in order for them to provide feedback. We then discussed the administrators' insights as a team and made any appropriate edits to the interview protocols. We developed the protocol for administrator interviews prior to the semester in which the interviews occurred.

Development of the interview protocols was an iterative process. Prior to each round of data collection, typically occurring each semester where data collection occurred, the team collaborated, along with UCC leadership, to revise interview protocols. Following the same process outlined above, we revised interview protocols by cutting superfluous items which added little insight. We also added items to the protocols

based on previously collected data allowing us to gain deeper insight into unanticipated topic domains (Carspecken, 1991).

This study conducted semi-structured, focus group interviews in addition to semi-structured, individual interviews. Firstly, we employed focus group interviews of students and academic advisors due to practicality. In regards to students, focus groups allowed us to efficiently recruit and gather several student participants together at one time (Hennink, 2014). With several registration and enrollment periods during a semester at UCC, there are few windows during the semester when academic advisors can afford the time to participate in a research study. Conducting focus groups with academic advisors, rather than individual interviews, allowed us increased capacity to enroll academic advisor participants into the study.

More importantly, conducting focus groups allowed for the expression of multiple perspectives and experiences during a single interviewing session; furthermore, the engagement among participants elicited more nuanced discussions and responses to inquiries than many of the individual interviews we conducted (Boateng, 2012; Hennink, 2014). In conducting focus group interviews, we were aware of the potential for groupthink to occur. We, therefore, conducted individual interviews in addition to focus groups with students to triangulate the data; additionally, interviewers conducting focus groups made sure to follow up on participant responses which may have been contrary to the majority group sentiment. Creating a friendly atmosphere by providing food and engaging in casual conversation prior to the start of the focus group was another strategy employed to mitigate groupthink (Boateng, 2012).

## **Positionality**

I began my academic career as an undecided student enrolling at a community college. I have first-hand experience of the supports quality academic advising can provide a community college student who is unclear of their collegiate pathway. However, I understand that—coming from a middle class household with college educated parents—I was privileged with supports that many community college students do not have, which is why I am passionate about research aimed to improve academic advising supports, especially for underprivileged community college students.

It is also important to note that I am a part-time employee at the site where this case study occurred. While my employee role affords unique institutional insights into the data, I understand that researcher autonomy may come into question. In recognition of this concern, I prioritize my autonomy as a researcher while acknowledging the institutional insights my role as an employee provides during the analysis of the collected data. Furthermore, although I am a part-time employee at UCC, I am not directly involved with academic advising redesign efforts. I, therefore, do not have an insider perspective that an employee directly involved with advising change efforts would possess. I recognize my knowledge of academic advising redesign is bound to information to which I have access and the data collected for this study.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this qualitative case study involved the constant comparative method (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) detail the constant comparative method for data analysis in two parts: 1) unitizing and 2) categorizing. Unitizing consists of identifying, and noting, units of information in the

data (e.g., interview transcription or field notes) which provide information, or a level of understanding, for the phenomena under investigation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a unit must be heuristic and “must be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself” (p. 345). Erlandson et al. (1993) elaborate:

A unit of data is said to exist when there is but one idea found in a portion of content. A unit may consist of a few words, a complete sentence, several sentences, or an entire paragraph. The unit must also be heuristic; that is, it is aimed at understanding some aspect of the context or some action the inquirer needs to take. (p. 117)

I employed In Vivo coding to unitize the data. In Vivo coding aligns with the constant comparative approach as the researcher does not attempt to interpret the data during the unitization stage beyond deciding whether each unit speaks to the explored phenomena. With In Vivo coding, the researcher codes the units of data using verbatim language from the participants rather than identifying, or summarizing, units of data with a word or phrase developed by the researcher (Saldaña, 2009; 2011). Moreover, I used the qualitative software NVivo (released in March 2020) to organize and manage data analysis. Rather than note units of meaning from the data onto index cards as instructed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I coded the units in NVivo identifying each unit by a word or phrase found verbatim within the unit. I conducted unitization on all interview transcripts. I conducted multiple passes of unitization on a single transcript. I concluded unitization of a transcript once I was satisfied all units of data were identified and coded.

The next task in constant comparative analysis is to categorize the units of data (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized NVivo software to organize



and manage categorization. Categorization involved sorting the units of data coded during unitization into categories. I employed focused coding during the categorization process (Saldaña, 2009). I began by reading the first unit of data coded during unitization. Next, I read the second code. I then decided whether the second code belonged in the same category as the first depending on whether the first code ‘felt’ the same as the first. If so, I included the first and second codes together in a category. If not, I designated the second code as its own, separate, category. I then continued this process until all codes were added to categories. Once all units were categorized, I loosely defined each category to distinguish each category amongst the others. Finally, I completed each step of the categorization process again. Repeating the process allowed me to further refine the categories and develop subcategories. In regards to repeating the categorization process, Erlandson et al. (1993) instruct:

One must allow new categories to emerge and old categories to dissipate as empty sets. It is probable that the researcher will move [codes] from one category to another in this step. This step should be no less emergent than the first. (p. 119)

I repeated categorization until I was satisfied each category was distinct and well-defined.

Based on the emergent categories, I developed themes beginning with constructing low-level inferences from the data which explained what is occurring in the data. From the low-level inferences, I then developed high-level inferences examining the deeper meaning that emerged. I then constructed key themes and subthemes which address this case study’s research questions (Saldaña, 2011).

### **Trustworthiness**

I established credibility in this dissertation through various means (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2011). This study used multiple sources of data (i.e., students, academic advisors, and administrators) for triangulation. I engaged in peer-debriefing with research team members as well as members of my dissertation committee. The research team kept an audit trail for the duration of the study which includes versions of interview protocols, researcher notes, and data analyses. I continued the audit trail by keeping a detailed record of this dissertation's analysis within NVivo. The research team purposefully selected participants. Rather than external validity, naturalistic inquiry seeks to attain transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve the criteria of transferability, this study employed purposeful sampling. Moreover, I provided a thick description of the institutional context, the data collection process, and the data analysis.

### **Limitations**

A significant limitation pertains to the purposeful sampling criteria for student participants in cross-sectional, individual interviews. Students recruited for individual interviews were enrolled full-time. The perspectives and experiences of part-time students, therefore, were only incorporated into the student focus groups and longitudinal interviews as some students decided on part-time enrollment in subsequent semesters. Furthermore, academic advisor participants were not necessarily the assigned advisors for the student participants. Also, it is not known if any of the student participants sought academic advising support from any of the academic advisor participants. I was, therefore, unable to connect the student participants' experiences with academic advising

to the academic advising efforts of the advisor participants. A final limitation for this study is we did not collect detailed demographic information on the participants.

Although this dissertation is primarily concerned with an organizational level of analysis, having a more detailed profile of participants would potentially provide insights into participant experiences and perceptions than an analysis which does not consider participant characteristics such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

Data analysis involved the constant comparative method of naturalistic inquiry. In total, I conducted data analysis on 59 student, 11 academic advisor, and two student services administrator interview and focus group transcripts. The initial coding analysis resulted in 1,275 codes. The clustering level of analysis resulted in 21 primary clusters and 107 sub-cluster/groups. An additional level of clustering resulted in 15 primary groupings in which inferences and sub-inferences were drawn. Analysis of the inference and sub-inferences resulted in identifying seven themes and nine sub-themes. In this chapter, I discuss the findings which emerged from the data analysis. I use pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality when referring to individual participants. See Appendix F for the list of pseudonyms used to refer to academic advisors, students, and administrators.

Due to the nature of this study's research questions, the findings presented here primarily address the challenges, or deficiencies, within UCC's academic advising system. Therefore, I feel it important to highlight the strengths in UCC's academic advising system which emerged during data analysis. The data collected from academic advisors, administrators, and students suggests UCC possesses many of the integral structures (e.g., early alert system, online degree planning, and a required student success course) for implementation of the SSIP model of academic advising. For the most part, students speak positively about their experiences with academic advising. Many students identify academic advisors as playing an integral role in developing a "game plan" for their academic journeys. Students also speak directly to academic advising supports (e.g.,

online degree planners and Early Alerts) which assist them in staying the course to achieve their academic and workforce goals. With a few exceptions, academic advisors speak passionately about their mission to support students in achieving their goals. Administrators also speak to the indispensable role academic advising plays in supporting students' success at the community college. Promisingly, the administrator participants' concerns pertaining to the state of academic advising at UCC, largely align with academic advisors' considerations as to the challenges they face as advisors at UCC.

UCC, furthermore, was in the first year of an academic advising redesign partnership with EAA when the final focus groups were conducted with academic advisors. In fact, UCC administration requested the research team collect additional data from academic advisors. UCC, therefore, coordinated with the research team to organize additional focus groups to ensure sufficient data were collected from advisors. Promoting additional data collection from academic advisors is an example of UCC's purposeful inclusion of academic advisor perspectives into the college's redesign efforts. UCC is now in the second year of its partnership with EAA and the redesign of its academic advising to integrate an EAP. I provide further insight into the efforts made within the college's redesign in the following chapter. Here, it is important to note the findings do not necessarily reflect UCC's current reform efforts as the data collected from administrators, academic advisors, and students occurred either prior to, or at the beginning of, the academic advising redesign partnership.

For the remainder of this chapter, I turn to a discussion of the key themes which address this dissertation's three research questions. In regards to the first research question, overwhelming advisor workloads, an emphasis on top-down leadership, and

inconsistent academic advising processes and attitudes are the three key challenges to successful academic advising reform which emerged from the data analysis. Pertaining to the second research question, the data suggest UCC prioritize reducing academic advisor workloads and moving beyond leaders and silos to promote cross-functional and cross-hierarchical involvement to overcome the first two challenges to reform listed above. Furthermore, the data show several areas where academic advising at UCC aligns with the SSIP model. To address the third challenge mentioned above, it is necessary for leaders and academic advising stakeholders to identify where the processes and attitudes do not align in order to bring them into alignment and ensure consistency across the system. Finally, although the support and involvement of system-level leadership is required for successful academic advising redesign, leaders and academic advising stakeholders should take a shared leadership approach to increase the chances for long-term, second-order changes to take hold. I discuss these key themes as well as the accompanying subthemes below.

### **Challenge: Overwhelming Academic Advisor Workloads**

Academic advisors at UCC are responsible for high caseloads which are prohibitive to a SSIP model of academic advising. In the focus groups and interviews, advisors reported caseloads generally between 700 and 900 advisees. Julie reported by far the highest caseload at 1,500 students. Julie states:

Let me bring up, on my side, about the case load in regard to the numbers that we have to see. And, they're not right. There's no way an individual can handle the numbers that we have, and if the numbers aren't correct, then the administrative offices need to fix it! But we all have about nine hundred. I have 1,500.

An academic advisor will find it extremely challenging to provide effective academic advising supports to a caseload of 900 students, let alone, 1,500. Even if strategic advising is employed to focus on providing advising to students who most require advising, the number of advisees who require in-depth advising will likely be too high for advisors to meet advisees' needs with current caseloads.

Consider, for instance, in the Fall 2019 semester, UCC recommended 38% of new, entering students for developmental education. Each academic advisor, therefore, would be responsible for providing in-depth advising to potentially one hundred students in this scenario. One academic advisor, Tracy, recommends a manageable caseload ratio would be "around 300 or 400" students per academic advisor. The student services leaders interviewed also assert the ratio of advisees to advisors is too high and creates challenges to providing advisees with the individual level of advising supports they require. Kristen, a student services administrator, states, "To me, that's the challenge with community colleges, is our ratio of advisors to students is so high! It's so hard to get these students the individual attention they get!"

Faced with such high caseloads, academic advisors face overwhelming challenges, especially during busy times in the semester such as peak enrollment periods. Michael explains:

We do as much as we can, but during our peak registration times, January and August, it's really kind of impossible to do, and see all the students in the lobby, and answer every single email, answer every single phone. It's not possible. I always tell the students that come in that, because they'll come in and say, "I've been emailing," like in January, "I've been emailing my advisor all week and they

haven't responded." I'll say, "You might have to come in and see them, because we are told that students in the lobby are a priority during that time." Because we can get like fifty students at... [at my campus], it can be up to like sixty students in the lobby, and those are priorities. So, if the phone rings and I have a student in my office, or if I'm out running around because sometimes we have to go to a different department to ask a question, I may not answer the phone. I actually specifically told my students, "Do not call me on the phone. If you want to talk to me either come in or send me an email." But during peak registration, our main focus is the students that are in the lobby.

From Michael's quote, we can glean the desperation academic advisors feel when faced with advising a caseload of nearly 1,000 students, advising walk-in students—whether in-person or via virtual videoconferencing—and handling other responsibilities advisors are tasked with such as student recruitment and new student orientations.

### ***Struggling to Meet Workload Challenges***

High advisee-to-advisor ratios contribute to academic advisors' perception that they are facing unrealistic expectations. Riri explains:

I would like for them to have a realistic view of how much work it takes. They want us to see students in 15 minutes. Sometimes when that student comes in there you have to help them pick a major, explain to them what they have to do.

Registration is a crucial period for advisors to not only advise students on their enrollment decisions, but to build the advisor-advisee relationship, especially for students who are uncertain of their goals or who are struggling academically. Due to his high caseload and heavy walk-in traffic, Michael felt it necessary to tell his assigned advisees



he would be unable to set appointments to meet with them, answer phone calls, or respond to emails. What does that tell the student about the advisee-advisor relationship? And, what kind of trust will the student have in Michael's capacity to provide the guidance the student requires? Carlos speaks to the damage that struggling to meet the demand of walk-in advising while providing supports to assigned advisees can cause to the advisor-advisee relationship. He states:

That's an extra duty on our end when we have case management to deal with, when we have walk-ins to still take care of, and other things that are still assigned to us. So, that does not create a positive atmosphere of reaching out to the students.

As seen in Kristen's quote above, administrator participants also feel that unmanageable caseloads contribute to the pressures advisors face. Furthermore, one administrator, Barbara, asserts that immense accountability pressures compound the sense of desperation some advisors may feel. Barbara explains:

You know, I knew that the advisors were struggling with this for a while now because they don't want to be blamed if something doesn't go right or if the student didn't complete and now everybody is held accountable. There is so much pressure on the advisors now! I think a lot of it is unwarranted, but as long as, at the end of the day, the data is about dollars and cents to report your completions to the state and you are refunded. And all that kind of thing is a lot of pressure on the advisors!

Advisors echo this frustration with being held accountable for things they feel are out of their control, especially when faced with overwhelming workloads. Emily argues:

If you don't provide [advisors with] everything they need, then you're just scapegoating them every semester. Nothing is going to change and morale is going to continue to nosedive. You come up with some new initiative like financial aid auditing. We're not going to be enthusiastic about that. We're not going to jump in with full vigor! We're going to do the minimum! So that's kind of where we are now; we're the people that are always blamed for everything!

According to federal law, UCC must ensure courses in which students on financial aid enroll meet degree plan requirements. Academic advisors work with students to construct their degree plan and guide them on course enrollment decisions to meet requirements of the degree plan. Advisors are, therefore, the appropriate personnel to be tasked with confirming financial aid will cover the courses in which students enroll. It is likely that academic advisors' frustration with the task can partly be contributed to communication channels which may not have sufficiently demonstrated the importance of the task to advisors. As advisors work hard to meet the needs of students and the institution, the data also suggests advisors' frustration with performing an additional task stems from the heavy workloads they face. As Emily's quote reveals, heavy workloads have contributed to low morale amongst academic advisors and a sense of distrust of the administration.

Student participants expressed their own unrealistic ideals of academic advisors' responsibilities and capabilities. In general, students who struggled academically and who did not have a clear academic plan were more likely to have unrealistic expectations of academic advisors. For instance, Veronica says:

I feel like one of the things they need to know, and this might sound like failure or something like that, but it's like, most of us don't have any idea what we're doing

or what we're supposed to do. So, we go to them for help and then, in my case, when my advisor gave me that answer, I was like, "Okay, what am I supposed to do now? You said you can't tell me and then I don't know what to do." That's really not helpful at all.

Academic advisors can provide students with sufficient knowledge to make an informed decision and can closely guide students to make optimal decisions. Academic advisors do not, however, make students' decisions for them. Similarly, Stephanie—a student planning to transfer to a four-year institution—claims:

I feel that, from my experience, dealing with a [UCC] advisor, they should be pretty well informed about transfer credits, because it seems like none of them, or a majority of them, don't even know what transfers or how transfer credits work. I feel like, at least with schools in Texas, that's really my main frustration point when dealing with [UCC] advisors.

Clearly, Stephanie was unsatisfied with her academic advisor's efforts to advise her on which credits would transfer to her selected transfer institution. According to the interviews and focus groups with academic advisors, Stephanie's understanding that UCC advisors are not proficient on how to identify which credits will transfer to a four-year institution is incorrect. Rather, it is likely that in both of the students' experiences described above, that the academic advisors in question directed students to additional academic advising supports (e.g., career services and the transfer institution website or academic advisor). In both experiences, the confusion over the responsibilities of the academic advisors are likely related to the advisors directing students to resources rather than guiding them to the supports.

### ***Providing Direction without Guidance***

High caseloads and an overwhelming workload can leave advisors with less time than required to closely advise students who require it the most. When pressed for time, the data shows academic advisors may direct students to complete a task rather than guide them through the task. The difference between direction and guidance is important to understand within a SSIP model of advising where the goal is to provide strategic, personalized advising to students. Students who are struggling to navigate the community college will require guidance. Take, for instance, Janith's recounting of her meeting with her assigned advisor. Janith met with her advisor to gain assurance that the classes in which she enrolled would count toward her degree requirements. Janith describes:

My advisor was like, "You can easily track this stuff online. There wasn't really a need to meet in person." But as a college student, I wanted to meet in person just to make sure. I thought they could have handled that situation better....So, I still wanted to go in person to make sure that it was all okay, and I was good to go. So, she literally took me to the student page and she was like, "If all of these are closed then you're good," so I didn't really go into detail about like what classes I was taking, and if they were okay....So, the scheduled time was supposed to be around 30 minutes. But, I was in and out in about 5 minutes. So, like, we didn't really discuss anything; she just showed me what I can see on my own student account, and she said, "If these are all closed, then you're fine." And then that was it!

Riri explains in a quote provided above that academic advisors cannot guide students with the limited time their heavy workloads afford them. However, in the

following quote, Riri expresses her frustration for students who contact her with questions she feels they should be able to locate the answers to without her guidance. Riri states:

I don't want you to contact me for something that you could just search for and then get the information directly from them instead of me having to email you and search for it myself. I try to let them know that you are empowered. You've got to use what you've got.

Although Riri seems to be expressing frustration at the students for not being 'empowered,' her frustration is likely compounded by the heavy workload she faces and lack of time required to guide students to the resources which will provide the answers they seek. John, an academic advisor, asserts, "You know, because each advisor cares about them. We have 500, 600, or 700 students on each case load, so there needs to be some type of support to be able to be effective."

With a few exceptions, academic advisors speak passionately in focus groups and interviews about their work to support the success of students. Advisors speak directly to the resiliency of students at UCC. According to the data, instances when advisors fail to provide students with sufficient guidance is not due to a lack of care, but rather, a lack of capacity due to high workloads.

From the data analysis, it emerged that when meeting with an advisor, UCC students—especially new and uncertain students—first expect advisors to invite them to ask their questions, explain their needs, and express their struggles and/or confusion. Students, if unfamiliar with a task or advising support, then expect advisors to guide them through the task. Mary provides a powerful example of the support advisors can provide

students when they have the time to listen and guide students through their concerns. She describes:

I remember when he came in, I waved at him, and I first asked him...I was having a deadline that was almost due. And, I remember the first time I just mentioned it to him. I told him at first...I thanked him for coming to my rescue, because I was having a deadline, and I was like, "Oh, thank you for coming to my help. So, one question, I feel like I have a very big concern, and I hope by the end of this conversation you will help me." He said, "I'm all ears, and that is the reason why we are here, so you just explain the concerns, and I'll try my level best to help you. And, in case I am not able, I will refer you to the person who is able to help you." So that gave me a foundation for me to express my concerns, and he was able to walk me through. In fact, he calmed me down because I was trying to hear. So, he calmed me down, and he walked me through everything, and eventually everything sorted out.

The data suggests that students can gain a sense of empowerment when they are heard and guided by advisors. After meeting with her advisor, Mary was 'calmed down' and believes everything is 'sorted out.' Coming from a place of desperation to a state of calmness and belief that all will be okay provides Mary with a newfound confidence. The data suggests students gain a sense of empowerment when they become more confident and proficient in utilizing student services supports. Furthermore, the data reveals students reached a degree of empowerment when they were able to reach out to advisors to confirm their decisions rather than connect with advisors due to being unaware of the options available to them. Certainly, not all student participants expressed this sense of

empowerment over their academic pathways. Students who did express a degree of empowerment, however, at least partly contributed the sense of empowerment to the guidance provided by academic advisors. Another student, Jackie, received in-depth guidance from her advisor on planning her transfer to her chosen four-year institution. In the following quote, Jackie explains the empowerment academic advising can provide students. She asserts:

I'm sure there are students who don't know what they want to do, and in that case, I'm sure an advisor can, and should, take a bigger role in shaping their path so that maybe further down the line, whether it's further down the line in their educational career or even professional career, they can start to take over and shape the rest of that.

UCC student participants in this study assert that academic advisors who listen can guide. And, advisors who guide can empower.

Academic advisor participants also express that their role as advisors is to listen, guide, and empower. Phil details his views on academic advising which empowers students in the following quote:

Well, I'll tell you, the students enjoy receiving proactive information. They enjoy having somebody give them more than they really hoped for, more than they expect. I think it's inherent with serving community college students. They come in with sort of minimal expectations. They have very little awareness about terminology, and processes, and procedures. I enjoy providing an abundance of information, and equipping them with tools they can use after the advising session

so it really makes things easier. I've never had a student complain about receiving too much information or too much assistance. In fact, they really appreciate that! Maxwell uses various advising tools such as time-management worksheets and the online degree planner to guide his advisees. In our interview, he described an innovative strategy he uses to guide and empower students when indecisive about choosing their major. Maxwell explains:

[I have a coin]. I don't know, it's like a peso or something. It's like somebody had dropped a coin from another country in my office on the floor, so I saved it, and I go, "Look, I'm going to flip a coin. You want to flip a coin and choose a major?" And they'll go, "Yeah!" And I go, "Okay," and I say, "I'm going to flip this coin. Heads, it's Sociology, tails, it's English, and I'm going to flip it. And they go, "Okay." "Okay, before I flip it," I go, "what do you want it to land on"? And then half of them will go like, "I want tails." "Okay, well, I don't need to flip it anymore. You just chose your major."

Despite a commitment to advising to empower students, academic advisors too often are not afforded the time necessary to guide students in need.

There are numerous instances in the data where students express they felt rushed when meeting with an academic advisor. Logan asserts, "It's like every time you go in and talk to her, she acts like she's kind of, I don't know, irritated that you're there in the first place." Likewise, Angela says:

Any time I speak to an advisor, which has only been twice, well twice this semester, I'm always hoping that they're in a good mood, and they're not overwhelmed with work, and they're just trying to get you in and out real quick.



In the following quote, Veronica describes the anxiety she feels when meeting with an authority figure. She explains:

When I'm talking to my advisor, I really get frustrated because I'm kind of like...I went last year, but still, just dealing with people that have got a little power over me, makes me nervous. So, it's hard for me to try and explain and break things down to them. So, when I'm trying to talk to her, it was really like she was trying to just rush me just to get rid of me. Just, "Well, just do this, and do this." I'm like, "Do what?"

Students sense when academic advisors are overwhelmed with work and lack the appropriate time required to provide them with sufficient advising. UCC should reduce advisor workload if the institution is to provide strategic and personalized advising to students.

### **Overcoming the Challenge: Reduce Academic Advisor Workloads**

The first measure UCC should take to overcome the challenge of overwhelming workloads is self-explanatory—hire more academic advisors. However, UCC will not be able to hire its way out of this problem. For one, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UCC instituted a hiring freeze in large part due to the loss in tuition revenues brought on by the pandemic (Yuen, 2020). Furthermore, state appropriations to community colleges across the nation are in decline (Dowd et al., 2020). Simply put, UCC currently lacks the funding required for a large-scale hiring campaign of academic advisors. The data suggests that beyond a hiring campaign, UCC should invest in the retention of academic advisors. Furthermore, the additional responsibility of providing advising to walk-in students contributes to advisors' unmanageable work load. In many cases, students who

seek advising without an appointment are not the assigned advisees of the advisors with whom they are meeting. UCC should, therefore, systematize procedures for meeting the responsibility of advising walk-in students to create a more manageable advising load for academic advisors.

### ***Invest in the Retention of Academic Advisors***

Barbara, a student services leader, reports, “The pay scale associated with [the academic advisor] job description is not very competitive,” and goes on to say, “There [is] a huge turnover in the actual advisors themselves.” Compensation could certainly be a factor related to the high turnover of academic advisors at UCC. However, the data reveals other factors—which are possibly more significant than compensation—related to turnover of academic advisors that UCC is likely in a better position to address than paying advisors higher salaries/wages. Addressing other factors impacting turnover is especially important when UCC will need to designate additional finances to the hiring and compensation of more academic advisors when the institution is financially in a position to hire a considerable number of advisors.

Academic advisor participants expressed low morale amongst advisors across the UCC system. Participants state a lack of recognition for their work and expertise as partly to blame for the low morale. In the following exchange during a focus group with academic advisors, Julie and Eric speak directly to what they view as a lack of respect from the administration:

Julie: The advisor staff at HCC is the largest group of educated employees here. I think they are only outdone by faculty, as far as staff. You know, we have Master’s degrees. All of us have at least a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree.

Eric: But we're not treated as educated professionals! We're treated like a group of children: "We can't trust them to stay in the office on Fridays."

This exchange reveals two ways in which advisors feel unrecognized and disrespected. Firstly, advisors feel as though their education and expertise is not recognized. In a separate focus group, Christina reflects this view stating:

I'm only here to help you! I want to see the success of the school! I want to see the success of our students! .... And, I'm just trying to help with the experience that I have! I don't want fifteen years to go to waste! Because, I have that, and I want everybody to be successful!

Secondly, advisors feel they are not recognized as professionals due to restrictive oversight of their workdays. They perceive this micromanaging as the administration distrusting in the professionalism of academic advisors to meet their work responsibilities. Edward reiterates, "We don't get treated as professionals, we get treated as blue collars."

Academic advisors report that administrators are quick to blame advising when recruitment numbers are not met or students are dissatisfied with received advising supports. Emily asserts:

Well I think there's an in-equitability with regard to who's responsible for what when something goes wrong. And its Student's Services, Advising, Admissions, sometimes Financial Aid, testing, we get sort of swooped into this, "Oh, enrollment is low because customer service is poor at Student Services," and it's like, "Okay, yeah, sure, it's our fault!" But rather than constantly pointing the

blame at Student Services, I think we need a fair administrator at the top that can see that it's not just Advising or Student Services.

On the other hand, advisors state that recognition for their efforts and successes is hard to come by. Julie expresses advisors' desire for recognition in the following quote:

An acknowledgement for the achievement this department has done and helped somewhat! I mean having that as an administrator can help with the morale. When you know something is new, and you know you have to do it, for whatever reason, because they push it on your team to do it! Okay, well kind of make it easier for us! Make it easier for us to accept it, but it has to happen now.

Ashley asserts:

I think you should always, in my opinion, start from the bottom and work your way up. Because since we're in the first line of defense with the students, if we're happy, and everything is going good in our lives, we're happy, like financially, socially, whatever, then that will display when you meet a student.

Hiring additional advisors to reduce caseload will be for naught if low morale of advisors is not addressed. It is, therefore, important for UCC to prioritize boosting the morale of academic advisors to improve retention of academic advisors and reduce their work load.

### ***Systematize Procedures for Walk-In Advising***

Academic advisor participants recognize the need to provide walk-in advising opportunities for students due to the accessibility and convenience walk-in advising affords. Emily states:

We have twenty-five campuses all over the city, and students can choose any one of those to take classes. They want to get their services the same way: "I want to

go see this advisor when I'm here, and I want to see her when I'm over there," or,

"I only want to see her, and I don't ever want to see him."

Advisors, furthermore, take pride in their willingness to support students via walk-in advising. José explains:

I'll see anybody. If I can help you out, I will help you out....I see anybody; a walk-in, an appointment. If I can help you, if I have knowledge, then I can assist you.

Nonetheless, without procedures put in place to delegate responsibilities for academic advising, advisors can be overwhelmed by the additional advising load, which can impact their ability to provide advising to assigned advisees. José explains how walk-in advising sessions can impact academic advisors' ability to meet with assigned advisees who have appointments in the following quote. He states:

If they don't have appointments, it is okay. We tend to see them. But, we encourage them to do an appointment because basically we're trying to follow protocol, and we don't want to overwhelm the campus [that has] appointments.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UCC implemented the ability to advise students via virtual videoconferencing software. Students are now able to access face-to-face advising via a virtual lobby. When students join the virtual lobby, they are connected with an academic advisor sometimes within a few minutes. While virtual advising via videoconferencing has greatly increased students' access to advisors, this increase in accessibility has also significantly increased advising workloads. José describes:

I just feel like I was in training, honestly. We were in ZOOM and I was seeing...I think one day I saw like 25 students. It was back to back. You know, that doesn't

seem like a lot, but if you're doing a 30 minute session with this one, and then you don't even get a break, you do another session a minute after, I feel like it was boot camp. Whenever we were in quarantine it was just a lot of advising, and in person I feel way better and I feel way more equipped.

In the following quote, September's experience with advising via videoconference reflects that of José. She says:

We already have a case load, but we had a lot more students coming in as walk-ins from various campuses through our inbox and our ZOOM. So they figured out which inbox to go to, and that gave us a whole lot more work than normal.

The data from academic advisors clearly show that academic advisors struggle to handle appointment-based advising with assigned advisees as well as walk-in advising—both in-person and virtually.

UCC can address the impact walk-in advising has on academic advisor's workload in the following ways. Schedule days and/or times when academic advisors are responsible for meeting the needs of students seeking advising without an appointment. A schedule for walk-in advising will allow advisors to dedicate days and/or times during the week solely to advising their advisees whether through appointments or proactively reaching out to students to offer advising supports. Furthermore, advisors should be scheduled to either serve walk-in students in-person or via the virtual lobby. Academic advisors should not be expected to meet the needs of walk-in students both in-person and virtually. Furthermore, it would likely be prudent for UCC to designate a team of academic advisors as solely servicing the advising needs of students who seek advising through the virtual lobby. Additionally, UCC should implement a virtual alert system

which notifies students' assigned advisors that the student has sought walk-in advising—either in-person or virtually—and provide brief details on the nature of the advising session. This will allow the assigned advisor to proactively reach out to the student if additional guidance is required.

### **Challenge: Emphasis on Top-Down Leadership**

According to student services leaders and academic advisors, prior redesigns to academic advising at UCC emphasized a top-down leadership approach to implementing change. The data suggests that emphasizing a top-down leadership approach has been a significant barrier to implementing lasting system-wide change to advising across the UCC system. Namely, the high turnover of student services administrators has resulted in stalled, or incomplete, redesign efforts leaving piecemeal changes to academic advising structures and practices rather than a cohesive redesign. Furthermore, previous redesign efforts have lacked communication and cooperation amongst silos as well as a lack of academic advisor involvement.

### ***High Turnover of Student Services Administrators***

Administrators and advisors name administrative turnover as a significant barrier to academic advising redesign at the UCC system. Due to a top-down leadership approach, past redesign efforts were not followed through to completion when a leaving administrator spearheading a redesign would be replaced with a new administrator pursuing their own efforts to implement changes to advising. Barbara asserts:

As soon as we have a turnover in leadership and we think we have that one that is on the path to make some good things happen here, all of a sudden they get a job at [another community college nearby], and they're making twice as much as they

were making at UCC, and so they're gone!....But yes, we've seen just within the recent past, and even since I've been [at my current location], which has only been about four years, we have had one, two, three Vice-Chancellors! Three within that timeframe, which never gave anybody enough time to assess and develop a strategy, or implement a strategy, that would bring some clarity there for the advisors.

Implementation of redesign to academic advising across the UCC system is certain to span a period of several years. We see from Barbara's quote that there could be little progress made to substantially improve academic advising efforts with a turnover of three Vice Chancellors within a four-year period, especially when there is not a shared effort across stakeholders to see the redesign through to fruition.

According to the data, the impact of administrator turnover resulted in confusion and inconsistent practices. We see from Barbara's quote that with such high turnover in a short time span, advisors are left without 'clarity.' In interviews and focus groups, academic advisors frequently referred to confusion caused by a lack of sustained leadership. One academic advisor, Thomas, states:

It seems like we are changing administrators every other year, and they are implementing new systems and practices, and new ideas. But, they're not getting rid of the old one, so they're just adding, adding, and adding with each new administrator that comes on, or whoever comes up with a new idea. And so, we are doing fifteen different things, and a lot of it is not streamlining the process for the students, either.



The data suggests that advisors are navigating a system of academic advising which lacks clearly defined and consistent advising practices, which advisors largely contribute to a patchwork of practices left behind by administrative turnover.

***Inconsistent Channels of communication and Cooperation amongst Silos***

The data from academic advisors and administrators suggests previous top-down approaches to leading academic advising redesigns at UCC did not fully realize clear channels of communication and cooperation across established silos at the institution. Academic advising involves within and cross-functional cooperation (e.g., career counsellors working with academic advisors and faculty working with academic advisors). The data suggest that silos within student services and cross-functional silos (e.g., instruction and advising) have been barriers to implementing transformational, system-wide changes to academic advising. Breaking down silos and establishing clear channels of communication and collaboration at a community college system as large as UCC is an incredibly complex endeavor. It is important to note that UCC has prioritized breaking down silos and improving communication across the system. Part of Barbara's administrative role was to bring silos together to collaborate on initiatives of which both functions were stakeholders. Barbara explains:

I was sort of there to combine or to serve as the bridge between student services and instruction, because those two groups were working in isolation as opposed to in tandem with each other. So, my job was to bring cross-functional teams together to have them work on strategies together as opposed to in isolation, because many times they were doing something and the other party didn't have a clue about what they were doing.

Barbara continues to assert, “If you are an institution that is considering making a change, that if you don’t have collaborative conversations across functionality, it causes a barrier when it comes down to implementing anything.”

Academic advisors also confirm that lack of cooperation amongst silos has been detrimental to implementing coherent and consistent academic advising practices.

Christina asserts:

I also think that other departments need to be connected together too, because it’s almost like all these silos, and nobody really knows what’s going on. And then, you know, it definitely lacks consistency. Once again, we need standard operating procedures on new things that are coming aboard. And I was in a previous department, but this seems like the same thing. You have this new thing that you want to put together, but when you’re putting together a new operation or new system you have to make sure that you include the IT Department. Can that be completed before you say, “Okay, let’s implement this.” The IT needs to definitely be a part of the process, because if not you’re just half way implementing it, and then the staff will run into these issues.

We can infer from Christina’s quote that there have been instances when previous changes to academic advising structures and/or practices were not a well-planned, collaborative effort across functions resulting in partial implementation and confusion amongst academic advisors.

Additionally, interviews with administrators reveal that changes to student services have generally come from the district level with little input from the campuses.

Kristen admits:

Not to totally air our dirty laundry, but if you know how we're organizationally set up, where we've got some district folks at student services, and then student services reports on the campuses up through a president, so sometimes the campus level folks butt heads with the district level folks.

Meanwhile, academic advisors reveal their frustration that changes in policy and/or practice are not directly communicated to them. According to data from academic advisors, past top-down leadership efforts to enact changes in academic advising could have been more intentional to include the input of advisors.

### ***Insufficient Academic Advisor Involvement***

Aside from students, academic advisors are the stakeholders most impacted by changes to academic advising structures and practices at the community college. The data show, albeit, top-down leadership approaches at UCC could have been more intentional to involve academic advisors in change efforts to advising. Coupled with the lack of top-down communication reaching advisors, it is clear that not involving advisors in change efforts has been a challenge when it comes to implementing cohesive, lasting changes to academic advising.

Advisors possess valuable insights into what systems and practices are not working, how to use current systems and practices to their full potential, and what tools or resources they lack. For instance, some advisor participants clearly understand the valuable impact UCC's early alert system can serve in supporting students who show signs of struggling. Nevertheless, during focus groups and interviews, academic advisors were adamant that early alerts were not being used in a way in which utilized the

system's full potential to support students. Riri provides us with a quote exemplifying the intended purpose of an early alert system. She explains:

We get early alerts too, which the teachers are supposed to contact them, and after three times then they hand it over to us. And basically, what I do when I'm doing that is email them and tell them that, "I got the alert, and you haven't done this, per your teacher. What you now need to do is contact that teacher, find out what you can do to make up your work. Here is the tutoring link." I put in also, now, [a link to] the counselors because it is a stressful time. And then, I follow up with an email that says, "Hopefully, you contacted your teacher and caught up with your work. The teacher and the tutors can help you from failing this class, and if you need to talk to me my information is in there." I try to reach out to them, but we really can't force these students to go to class, no more than the teacher can. But if you just are basic with them and tell them, "Hey, you're going to end up failing this class. Get some help, and here's some help, some links, and some information."

Michael provides a succinct description on how early alerts can effectively support students. He states:

I mean it's better to have [early alerts] than to not have it at all, because there are a lot of students that have been helped by early alerts, especially if they don't know where tutoring is, or if they don't know where the library is, or something like that.

On the other hand, Carlos states how early alerts are not being employed to best support students. He argues:

There are some of the early alerts that some of us, as advisors, believe that it is classroom management; things that the instructor can control. We don't know why they are sending all this bunch of early alerts to advisors to do it. And as advisors, when we go to our supervisors, they just don't give us any response as to why these instructors are sending things that they can control within their classrooms.

Academic advisors—along with faculty—would provide beneficial input on defining best practices for early alerts; therefore, a leadership effort to improve early alerts would be most effective if the effort included advisors as partners in the effort.

Furthermore, veteran advisors can draw from past experiences to inform change efforts on what has, or has not, worked in the past. According to academic advisors, UCC transitioned from a proactive advising approach to a case management approach in the last few years. Academic advisors employed at UCC during the time of proactive advising, express a desire to return to the approach as they found it better served students in large part due to both students and advisors being held accountable for seeking, and providing, academic advising, respectively. Darrell asserts:

[Meeting with an advisor] used to be mandatory.... But now, we went from one motive of advising into another one, to case management. So, now people come in and may or may not have an advisor assigned, or even though the advisor is assigned, they may not know who their advisor is, because they haven't looked on their page!

Academic advisors, especially in the first year of data collection, discussed a preference for a proactive approach over the current case management approach to

academic advising. As we see from Darrell's quote, however, advisors appear to not have a clear understanding of case management's purpose and what it entails. Darrell attributes students not being assigned an advisor to a case management approach. Case management, albeit, is meant to bring together services which are historically fragmented at the community college (e.g., career services, financial aid, and counselling) to support students. The academic advisor within case management is the central figure who coordinates with various areas of student services to support students according to students' needs (Hamilton, 2008; McClenney & Waiwaiiole, 2005). Case management is considered a proactive model of academic advising.

It appears in early focus groups that academic advisors attribute various challenges to academic advising to case management. This suggests a lack of understanding of case management and the reasons behind integrating case management into the academic advising system. Intentionally involving academic advisors in change efforts provides an opportunity to open a communication channel, which would not only allow advisors to provide valuable insights based on their expertise and experience, but would also allow a channel for administrators to provide insights into the purpose of intended changes and what those changes entail.

Involving advisors would allow Darrell to recommend advising be compulsory for students and explain how students are not accountable for advising under the current system. UCC could learn from Darrell's insights then decide whether to make appropriate changes to practices. While at the same time, administrators would have the opportunity to provide Darrell with insights into why UCC is integrating case management and clarify what constitutes advising within a case management model. Advisors with

experience can provide insights into the benefits and drawbacks to current advising practices. At the same time, academic advisors may not have the full picture of the current advising system. If a channel of communication is established and advisors are involved in change efforts, administrators will have the opportunity to address any misconceptions with changes being implemented.

### **Overcoming the Challenge: Move beyond Leaders and Silos**

As I discussed in the previous section, administrators and academic advisors expressed that a top-down leadership approach to relatively recent advising redesign efforts could have been more intentional to bring within function and cross-functional stakeholders together. Furthermore, advisors express change efforts could do more to involve academic advisors. The data also show that when the change initiatives stemmed primarily from top leadership, the departure of the championing leader(s) stymied change efforts leaving only vestiges of change. To overcome these challenges—or byproducts of previous top-down leadership efforts to advising redesign—future UCC transformational change efforts should move beyond leaders and silos.

When I say move beyond leaders, it is not my intention to suggest transformational changes should be carried out sans leadership. Rather, leadership efforts to affect deep change should be cross-hierarchical championed by leadership at the district level to the boots-on-the-ground advising at the campus level. On the lack of follow through on previous change efforts, Kristen says:

One of the things is I feel like the changes we make are grounded in good research and philosophy, but we don't stick with them long enough to measure the success of them. And, so I feel like you do your due diligence, you make a

decision on the model, and the research should tell us about how many years we need to be doing something before we'll start seeing some results.

An advisor participant, John, echoes Kristen's perspectives. He asserts:

I think the consistency has been a very, very important factor in us advising and being effective because we have different regimes come in, with different philosophies, different perspectives, then before you know it, they have transitioned out, and we've got this new person that is in with new perspectives and philosophies, so they can put on a stamp with their name. Then, they transition out!

Acknowledging stakeholders at various hierarchical levels as leaders in change efforts can mitigate the departure of an administrator when all involved champion and passionately pursue the realization of the intended change.

Effective systems of academic advising involve community college personnel across student services, instruction, and IT. Leadership efforts for academic advising redesign should, therefore, intentionally involve individuals across each function. Leadership efforts should break down silos if the changes are to be successfully implemented and persist. We see from Barbara's and Christina's quotes in the previous section that both administrator and advisor participants recognize the importance of breaking down silos and name the lack of cross-functional cooperation as barriers to implementing successful change in advising.

### **Challenge: Inconsistent Academic Advising Processes and Attitudes**

The data suggest the advising structures at UCC generally align with a SSIP academic advising model. For instance, all students are assigned an academic advisor,



which promotes sustained, strategic, intrusive, and personal advising. Required orientations and student success courses are conducive to strategic and integrated academic advising. Online degree planners which map out a student's academic pathway at the college is an example of an advising support that meets all four dimensions of SSIP. As an advising support, the early alert system also aligns with all four dimensions of the SSIP model. The recent addition of academic advising via videoconferencing provides students with personalized access to academic advisors promoting sustained advising through increased access.

While the data show there are structures, processes and attitudes (e.g., assigned advising, proactively contacting students in need, and a commitment to supporting a diverse student body) which align with a SSIP model, the data is also clear that there are processes and attitudes within advising that do not align with the model. Furthermore, with the various directions advising has taken at UCC during recent years, structures and processes have been implemented inconsistently. Academic advisor and student data, additionally, suggest advising processes are poorly defined. Processes which have not been well defined can contribute to confusion amongst advisors and students.

### ***Inconsistent and Undefined Processes***

I discussed the lack of a structured process for walk-in advising above. Another structure in which the processes within seem to be undefined is assignment of students to advisors. The data shows that students are assigned to advisors according to students' major or program of study. Both academic advisors and students are unclear on how and when this process occurs. Speaking to how students are assigned an academic advisor, Michael admits:

Honestly, I don't even think the college has figured out how that works. I mean some students, they're the brand-new students, they get assigned advisors. Some students have been here for two semesters and they still don't have one. We have absolutely no idea how that works!

According to Kristen, assigning students to advisors depends on the students' program of study, and although she advocated for assignment of students to advisors beginning with orientation, others involved with the decision "decided it was too problematic . . . so, after classes started, caseloads [are] assigned." The data collected does not reveal how students are assigned to advisors relative to the campuses in which they attend classes or whether class location is a consideration, except for specialized programs offered only at specific campuses. The data does suggest both advisors and students are unaware of precisely how the process works.

Students can learn who their assigned advisor is by visiting their online student portal. Many student participants were aware they were assigned an advisor and knew who that advisors is, and had sought academic advising from their assigned advisor. Several students, however, reported they were unaware of who their assigned advisor is or were unaware they had an advisor assigned to them. For example, Noelle believed advisors were assigned depending on who she met with during her first walk-in visit with advising. She explains, "When you go in the first time, it's kind of like a lottery thing. You go in, you sign in, and then you get whoever is first available, which is what led me to the first advisor." Noelle states, that after meeting with an advisor during a walk-in session "they are assigned to [students] at that point."

UCC's interactive advising report and online degree planner are important tools for advisors and academic advising supports for students. However, according to academic advisors it is relatively common for the course/requirement information located within the planner to be out-of-date. Academic advisors admit this can cause issues if a student self-advises via the online planner without confirming with an advisor or consulting the course handbook. Carlos says:

We try to encourage students, when you are a new student, or you plan to change your major, let us know! We're going . . . to make sure the IAAR is correct. We have the IAAR, Interactive Academic Advising Report. Sometimes it does not match the degree plan that's online for students to see!

Not having timely processes to update advising information online diminishes UCC's capacity to provide students' sustained and integrated advising supports.

The early alert system is certainly the most controversial academic advising structure according to the data. Students spoke appreciatively about early alerts. Marcus explains how he was contacted by his advisor when he was struggling with a course due to the early alert system. He says:

Whenever I had an issue with the class or a course, [my advisor] sent me an email, because she already knows that I have an issue . . . so she is already sending me an email . . . . If there is something, she is the first one to email me.

As we see in the quotes from advisors in the previous section, it is clear that advisors view how early alerts are currently implemented as creating burdensome, unnecessary tasks for the advisor. Advisors assert the majority of early alerts they receive from faculty

pertain to classroom management issues or a matter faculty could easily assist the student with themselves. Brad asserts:

I do like the idea of having to have multiple staff members to be able to be proactive and reaching out to the student. Yes, I agree, to a certain extent. But, the line of communication first-hand should be from the instructor, especially if it's coming from attendance issues, not submitting assignments, or not logging into their campus. That's an instructor classroom management perspective—not an advisor.

As I previously stated, advisors appreciate the intended purpose of early alerts; albeit, they do not believe early alerts are being employed as intended.

Academic advisors and students discussed the benefits of the required student success course. Advisors expressed that the student success course is an important means to integrate academic advising into the students' campus experience. However, according to academic advisors, after transitioning from a proactive approach to a case management model of advising, advisors feel the student success course does less to integrate academic advising. Denise explains:

But, the advising sessions were linked to the Learning Framework class. You know, that freshman level class coming in to teach you how to be successful in college? They also made that an assignment. If they didn't [meet] with us, they got a hold on their record. And then, that means they couldn't register for the next semester, or it even held up their financial aid! So they had to come in to see us.

As I discussed earlier, case management may not be to blame for decreased involvement of academic advisors in student success courses. Nevertheless, the data suggest advisor

involvement in student success courses decreased; moreover, academic advisors are unsure why the practice changed and are frustrated with a perceived lack of accountability for students when it comes to meeting with academic advisors.

### ***Inconsistent Attitudes toward Students***

The academic advisor participants often expressed admiration for UCC students. Academic advisors recognized the challenges many UCC students face on the path to achieving their academic and professional goals. Advisors especially recognized the resiliency first generation students and working students raising families must possess to reach their goals at UCC. However, seemingly due to frustration over their overwhelming workloads, advisors also revealed they at times view students without a defined plan or sufficient knowledge on navigating higher education within a deficit lens. Furthermore, academic advisors often expressed distrust of students.

“They’re not in high school anymore,” was a phrase which arose during focus groups with advisors. “I don’t baby them,” is another phrase used. Advisors used these phrases to refer to students who they viewed as not having autonomy over their education. Academic advisors state their intent is to empower students to take charge of their education. For instance, Riri says, “They’re young adults, because they need to realize you’ve got to grow up! This is college; this not grade school or high school.” Riri’s intention is to empower her advisees. However, this deficit language suggests inconsistency with strategically providing additional, in-depth guidance to students who are struggling. This language suggests the advisor views this student as immature and uncaring rather than a student who is maturing and struggling to learn how to navigate the very complex landscape of the community college.

Academic advisors also assert students tend to be dishonest for a variety of reasons. According to advisors, one way students are dishonest is a practice advisors refer to as ‘advisor shopping.’ Advisors contend students will go from advisor to advisor until they find an advisor who will provide students with what they want (e.g., recommendation to enroll in a course). Advisors warn the practice leads to inconsistent information which can result in enrollment errors. Advisors insist students engaging in ‘advisor shopping’ will then blame advisors for any resulting enrollment errors. Academic advisors are correct that visiting multiple advisors can lead to confusion resulting in mistakes. The data collected from advisors suggests students do engage in ‘advisor shopping’ behavior. Student data, however, suggest students visit multiple advisors not to go over the heads of other advisors, but generally because the students had a bad experience with a previous advisor or purely due to convenience. Noelle states:

I think with the advisor that I have, I noticed two different experiences. I was able to work with another advisor that I talked to for one visit, and I wasn’t quite happy, because it wasn’t really motivating me. But when I went for the second time around, I talked to another one—she was a lady—and she helped me right off the bat. I gave her what I wanted to major in, she put a plan together, and she seemed very understanding as far as my outside school life. And she’s been very upfront about what she thinks I’d be able to handle. So, overall, I think my experience has been great, which is why I take her advice into consideration.

While students engage in ‘advisor shopping’ according to academic advisors, in interviews and focus groups, no students discussed engaging in ‘advisor shopping’ as

academic advisors described the practice. The data from students suggests a more nuanced picture of why students may meet with multiple advisors.

### **Overcoming the Challenge: Enact Change to Align Academic Advising Processes and Attitudes with the SSIP Model**

The academic advising structures within UCC generally align with a SSIP model of academic advising. However, the data indicates areas where processes and attitudes do not align. Below, I discuss measures UCC can take to bring the processes and attitudes into alignment.

The current structure for walk-in and appointment-based advising allows for sustained advising but hinders advisors' ability to provide strategic, intrusive, and personalized advising to their advisees who may require additional supports. As I previously stated, advisors' walk-in responsibilities should be scheduled; moreover, the schedule must provide advisors with ample time to devote advising efforts towards their students who require proactive supports and for those who schedule advising sessions. Additionally, there is no system-wide, defined process to schedule academic advising appointments. UCC should work with academic advising and IT to develop an online system where students can view the availability of appointments and select an appointment which best suits their schedules. To promote sustained and personalized advising, an inter-advisor alert system should be developed and implemented where academic advisors can communicate, or alert, walk-in students' assigned advisor on details of a walk-in advising session. The assigned advisor can then be proactive in following up on a student's walk-in meeting if the advisor feels the details of the session deserve such an action.

A SSIP model requires academic advising to be proactive. There should not be a UCC student who is unaware of the advisor to whom they are assigned, where the advisor is located, or how to contact the academic advisor. UCC students are able to see who their assigned advisor is by visiting their online student portal. In general, the data shows student participants in this study were aware their assigned academic advisor was listed in their student portal. Albeit, some participants were unaware who their assigned advisor is or how to locate that information. Academic advisors should be required to proactively contact their advisees—as soon as they are assigned—through a mass email and/or text message which feels personalized. This first communication should introduce the advisor, detail best practices for communication and scheduling appointments, and invite the students to schedule their first academic advising session.

Online degree planners and online advising reports are of minimal use to students and academic advisors if the information is out-of-date. Moving forward, instruction, IT, and academic advisors should collaborate to create a process in which to communicate changes to degree requirements and update department/program websites, the online planner, and the online academic advising report in a timely manner. An advisor should not learn from a student that their financial aid was turned down or that they were enrolled in a course which does not meet degree/program requirements. Providing students with an online planner is best practice. It is, therefore, essential to ensure online planners are up-to-date.

An early alert system provides strategic, proactive, and sustained academic advising to students in most need of advising supports. The data reveal a disconnect between academic advisors and faculty on the appropriate, or intended, use of early



alerts. Faculty and advisors should collaborate to develop best practices for employing early alerts. It will be important to define the role of faculty in conjunction with the role of academic advisors within the early alert system. For instance, should faculty first attempt to address the issue with a student before sending the early alert to academic advisors? Or, perhaps faculty may want to address issues negatively impacting the student's academic performance in the class (e.g., poor attendance, lack of participation, and poor performance on exams) before initiating an early alert. While for issues which are not directly related to the course (e.g., financial and health concerns), faculty may be responsible for sending early alerts without first addressing the issue to quickly connect the student with trained personnel. It will also be important to define the academic advisor's role when an early alert is received. For instance, will the advisor be responsible only for guiding students to the resources which will support students in overcoming their issue? Or, will academic advisors also be expected to serve as mediators between students and faculty? If expected to mediate between faculty and students, extra care in communication will be required to avoid causing offense. Also, what will the advisor's role be in following up with a student and support providers? These are just a few examples of important questions which will need to be answered to define the roles of those involved in the early alert system. Once best roles and best practices are defined, all faculty and academic advisors should be trained on the use of the early alert system.

Student success courses provide students with strategic and integrated academic advising supports. However, the data shows that academic advisors believe the courses could be more proactive in ensuring students interact with academic advising supports—

specifically, meeting with academic advisors. Academic advisors should work with faculty of student success courses to create a process for academic advisor involvement in the course. In the following quote, Darrell explains his involvement in student success courses during the time of intrusive advising at UCC. He describes:

When we had the EDUC Intrusive Advising initially, I started out, I'd go in the class, because we had to go into the classroom and do a presentation, right? And then, okay, you had a list of when can .... "You know you need to meet with me, so let's do a calendar and you put your name on when you can come see me."

They didn't show! .... Luckily, the instructor would work with me, and we would go in, because he had to do a planner. And so I had developed a planner for each and every one of those students, and then took it in to him, and then they had to input it into the system .... But it was a lot of work on me.

Darrell visited the class to present and sign the students up for advising appointments. When students did not show, Darrell and the instructor collaborated on how they could effectively provide students with proactive advising in the class. This is a powerful example of how instruction and academic advising can collaborate to develop effective academic advising practices that align with a SSIP model of advising.

The negative attitudes advisors expressed towards students seemed to be more out of frustration with workload than truly viewing students through a deficit lens. Therefore, changes should be made which provide advisors with the sufficient time required to provide quality academic advising to students. Certainly, implementing culturally responsive trainings for advisors on a regular basis should be required. Additionally, seminars and/or retreats where advisors come together to learn from one another would

be ideal. Academic advisors at UCC express a lack of trust for the administration, while also expressing their desire for their expertise to be valued and shared. Therefore, it may be counterproductive for all professional development to be conducted by district-level administrators or outside experts. For instance, veteran advisors could lead seminars on how to best guide undecided students or first generation students. Advisors could come together to educate one another on best practices within the various academic advising structures at UCC or to reflect on any issues within structures or practices.

### **Take a Shared Leadership Approach to Enact Second-Order Change to Academic Advising**

Academic advising stakeholders at UCC should take a shared leadership approach to redesign academic advising and implement a SSIP model of advising. According to the data, second order changes must be made to academic advising processes and attitudes in order to effectuate a SSIP model of advising across the UCC system. Second order—or deep level—changes take a significant amount of time and effort to implement.

Academic advising stakeholders involved in the shared leadership team will need to work to, not only identify the needed changes and make those changes, but convince other stakeholders across the system to understand the benefits of the changes made and believe in them. In recent years, a top-down approach has not been able to sustain the momentum required to significantly redesign academic advising. Embracing shared leadership may better support institutional efforts to enact the second-order changes required to redesign academic advising to a SSIP model of advising. The data suggests UCC has passionate academic advisors who desire to share their expertise and realize the value of cross-functional and cross-hierarchical collaboration. As Christina declares, “I’m

only here to help you! I want to see the success of the school! I want to see the success of our students!”

It is evident in the data that first order changes are necessary for the implementation of a SSIP model at UCC. Take, for instance, the need to hire additional academic advisor. A top-down leadership approach is sufficient to direct the college to hire additional advisors. Although, second-order changes will be required to implement an onboarding process for academic advisors which aligns with a SSIP model of advising. As I stated previously, however, UCC will not be able to hire its way out of advisors’ overwhelming workloads. Reducing the work/advising load will require second-order changes such as changing attitudes towards advisors at UCC. Edward, and other academic advisors, feel they are treated as “blue collars.” In other words, advisors do not feel they are viewed as professionals with valuable expertise. That attitude will need to change. Academic advising may not be recognized as a profession according to the sociological literature; however, only once advisors are valued for their professional expertise at UCC, will they be included in decision-making efforts to enact changes to academic advising. A shared leadership approach will include the support and expertise of top-level administrators with the boots-on-the-ground knowledge of academic advising stakeholders and others involved with implementing the processes within the structures put in place.

I previously referred to the following quote from Barbara. I refer to it again as it makes a powerful argument from an administrator for a shared leadership approach. Barbara asserts, “If you are an institution that is considering making a change, that if you don’t have collaborative conversations across functionality, it causes a barrier when it

comes down to implementing anything.” The data identify various stakeholders who should be involved in “collaborative conversations across functionality” to realize the implementation of a SSIP model of advising. However, ‘collaborative conversations’ will not suffice. Second order changes will require ‘collaborative,’ or shared, leadership. Foremost, a shared leadership approach to academic advising redesign will require the support and involvement of district-, or system-level, administration. Because, as Barbara states:

If you don’t have the go-ahead on the approval of your Chancellor, your President, your Provost, or whoever it is that has the last word before you even talk about it, you are not going to get anything passed. You’ll be fighting an uphill battle. So, it is best to get the buy-in of your leadership.

Specifically, shared leadership will require the involvement of chancellors and/or presidents and student services leaders at the system level as well as presidents and student services leaders at the campus level.

The data suggest previous academic advising change efforts lacked intentional cooperation between the district and campuses as well as amongst functionalities. A shared leadership approach, therefore, should intentionally include stakeholders at the campuses and outside of the student services—and advising—functionalities to underline their importance to actualizing the redesign. Garnering such buy in requires a deep change in attitudes pertaining to individuals’ roles within the UCC system. Moreover, since past efforts at improving academic advising efforts did not intentionally involve—at least according to the data—shared leadership, involving stakeholders from campuses as well as across functionalities should improve the likelihood that stakeholders believe

in the implemented changes and will follow through on efforts to fully integrate changes to academic advising.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

Community colleges across the nation are prioritizing the success of their students through the implementation of success initiatives such as guided pathways (Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2018). Instrumental to the success of completion initiatives, and to the success of students, is quality academic advising (Bahr, 2008; Barr & Castleman, 2017; CCCSE, 2018). Therefore, to support success initiatives, community colleges are also engaging in academic advising reform to implement academic advising which centers student success, especially for students who require the most support (Donaldson et al., 2020; Karp et al., 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013a). This study sought to identify ways in which a large, urban community college system (i.e., UCC) that is transitioning its curriculum to a guided pathways model could overcome current challenges within its academic advising system to redesign that system and transition to a SSIP model of academic advising aimed at improving student success. This qualitative case study conducted interviews and focus groups with 78 students, 33 academic advisors, and two student services administrators. The data analysis involved the constant comparative method of naturalistic inquiry to identify key themes.

The findings suggest that UCC has the structures in place to transition to a SSIP model of academic advising. These structures include a guided pathways curriculum, assigned academic advising, advisor involvement in student orientation, a required student success course, an early alert system, and virtual advising supports. However, the findings show there are significant challenges within academic advising processes and attitudes which should be overcome to successfully redesign academic advising. The key

challenges to overcome are overwhelming academic advisor workloads, an emphasis on top-down leadership, and inconsistent academic advising processes and attitudes. The data also reveals that academic advising stakeholders should reduce advisor workloads, move beyond top-down leadership and silos, and enact change to align academic advising processes and attitudes to support a transition to a SSIP model of advising. Finally, to take these measures to redesign academic advising, the data reveals UCC should implement a shared leadership approach to transition to a SSIP model of advising.

In this section, I situate this study's findings within implications for institutional policy and practice. Furthermore, as a SSIP model of advising aims to support and improve students' opportunities to achieve their academic goals, I discuss these findings within the context of student success. I first examine the findings as they relate to the frameworks which guide this study: a SSIP model of advising (Karp et al., 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013a) and Kezar's (2014) theory for organizational change. Next, I describe the current change efforts occurring at UCC which are not captured in the findings. I then discuss implications for academic advising redesign at community colleges which seek to transition to an enhanced approach to academic advising. I conclude with recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study.

### **Transitioning to a SSIP Model of Academic Advising at the Community College**

I employed the SSIP model of academic advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013a) as a guide to examine how UCC could reform its system of academic advising to better support its students to achieving their academic and workforce goals. A SSIP model of academic advising details four dimensions necessary for providing academic advising supports to community college students. A SSIP approach states academic advising at



community colleges should be 1) sustained, 2) structured, 3) intrusive and integrated, and 4) personalized. I discuss each dimension below in relation to this study's findings.

### ***Sustained Academic Advising***

Empirical studies provide evidence that sustained academic advising is positively related to student success metrics (Barr & Castleman, 2017; Hatch & Garcia, 2017).

Administrators, academic advisors, and students at UCC understand the importance of sustained academic advising across students' time at the community college. UCC assigns students to academic advisors, integrates academic advising into new-student orientations, provides virtual academic advising supports (e.g., online degree planner), requires completion of a student success course, employs an early alert system, and provides various efficient and convenient means for students to meet with an academic advisor. New students to UCC will engage with some form of academic advising support. Furthermore, all students at UCC will be able to engage with academic advising supports during any point of their time at UCC as long as they are provided the knowledge of how to access those supports.

Findings suggest, that although UCC provides students with sustained academic advising supports, the college does have some challenges to overcome in order to improve sustainability. Bringing advisors workloads and caseloads to a manageable level should be a priority. This dissertation recognizes, however, that UCC likely does not have the financial resources which would permit a hiring campaign of academic advisors. Nevertheless, at advisors' current caseloads, they may not have the capacity to provide students, especially undecided and first-generation students, with the in-depth guidance

they require. UCC could, therefore, address advisor turnover by taking measures to improve advisor morale. I address these potential measures further below.

Secondly, defining a process for in-person and walk-in academic advising which implements inter-advisor alerts can improve sustained advising efforts by creating capacity for advisors to focus on sustained advising of their advisees while maintaining students' accessibility to academic advisors without an appointment. An inter-advisor alert system which alerts an advisor that their advisee sought advising with another advisor and informs the advisor on the content of the advising session would promote consistency in sustained advising. Lastly, UCC should work to ensure virtual advising supports such as the personalized, online degree planner and interactive advising report are up-to-date. If information on the virtual systems is inconsistent with current program requirements—as is sometimes the case at UCC—the virtual supports could hinder a student's progress. Karp and Stacey (2013a) assert, "Information about program requirements, course requirements, transfer requirements for target institutions, and employment options should be clear, accessible, and consistent" (p. 4).

### ***Strategic Academic Advising***

The participants in this study recognize the incredible diversity of the UCC student body. The diversity of the UCC student body, as well as its employees, is an institutional strength. It is also apparent to participants that UCC serves a great number of first-generation students, students who may not be college-ready, and working students—many of whom are raising families. Administrators, academic advisors, and students, therefore, recognize the need for UCC to strategically focus advising supports on those students most in need. Furthermore, strategic advising is especially important at

community colleges which are doing their best to support students with increasingly limited resources (Dowd et al., 2020; Karp & Stacey, 2013a; Yuen, 2020).

Academic advisor involvement at new-student orientation, required student success courses, and the early alert system are all systems which strategically deploy advising supports to students. However, to fully realize a SSIP model of academic advising at UCC, improvements should be made to these systems. The process to identify students who are undecided on their academic pathway could be further defined and integrated as part of the orientation process. If not already required, undecided students should meet with an academic advisor and take a career assessment as part of the degree/program planning during orientation.

Student success courses are shown to benefit students' early credit momentum and persistence while providing students additional opportunities to engage in career and degree planning (Karp & Stacey, 2013c). Academic advising could collaborate more closely with faculty teaching student success courses to improve the curriculum regarding academic advising and other student supports. Furthermore, academic advisors and faculty could schedule a recurring class visit from an academic advisor each semester.

Importantly, academic advising and instruction at UCC must cooperate to define a process for the early alert system, which would include establishing clearly defined roles for faculty and advisors (Tampke, 2013). Karp and Stacey (2013a) write, "Technology can be leveraged to help colleges achieve a more sustained distribution of services. For example, colleges can provide enhanced advising for struggling students based on early-warning systems" (p. 6). The early alert system at UCC is a powerful tool that can be

leveraged to strategically provide advising supports to students most in need (Finney et al., 2017; Tampke, 2013; Waddington, 2019).

### ***Intrusive and Integrated Academic Advising***

UCC has intrusive and integrated structures of advising in place (e.g., the early alert system and student success course). However, as the findings suggest, academic advising stakeholders should work to clearly define the process involved and ensure those involved in carrying out the processes (e.g., academic advisors and faculty) are adequately trained. Again, the early alert system is an important proactive advising structure at UCC in which the process could be better defined and implemented. Additionally, the findings reveal not all students have the knowledge of academic advising supports required to most effectively utilize those supports. UCC could enhance the integration of advising supports by further defining the involvement of academic advisors in student success courses, working to further integrate career services into academic advising supports, and making the institutional website and student portal easier to navigate (Karp & Stacey, 2013a; 2013c). The integration of career counselling and academic advising could be more intentional by requiring undecided students to complete a career assessment, creating a process whereby academic advisors introduce—rather than direct—students to career services, and standardizing first-time advising sessions with new students to begin with career goals before transitioning to academic planning (Karp & Stacey, 2013a).

### ***Personalized Academic Advising***

UCC's virtual degree planner and advising reports are excellent personalized advising supports. As previously stated, UCC should refine the process to keep these

virtual supports current and consistent with program requirements. According to the data, academic advisors seek to provide students with academic advising personalized for the students' needs. Academic advisors also admit there are circumstances when advisors find they are unable to provide students with the adequate, in-depth advising they may require due to heavy workloads. Hiring additional academic advisors, focusing on improving advisor retention, and developing procedures for walk-in and virtual advising can potentially reduce advisor workloads increasing the likelihood advisors are able to provide a deeper level of guidance when advising students in need.

### **A Shared Leadership Approach to Academic Advising Redesign at the Community College**

I situated this study within Kezar's (2014) theory for organizational change to examine the ways in which community college leadership would be most effective at implementing transformational change to UCC's academic advising system. Kezar (2014) asserts higher education institutions must understand the types of changes required before change can be implemented. Institutions must analyze the content, scope, levels, focus, and forces and sources of change, as well as the context for change, before leading a change initiative. Once the content and context of the changes are known, community colleges can then utilize the appropriate leadership type to effect the change. In the following paragraphs, I discuss type of changes required to transition academic advising at UCC to a SSIP model as well as the context for transitioning to a SSIP model of advising. I then discuss the most suitable leadership approach for leading academic advising redesign based on this study's findings.

### ***Type of Change and Context for Change***

The content of the change involved with transitioning to a SSIP model is, of course, academic advising. According to the data, administrators, academic advisors, and students express a desire for changes that improve the effectiveness of the academic advising system in its ability to support student success. Transitioning to a SSIP model of advising will involve both first- and second-order changes. For instance, first-order changes include the hiring of additional academic advisors and requiring career assessments for undecided students. Implementing within- and cross-functional cooperation to bring academic advising processes into alignment with a SSIP model involves second-order changes in which individuals' attitudes and values as well as working culture at UCC will need to be addressed if the changes are to be enacted. Academic advising reform across the UCC system will require change at multiple levels (i.e., the individual, group, and organization). As the findings suggest, the academic advising structures at UCC generally align with a SSIP model; therefore, changes to the processes and attitudes associated with academic will need to occur in order for redesign efforts to succeed.

The sources for the change are both internal and external. As success initiatives are prioritized at community colleges across the nation, institutions, community college organizations, and scholars push for academic advising approaches that prioritize the success of students (Bailey, et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2018; Karp et al., 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013a; 2013b). Participants in this study also desire change to current academic advising supports suggesting there is an internal source for change at UCC. The context for change involves sociopolitical and economic factors aimed at holding community

colleges accountable for student success (Dowd et al., 2020; McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017; Ocean et al., 2020). Moreover, higher education as an institution is now prioritizing student success more than ever and recognizes the value of improving academic advising systems to better support student success (Bailey et al., 2015; CCA, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2018). Importantly, UCC is highly dedicated to improving its academic advising system to better support the needs of its incredibly diverse student body.

### ***Shared Leadership to Realize Academic Advising Redesign***

Kezar (2014) defines shared leadership as “includ[ing] change agents working together who span those in positions of authority and those who are not. Shared leadership has clear value for those in positions of authority” (p. 123). Kezar continues, “The value of shared leadership for those in positions of authority is that there is greater legitimacy and credibility for their change efforts than when they operate in a unilateral, top-down manner” (p. 123). Academic advisors and administrators admit there is a sense of distrust for district-level leadership. Advisors express in focus groups and interviews that previous changes implemented from district to the campuses lacked legitimacy. Therefore, a shared leadership team spearheading academic advising redesign at UCC is more likely to enact second-order changes that persist than previous top-down efforts. Kezar (2014) asserts that in order for shared leadership to be effective, individuals involved must be provided with necessary information and resources to lead, must be willing to develop, and learn from, one another, and there must be systems of accountability in place to ensure work is completed. Furthermore, since shared leadership is a team effort consisting of individuals across functions and hierarchies, the leadership effort is more likely to persist when turnover of administrators occurs.

### **UCC's Current Academic Advising Reform Efforts**

As previously stated, UCC is currently in the second year of its partnership with EAA. During this partnership, UCC made significant strides in reforming its academic advising system to align with an enhanced approach to academic advising. These efforts and successes are not necessarily exemplified in this dissertation's findings as data collection ended at the beginning of UCC's partnership with EAA. As we will see, however, change efforts made by UCC in the first and second years of the reform do, in part, align with this study's findings. Understanding what UCC's advising reform journey has entailed up to this point can provide community colleges considering a similar path with valuable insights.

The EAA academic advising reform process involves three phases: 1) analyze and plan, 2) implement and assess, and 3) analyze and refine (NACADA, 2021a). During the first phase, UCC involved academic advising stakeholders including administrators, faculty, staff, and students in organizational learning to examine its academic advising system. UCC purposefully requested this study collect data from academic advisors and students which would provide the participants' perspectives on, and experiences with, the academic advising system in order to assist the analyses during phase one. UCC situated this organizational learning within NACADA's Nine Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising (NACADA, 2021a). The Nine Conditions of Excellence are as follows: 1) commitment, 2) learning, 3) equity, inclusion, and diversity, 4) advisor selection and development, 5) improvement and the scholarship of advising, 6) collaboration and communication, 7) organization, 8) student purpose and pathways, and



9) technology enabled advising (NACADA, 2021b). UCC utilized the findings from these analyses to construct recommended change efforts to improve its advising system.

UCC is now in the second phase of its partnership with EAA and is in the process of implementing and assessing the recommended changes identified in phase one. Importantly, the college is in the process of implementing a proactive communication system where academic advisors can introduce themselves to assigned advisees, provide time-sensitive reminders to students, and share other important information. In order to improve the process of ensuring program requirements are displayed correctly on students' online planners, UCC is providing professional development to academic advisors on how to correctly utilize the software to confirm requirements on a student's planner are up-to-date. UCC is also taking steps to recognize the efforts and achievements of its academic advisors by implementing a survey system where students can provide valuable feedback on the academic advising services received. Recognizing there are differences in needs and service provision at its many campuses, the campuses of UCC are creating systems of walk-in advising which specify advisors' responsibilities. Furthermore, UCC is working to improve the relationship between district leadership and the colleges/campuses. A potentially important step towards improving the district-campus relationship is the establishment of a system of shared leadership. UCC is in the process of building a shared leadership team inclusive of administration, faculty, staff, and students. UCC will continue to implement change efforts to improve its academic advising system in phase two and will continue to systematically refine advising structures and processes throughout phase three.

## **Implications for Academic Advising Reform at Community Colleges**

Enacting change across a large organization is an incredibly complex task.

Community colleges planning to engage in transitioning their academic advising systems to an enhanced academic advising approach (e.g., the SSIP model), will need to employ innovative leadership strategies to make lasting first- and second-order changes to academic advising systems (Karp et al., 2016; Kezar, 2014; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Mayer et al., 2019; Miller, Cohen, et al., 2020). Kezar and Holcombe (2017) assert:

Campus leaders face the challenge of implementing more changes than ever, in a shifting social, political, and economic landscape, shaped by complexity. Shared approaches to leadership that capitalize on the broader knowledge of the institution and foster learning are needed moving forward. (p. 2)

However, shared leadership at the community college is no easy feat. Shared leadership requires individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole to reconsider the concept of leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Slantcheva-Durst, 2014). Slantcheva-Durst (2014) conducted a case study examining the development of a shared leadership model at a community college over a period of several months. From the study's findings, the author provides several recommendations for implementing shared leadership at community colleges. Slantcheva-Durst (2014) found top-level administrators must be committed to transitioning to a shared leadership model. With commitment from top-level leadership, shared leadership begins with the purposeful construction of teams which ensures teams are inclusive of stakeholders across the institution. Additionally, teams must be intentional to create environments which are conducive to collaboration as well as individual and organizational learning. Lastly, Slantcheva-Durst (2014) recommends:

Throughout the process, development teams need to create institutional decision-making bodies that reflect the shared leadership vision. The creation of such bodies institutionalizes ideas into sustainable practices, but it also helps solidify and deepen the cooperative spirit of the educational community as a whole. (p. 1028)

Although a challenging endeavor, this dissertation recommends community colleges implement shared leadership to engage in academic redesign to implement enhanced academic advising.

The enhanced academic advising literature recommends community colleges hire additional academic advisors to reduce caseloads. The literature argues reducing caseloads provides advisors with the necessary capacity to proactively and sustainably advise students who require the most advising supports (Johns et al., 2017; Mayer et al., 2019; Vasquez & Scrivener, 2020). The findings of this study also suggest it would be beneficial for academic advising redesign efforts if community colleges hired sufficient advisors to bring advising caseloads at the institution down to a manageable level. However, the fact remains that the majority of community colleges will not have the financial resources required to sustain a hiring campaign, providing onboarding to new-hire academic advisors, pay the additional salaries, and provide continuous professional development (Dowd, 2020; Ocean et al., 2020; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Yuen, 2020).

If community colleges are unable to hire additional advisors to reduce caseloads, it is essential community colleges make efforts to retain quality academic advisors. According to the sociological literature, the occupation of academic advisor has not yet reached the status of a profession (McGill, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2010; Wilensky, 1964).

Although not technically considered professionals, community colleges should recognize and treat academic advisors as such. Findings from this study suggest academic advisors who feel they are not treated as professionals or recognized for their expertise can harbor resentment and distrust for leadership. Additionally, research shows that academic advisors do not view academic advising as a viable career path (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015).

Community colleges should define career paths for academic advisors in order to promote retention of quality academic advisors. For instance, colleges could create separate career paths for current academic advisors as well as future new-hire academic advisors. Pellegrino et al. (2015) describe how one state university developed separate career paths for its academic advisors to promote retention and professional development. The university created a 'sole contributor' path for advisors who desire to grow professionally but want to continue advising students as their primary responsibility. The 'mentor supervisor' track, on the other hand, was developed for those advisors who wished to continue advising students but who desired to grow into a leadership role. Defining career paths for academic advisors recognizes advisors' education, experience, and professional expertise. Additionally, creating a career path for advisors who desire to grow into a leadership role provides colleges with candidates suited for shared leadership efforts to identify and enact potential changes to academic advising structures, processes, and attitudes (Pellegrino et al., 2015).

In order to enact the second-order changes required of academic advising reform, colleges will need advisors to believe in and support the reform efforts (Kezar, 2014). Furthermore, academic advisors in this study asserted that if the administration did more

to recognize them for their expertise and successes, job morale would increase. Thus this study recommends the inclusion of academic advisors in shared leadership roles to provide legitimacy to the redesign efforts as well as to harness the academic advisors' expertise and intimate institutional knowledge.

Karp et al. (2016) found that only three out of six colleges engaging in an academic advising redesign effort to integrate enhanced advising technologies made substantial progress in implementing the technologies within a two-year period. The authors found a lack of innovative leadership and a lack of intentional vision for what constitutes successful integration as contributors to the colleges' failure to implement the technologies. The findings resulting from this study's analysis of UCC data reiterate the need for innovative leadership that work together to implement deep changes to structures, processes, and attitudes over a period of several years. This study also confirms that virtual technologies associated with an EAP can be powerful tools which support students' success. Albeit, community colleges must also address the digital divide ensuring historically minoritized and marginalized students have access to virtual advising supports integrated into an EAP (Hu, 2020). A community college cannot, furthermore, expect the integration of academic advising supports to be a solution to problems within the academic advising system, nor can the implementation of technologies be considered a redesign in itself (Thomas & McFarlane, 2018). This study finds that colleges must build a culture that supports the integration of technologies, values collaboration, and values organizational learning to develop effective processes for employing enhanced advising technologies.

Enhanced academic advising recognizes that struggling students can require a mix of prescriptive and developmental advising strategies (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Donaldson et al., 2016; Earl, 1988). As the findings from this study show, professional development for academic advising within an EAP should accompany redesign efforts. In particular, academic advisors should engage in training on best practices for advising undecided and struggling students. Undecided and struggling participants in this study expressed desire for advising where academic advisors listen to guide, and guide to empower. In this approach, advisors learn about the student's circumstances before providing a more prescriptive advising. As advising with the student continues, the approach becomes more developmental in order to empower the student to take more autonomy over their educational decisions. Regarding the professional development of advisors, community colleges should utilize their academic advisors professional expertise inviting effective, veteran academic advisors to lead workshops and seminars.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study's findings raise several questions for further research on enhanced advising reform efforts at community colleges. It is necessary to better understand an EAP's impact on community college student persistence, retention, transfer, and completion rates at institutions that have fully implemented an EAP. Therefore, quantitative analyses on the impact an EAP has on these student success metrics should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of EAP at the institutional level. Furthermore, a longitudinal mixed methods analysis exploring the impacts an EAP has at the institutional level could provide insight into students' and advisors' perceptions and

experiences with an EAP throughout its implementation as well as how enhanced advising impacts students' utilization of academic advising supports.

Findings from this study suggest a shared leadership approach should be taken to enact academic advising reform across the community college system. This study, however, does not provide evidence that a shared leadership approach to reform has been effective. Future research on leadership efforts at the community college to redesign academic advising should examine the effectiveness of a shared leadership approach.

System-wide redesign of a community college's academic advising system will have a significant economic impact on the institution. Community colleges across the nation struggle to operate with limited resources. As academic advising reform requires the expenditure of substantial resources, implementation of an EAP must make economic sense to community colleges. Future research should, therefore, examine the economic impacts academic advising reform has on the institution as well as the economic impacts of an EAP once fully implemented.

## **Conclusion**

As community colleges continue to prioritize student completion efforts with the implementation of student success initiatives such as guided pathways, it will be necessary for colleges to redesign their systems of academic advising to align with success initiatives if colleges are to provide the most effective academic advising supports to students. While studies are limited, the academic advising literature suggests enhanced academic advising aligns with a guided pathways model and shows promise in its ability to positively impact student success (Barr & Castleman, 2017; Bettinger & Baker, 2011; Karp & Stacey, 2013a). Albeit, transitioning to an EAP is no simple task.

Redesigning the academic advising system at the community college will need innovative leadership over a period of years to fully realize the first- and second-order changes required to integrate the structures, processes, and attitudes necessary for enhanced academic advising.

Scott-Clayton (2011b) says, “For many students at community colleges, finding a path to degree completion is the equivalent of navigating a river on a dark night” (p. 1). With a greater diversity of students than ever before enrolling at community colleges, it is crucial that community colleges’ academic advising systems be agile in supporting students with diverse needs. As one of the largest and most diverse community college systems in the U. S., UCC is well-positioned to guide thousands of students each semester along this ‘dark river.’ The purpose of an EAP is to illuminate students’ pathways and to support them on their collegiate journeys. However, in order to most effectively support students on their journeys, colleges must ensure to foster the appropriate structures, processes, and attitudes for effective enhanced academic advising. Through the voices of student services leaders, academic advisors, and students, this study provides insight into the challenges community colleges may face when transitioning to an EAP and suggests how colleges may work to overcome these challenges. This study, therefore, may serve as a resource for community college administrators considering academic advising reform at their institutions.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Student Cross-Sectional Interview Protocols**

#### **Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 Cross-Sectional Interview Protocol (Students).**

1. Can you think of five words to describe yourself? OR  
How does your typical day start and end during your school year as a HCC student?
2. When deciding on how many credit hours to register for each semester, what are the key factors that you consider?
3. In New Student Orientation, you saw a video about completing an associate's in two years. Do you remember the name of the program? [Wait for the answer. If not remembering, tell them, 15 to Finish]. Did that have an impact on you making decisions about your credit hours?
4. What do you see as the benefits of enrolling in more credit hours each semester?
5. What do you see as potential challenges or difficulties you may experience when you take more credit hours/classes this semester?
6. How many classes were you initially planning to enroll in this semester? How many did you end up enrolling in?
7. About this 15 to Finish Program, have you seen any promotional materials about it? Any thoughts on how it's being advertised to the students?
8. What do you think will motivate people to enroll in \_\_\_\_ hours? [Wait for some quick responses and then mention the following.] For example, what about,
  - a. A digital badge that recognizes your academic success/course completion?
  - b. A textbook scholarship?
  - c. Banded tuition (if it costs the same to enroll in 15 hours as it did for 12 hours)?

- d. (Ask another related Q about what they discussed with academic advisor about credit load?)--- What do you discuss usually with your academic advisor about credit load or course selection?
9. Anything else you'd like to tell us about your enrollment experiences or credit load?

**Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 Cross-Sectional Interview Protocol (Students).**

1. Can you think of five words to describe yourself? OR  
How does your typical day start and end during your school year as a HCC student?
2. When deciding on how many credit hours to register for each semester, what are the key factors that you consider?
3. How many classes were you initially planning to enroll in this semester? How many did you end up enrolling in?
4. Can you walk me through the steps you take to register for courses each semester? What information and resources do you use during the course registration period? [Then can prompt students about the following:]
  - a. What role does academic advising play in your registration process?
  - b. What online tools/resources (Eagle Planner, HCC website) do you use?  
What did you think about these resources [only if need prompting] helpful, not helpful?
5. What are your expectations for how academic advising will help you?
6. What do you see as the benefits of enrolling in more credit hours each semester?
7. What do you see as potential challenges or difficulties you may experience when you take more credit hours/classes this semester?
8. Do you typically (non covid times) take all your courses face-to-face, online, or take a combination of face-to-face and online courses? [Wait for answer and if they mention online move to the next part] What factors do you take in to consideration when choosing online courses in a semester?
9. Have you ever dropped a course or considered dropping a course? [Wait for answer and if yes ]
  - a. What were the key factors they led you to drop (or consider dropping) the course?

- b. How did dropping the course impact your academic plan or progress? Or “You dropping a course, how did it work in your academic plan or progress?”

10. How has the Covid situation (e.g., working from home, classes online, childcare) shaped your enrollment decisions or your academic progress at HCC?

11. Anything else you’d like to tell us about your enrollment experiences or credit load?

## **Appendix B**

### **Student Focus Group Interview Protocols**

#### **Spring 2019 Focus Group Interview Protocol (Students).**

1. When deciding on how many credit hours to register for each semester, what are the key factors that you consider?
2. When registering for courses, what role does academic advising play?
3. What resources or online tools do you use for course registration?
  - a. Did you find any specific ones helpful? [I don't think both a & b are needed. Depending on the flow, we can choose one.]
  - b. Is there anything from the online advising that you like to continue after COVID (or after we go back to face to face)? Like specific online tools or ways of communicating with your advisor or instructors?
4. So how many courses are you currently taking? [This is not necessary but might be useful as a transition.] What do you see as the benefits of enrolling in more credit hours each semester?
5. What are the challenges or difficulties with taking many [if they are already taking many, if not, you can use "more"] credit hours/classes this semester?
6. If HCC is trying to encourage students to take more credit hours, such as 12 or 15, do you think that will work? And what would be a good way to promote it?
7. What are the things that work well in the ['specific'] Program that you think can be applied to other students at HCC?

#### **Spring 2021 Focus Group Interview Protocol (Students).**

1. When deciding on how many credit hours to register for each semester, what are the key factors that you consider?
2. When registering for courses, what role does academic advising play?

3. What resources or online tools do you use for course registration?
  - a. Did you find any specific ones helpful? [I don't think both a & b are needed. Depending on the flow, we can choose one.]
  - b. Is there anything from the online advising that you like to continue after COVID (or after we go back to face to face)? Like specific online tools or ways of communicating with your advisor or instructors?
4. So how many courses are you currently taking? [This is not necessary but might be useful as a transition.] What do you see as the benefits of enrolling in more credit hours each semester?
5. What are the challenges or difficulties with taking many [if they are already taking many, if not, you can use "more"] credit hours/classes this semester?
6. If HCC is trying to encourage students to take more credit hours, such as 12 or 15, do you think that will work? And what would be a good way to promote it?
7. What are the things that work well in the ['specific'] Program that you think can be applied to other students at HCC?

## Appendix C

### Student Longitudinal Interview Protocols

#### Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 Longitudinal Interview Protocol (Students)

#### (For Students who DID re-enroll in Fall 2019/2020/Spring 2021)

<b>Topic Domains (The topic areas to be covered by the interviews)</b>
• Student's individual goals, contexts, values, condition
• Students' awareness (and opinions) about course load
• Students' reasons behind their choices about increasing credit load
• Students' perception and understanding about the role of advising

1. Did you take any classes this summer? Are you enrolled this semester? (If so....)
  - a. What classes did you enroll in this summer?
  - b. What classes are you enrolled in this semester (or how many courses?)
  
2. When deciding on how many classes/credit hours to register for this summer and this semester, what are the key factors that you considered?
  
3. Did you talk to your advisor about your courseload?
  - a. [If Yes] What things did you discuss in terms of your courseload? (What factors...)
  - b. [If No] Can you share why you did not talk with your advisor about that? Is there anyone else at HCC that you talk to about your courseload?
  
4. Thinking back to last semester, you said you took XXX (the specific number) courses---how did you feel about the load?--(possible prompts below)
  - a. If you could do it again, would you take more or fewer? Why?
  - a. Did any of your experiences from last semester influence your decisions this semester?
  
5. For you personally, what do you see as the benefits of enrolling in more credit hours each semester? [After the initial response]
  - If someone takes 2 courses per term (Fall, Spring, Summer), it would take over 3 years to earn an Associate degree. What do you think about that?

6. What do you see as potential challenges or difficulties you may experience when you take more credit hours/classes this semester?
7. How many classes were you initially planning to enroll in this semester? How many did you end up enrolling in?
8. What does an academic advisor really need to know or understand about your academic or personal circumstances as they help you make decisions about your course schedule?
9. In our interviews from last year, some students mentioned public recognition—like names on the wall—for people who attempted and successfully completed 15 credit hours can be a motivator. What do you think? [Wait for the answer]
  - a. How about gift card incentives like a gas card, movie tickets, or tickets to sporting events?
  - b. How about paying the same amount for 5 classes as you would for 4 classes? (banded tuition)
  - c. Can you think of other motivators that might encourage students to attempt more courses each term?
10. Anything else you'd like to tell us about your enrollment experiences or credit load?

**(For Students who did NOT re-enroll in Fall 2019/2020/Spring 2021)**

1. What are you doing now?
2. Are you currently enrolled in college anywhere?
  - a. If transferred, then ask.....
    - i. What college are you currently attending?
    - ii. Are you in school full-time or part-time?
    - iii. What influenced your decision to transfer?
    - iv. Thinking about your time at HCC—Branch back to #4.



- b. If they did not transfer, then ask...
    - i. Do you intend to re-enroll at HCC in the future?
    - ii. Or another college or university?
- 3. Why did you decide not to enroll this semester? (or drop out of school)
  - a. What kinds of supports would have helped you?
  - b. How was your course load? Do you think you took the right courses for you? The right number of courses?
- 4. How did your experiences in the classroom influence your decision?
- 5. How did factors outside the classroom influence your decision?
- 6. Did you talk to an advisor during the semester? If so, what did you talk about?
- 7. What does an academic advisor really need to know or understand about your academic or personal circumstances as they help you make decisions?
- 8. What would you want HCC to know that would be helpful to you or for other students?

## **Appendix D**

### **Academic Advisor Focus Group Interview Protocols**

#### **Spring 2019 Focus Group Interview Protocol (Advisors).**

1. When you meet with students for the first time, what types of conversations do you initiate?
2. What are your typical interactions with students when you discuss their enrollment?
3. How does this differ between new students and continuing students?
4. Do you have criteria you use when you make recommendations which courses students enroll in, and the number of courses in which students enroll?
5. What tools do you use to help you advise students?
6. New students participate in an online orientation. In that orientation, students get information about course load called 15-to-Finish, which helps them understand the course load they must take if they plan to finish an associates' degree in two years.
7. Have you seen the video and information that is given to students? If yes: What is your opinion about the program? Does it affect your advising?  
If no: (Explain briefly and ask their opinion about recommending additional SCH)
8. Which students do you think could benefit the most from 15 to finish? Who do you think has most to lose?
9. What about part time students? What kind of conversation do you engage in with part-time students about their course load?
10. Do you have any additional thoughts about course loads students carry, or about your role as an advisor in helping them negotiate their course load?

#### **Spring 2020 Focus Group Interview Protocol (Advisors).**

1. When you discuss course registration (or enrollment) with your students, how do you start the conversation and how do the students' respond? What do you see as their major concerns?
2. Do you have criteria you use when you make recommendations on which courses students enroll in, and the total number of courses in which students enroll?

3. When you discuss enrollment choices with students, do you see any difference between full- and part-time students? What kind of conversations do you engage in with part-time students about their course load?
  - a. How about the new students and continuing students?
4. What kinds of tools or resources are available to you when advising your students? Which of these resources have you found to be most effective or useful? Why?
5. If you were an administrator here at HCC, how would you do with a program encouraging students to take one more course? Is there was one thing you want HCC leaders to know about student based upon your advising experience' [Wait for answers]  
[Whatever they mention, be ready to follow up with more questions on that thread]
6. What are some of the most common course enrollment/registration decisions you see students make that can derail their academic performance and progress? [If enough time,] What are the factors that contribute to those students' decisions? [Prompt for distinction between non-academic and academic factors if possible]
7. *[Since this is wordy, separate the question and print it out. Have the advisors read and respond. Ask this question when there's enough time left]  
Research shows that community college students who enroll full-time for even one semester are more likely to persist and graduate/transfer. What are your thoughts about the following strategies that colleges could use to encourage more part-time students to enroll full-time?*
  - a. *15-to-Finish programs that use informational campaigns (and sometimes financial incentives like banded tuition and textbook scholarships) to educate students about the benefits of taking 15 credits each semester (or 12, 12, 6)?*
  - b. *A 'one more course' advising approach that encourages part-time students to consider registering for one additional course (than their normal course load) each semester?*
  - c. *Do you have ideas or suggestions about other institutional strategies that could increase the number of students who increase their semester credit load?*
8. Are there things you want to mention that we haven't asked?

#### **Fall 2020 Focus Group Interview Protocol (Advisors).**

1. When you discuss the course registration (or enrollment) with your students, how do you start the conversation and how do the students' respond? What do you see as their major concerns?

2. Do you have criteria you use when you make recommendations which courses students enroll in, and the total number of courses in which students enroll?
3. When you discuss enrollment choices with students, do you see any differences between full-and part-time students? [If yes] What kind of conversations do you engage in with part-time students about their course load? How about the new students and continuing students?
4. What kinds of tools or resources are available to you when advising your students? [Wait for answer] Which of these resources have you found to be most effective or useful? Why?
5. What are some of the most common course enrollment/registration decisions you see students make that can derail their academic performance and progress? [If enough time,] What are the factors that contribute to those students' decisions, you think? [Prompt for distinction between non-academic and academic factors if possible.]
6. Have you had students come to you about dropping a course? [If yes]. Tell me more about that. [Wait for the answer] In your opinion, how does dropping courses work with /on their academic plan or progress?
7. What conversations do you have with students about taking a course face-to-face versus online? [Wait for answer] For the students who are deciding to take all online classes, what should be the key considerations, in your opinion?
8. If you were an administrator here at HCC, what would you do with a program encouraging students to take one more course each semester? If there was one thing you want HCC leaders to know about students based upon your advising experience, what would it be?
9. Do you have ideas or suggestions about other institutional strategies that could increase the number of students who increase their semester credit load?
10. How has the COVID situation affected advising sessions with students and the types of things you discuss with students? What have been your experiences so far with fully online academic advising?
11. Are there things that you want to mention that we haven't asked?

## Appendix E

### Student Services Leaders Interview Protocol

#### Summer 2020 Interview Protocol (Leaders).

*(Start with short explanation of project; in particular that we've been talking to students and advisors about the decisions students are making about their course loads, and how students decide how many courses to take)*

1. Please start by telling about the roles that you have held in the last few years at HCC.
2. Do you work with students or advisors? If so, how?
3. Based on your experiences, what sources of information do students rely on when deciding which courses to take, and how many courses to take?
  - a. What factors do you think they weigh most heavily? Is there anything that you think students commonly do not consider?
  - b. What are some of the most common course enrollment/registration decisions you see students make that can derail their academic performance and progress?
4. How does the (pull from question 1 or 2) area work with students to help them set their course schedule?
5. What feedback have advisors given you about their experiences working with students? (Follow-up: What kinds of policies or practices would you suggest HCC implement to improve the process)?
6. In 2016 and 2017, HCC created materials based on Complete College America's 15-to-Finish campaign. These materials were integrated into the New Student Orientation online components and included through Spring 2020
  - a. Do you remember this campaign?
 

If Yes: How was this campaign promoted to (faculty/staff/your area)? Were there any changes to policies and/or practices in your area?

If No: summarize that it was an informational video designed to make students aware that, to complete in 2 years, students needed to take 15 credits in Fall and Spring(or 12, 12, 6 over an entire year).
  - b) What types of students (would) benefit most from this type of campaign?

Follow-up: If you were to make recommendations, do you see any difference between the new students and continuing students? What about between full- and part-time students?

[If they say yes to either] What are the differences between these groups of students?

Follow-up: do you have recommendations for (the groups who would not benefit most)?

7. Research shows that community college students who enroll full-time for even one semester are more likely to persist and graduate/transfer. What are your thoughts about the following strategies that colleges could use to encourage more part-time students to enroll full-time?
  - a. 15-to-Finish programs that use informational campaigns (and sometimes financial incentives like banded tuition and textbook scholarships) to educate students about the benefits of taking 15 credits each semester (or 12, 12, 6)?
  - b. A 'one more course' advising approach that encourages part-time students to consider registering for one additional course (than their normal course load) each semester?
  - c. Do you have ideas or suggestions about other institutional strategies that could increase the number of students who increase their semester credit load?
8. Houston Community College is a very large, distributed system. As a leader, we would like your views on how to implement new policies and practices successfully. When there are changes to institutional policies, what factors have led to changes being successful?

Follow-up: When changes have not been successful, what could have changed to have more success?

9. [If there's time] Do you see any differences for students' registering for f-t-f course vs online courses? If so, what are they in your view?
10. Are there things that you want to mention that we haven't asked?

## Appendix F

### List of Pseudonyms Used to Refer to Participants According to Participant Role and by Alphabetical Order

<b>Advisor</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Administrator</b>
Ashley	Angela	Barbara
Brad	Jackie	Kristen
Carlos	Janith	
Christine	Logan	
Darrell	Marcus	
Edward	Mary	
Emily	Noelle	
Eric	Stephanie	
Denise	Victoria	
John		
Julie		
Michael		
Thomas		
Tracy		

## Appendix G

### IRB Approval Letters



DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
Institutional Review Boards

#### APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

August 31, 2018

Lonnie McKinney

[lmckinney@uh.edu](mailto:lmckinney@uh.edu)

Dear Lonnie McKinney:

On August 21, 2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	15 to Finish Programs: Do they Improve Degree Completion and Transfer Rates among Community College Students?
Investigator:	Lonnie McKinney
IRB ID:	STUDY00001145
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Greater Texas Foundation
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response Letter to Requested Modifications, Category: Completed Checklists;</li> <li>• Reference List , Category: Other;</li> <li>• Targeted HCC Student Populations for 15toFinish program, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Recruitment Email - Academic Advisors, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Recruitment Email - Student Participants, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• HRP 503 Template - 15 to Finish project, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Consent Form - Student Participants, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Consent Form - Academic Advisors, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Timeline of Project Research Activities, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Interview Protocol - Academic Advisors, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• Letter of Support from HCC, Category: Letters of Cooperation / Permission;</li> <li>• Grant Proposal Submission, Category: Sponsor Attachment;</li> </ul>
Review Category:	Expedited
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	<a href="#">Alicia Vargas</a>

The IRB approved the study from August 21, 2018 to August 20, 2019, inclusive.

To ensure continuous approval for studies with a review category of "Committee Review" in the above table, you must submit a continuing review with required explanations by the deadline for the July 2019 meeting. These deadlines may be found on the compliance website



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 Institutional Review Boards

(<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/>). You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking "Create Modification/CR."

For expedited and exempt studies, a continuing review should be submitted no later than 30 days prior to study closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted on or before August 20, 2019, approval of this study expires and all research (including but not limited to recruitment, consent, study procedures, and analysis of identifiable data) must stop. If the study expires and you believe the welfare of the subjects to be at risk if research procedures are discontinued, please contact the IRB office immediately.

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab. Attached are stamped approved consent documents. Use copies of these documents to document consent.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

If your study meets the NIH or FDA definitions of clinical trial, or may be published in an ICMJE journal, registration at ClinicalTrials.gov is required. See the [UH ClinicalTrials.gov webpage](#) for guidance and instructions.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office  
 University of Houston, Division of Research  
 713 743 9204  
[cphs@central.uh.edu](mailto:cphs@central.uh.edu)  
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

I, Gerald V. Bourdeau, served as a research assistant on this study.



Hello, Gerald Bourdeau

Dashboard	COI	Facilities	IACUC	IRB
<a href="#">WorkspacesFor IRBSubmission</a>	>	15 to Finish		
<< Return to Workspace	< Prev	2 / 52	Next >	

## Activity Details (Continuing Review CR00002159 review complete: Approved)

System activity logged on parent submission to record when a continuing review is closed.

**Author:** Alicia Vargas (UH Main Campus)

**Logged For (IRB Submission):** 15 to Finish

**Activity Date:** 6/26/2021 1:08 AM

**Form:**

**Documents:**

[<< Return to Workspace](#)



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COI

Facilities

Approved

## STUDY00001145: 15 to Finish

Entered IRB: 7/26/2018 10:31 AM  
 Initial approval: 8/21/2018  
 Initial effective: 8/21/2018  
 Effective: 6/26/2021  
 Approval end: 6/25/2022  
 Last updated: 11/9/2021 1:08 AM

**Principal investigator:** Lonnie McKinney  
**Submission type:** Initial Study  
**Primary contact:** Lonnie McKinney  
**PI proxies:** Mimi Lee

**IRB office:** IRB  
**IRB coordinator:** Alicia Vargas  
**Letter:** [Correspondence for STU](#)  
**Regulatory authority:** Pre-2018 Requirements

## Next Steps

Next Steps

[View Study](#)[Printer Version](#)[View Differences](#)[Create Modification/CR](#)[Report New Information](#)[Assign Primary Contact](#)[Manage Guest List](#)[Add Related Grant](#)[Add Comment](#)

(IRB: STUDY) - Status: Complete



History Funding Contacts Documents Follow-on Submissions Reviews

## Principal Investigator

Name	Financial Interest Review Status	E-mail
Lonnie McKinney	no	lmckinney@uh.edu

## Study Team

Name	Role	Financial Interest Review Status	Involved In Consent	E-mail
Misha Turner	Co-Investigator	no	yes	
Yolanda Barnes	Research Assistant Graduate Student	<a href="#">no</a>	yes	<a href="#">ybarnes@uh.edu</a>
Gerald Bourdeau	Research Assistant Graduate Student	<a href="#">no</a>	yes	<a href="#">gbourdeau@uh.edu</a>
Mimi Lee		no	yes	<a href="#">mlee7@uh.edu</a>
Susan <a href="#">Gall</a>	Co-Investigator	no	yes	
Andrea Burrige		no	yes	<a href="#">andrea.burridge@uh.edu</a>

## Other Study Team Member Information

Document	Description
----------	-------------

## Guests Who Can View This Submission

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Catherine Horn	<a href="#">chorn2@uh.edu</a>	
Penny Maher	<a href="#">pimaher@uh.edu</a>	
<a href="#">Emobasi</a> Chasi	<a href="#">emobasi@uh.edu</a>	



September 15, 2020

Dear Dr. Burrige,

This is to notify you that the approval of your project

**"Evaluating the Impact of 15 to Finish Initiatives on the Outcomes of Community College Students"**

has been extended. The effective dates are now October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021.

All data collection and analysis are subject to the legal and procedural requirements of Houston Community College and other local, state and federal regulations. Approval by the HCC Institutional Review Board does not mean that HCC implicitly or explicitly endorses research projects.

Cordially,

HCC Institutional Review  
Houston Community College

I, Gerald V. Bourdeau, served as a research assistant on this study.