# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING THE REQUIRED PREPARATION EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS TO HELP CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DEVELOP THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC AND FUTURE POTENTIAL

by

Lizzie Toler Branch

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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## Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors needed to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States. The conceptual framework guiding this study is O'Banion's conceptual framework on academic advising as it relates to the preparation experiences of Christian High School Academic Advisors. The design is a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study that examined the lived experiences and the phenomena involved in Christian high school academic advising. The sample and setting included participants who are Christian high school academic advisors who advise and guide the high school students in their respective Christian high schools in the southeastern United States who are members of and accredited by ACSI. The analysis includes the data derived from individual interviews, journal prompts, and document reviews; all three data analysis methods were merged using a multilayered thematic approach. The data was synthesized and organized, and the following themes and sub-themes evolved: lack of preparation (lack of mentoring, lack of job specific training, and lack of on-the-job training); not enough time in the day for academic advisors to do their jobs well due to other responsibilities (wearing too many hats and responsible for too many things); building relationships with students (time consuming and requires intentionality). Christian high school academic advisors play integral roles in the successful voyages their students embark on during and after high school, but they are limited in their potential due to their educational backgrounds and other non-academic advising responsibilities.


*Keywords*: academic advisors, Christian, high school, students, preparation, relationships

## Copyright Page

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God who has given me a desire to learn and grow, to help others reach their educational goals, and to trust Him as He leads me.

To my nanny, Lora Jane, who had to drop out of school in fourth grade to help raise her siblings. She told me to "go and get as much education as you can get because it is one of the few things in life no one can take away from you." I hope I have made her proud.

To my parents, who taught me to never give up and finish what I started.

To my husband, Anthony Branch, who has always supported my wild and crazy dreams with his time, money, and heart. I'm done, I promise! I love you.

To my children, Callie (18) and Sean (16), who have been my motivation to complete what I started seven years ago when you were 11 and 9. May you also "get as much education as you can" because it is truly one of the few things in life no one can take from you. I love you with all my heart.

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## List of Abbreviations

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Overview

Academic advisors in private Christian high schools play a pivotal role in the lives of their students (Smith & Allen, 2018). The relationship between students and their academic advisors has been researched at the college level extensively, but not at the high school level (Clayton, 2019). To look at the effectiveness of Christian high school academic advisors, this phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of academic advisors in private Christian high schools. Academic advisors, their preparation, and daily shared experiences need to be examined so that the effectiveness of their relationships with their students can reveal the commonalities and differences, thereby giving a voice to those professionals who have chosen to invest their lives in the field of academic advising (Gordon et al., 2000; McGill, 2021). In this chapter, the historical, social, and theoretical contexts are shared, along with the problem, purpose, and significance of the research. Furthermore, the research questions and definitions are highlighted. In examining academic advising in private Christian high schools, the purpose is that the data and information gained build upon the current research involving high school academic advisers and understand how they can help their students achieve their goals in high school and beyond.

## Background

The background and contextual framework for Christian high school academic advising started in 1841 and continues today (Cook, 2009). However, a uniform and consistent definition for academic advising at any academic level does not exist, although there are common themes that connect all academic advisors in their shared aspirations (Larson et al., 2018; McGill, 2021). In other words, academic advisors at all academic levels do many of the same things, but due to

the complexity of our American educational system, it has been difficult to create a conceptual framework that would persist since one size does not fit all (Larson et al., 2018). The following paragraphs explore the historical, social, and theoretical frameworks to reveal why this research study is needed.

**Historical Context**

The field of academic advising was not officially recognized until 1841, when Kenyon College had students partner with a faculty member to help choose their courses (Cook, 2009). In the 1940s and 1950s, college professors doubled as college academic advisors . Then in the latter 1960s, when college enrollment numbers increased enormously, the emerging theories of child development impacted academic advising, as many of the prominent developmental psychologists, including Erickson, Piaget, and others developed their psychosocial theories . As these psychosocial theories and their emerging research began to influence the world of academia, the position of college academic advisor became a new role on many college campuses (Harris, 2009). In the early 1970s, two researchers, Crookston and O'Banion, were developing their research on college academic advising. Crookston (1972) theorized that there were two types of advising: prescriptive and developmental.

In the prescriptive method, the academic advisor was the expert and told the students what to do; in the developmental method, the academic advisor and the students worked together to build a path forward (Crookston, 1972). The O'Banion model of academic advising (1972) became the first conceptual model of academic advising. There were many different dimensions involved in academic advising, including looking at life goals and vocational goals, scheduling, different programs, and course selections. Then in 1979, the founding of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) started the process of academic advising becoming

recognized as a profession (Cook, 2009). In 2008, Gordon et al. wrote *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook,* which has become an extensively used resource at the college level (Larson et al., 2018). However, this handbook does not address high school academic advising; therefore, the need for a research study on high school academic advising, and especially the niche of Christian high school academic advising, is greatly needed to add to the existing research on college academic advising.

**Social Context**

The research on college academic advising is vast. However, the research on high school academic advising is not as far-reaching (Clayton, 2019). Most of the research in the realm of academic advising is related to college advising (Baird, 2020; O'Banion, 2009). Looking at the high school realm using the O'Banion Model of Academic Advising would expand the reach of this conceptual framework to more than the college level and expand the research in this area (Clayton, 2019). Students, teachers, and administrators would all benefit from learning more about academic advising practices in private Christian high schools. Improved and more consistent practices and training in the realm of academic advising can evolve as a result of having a clearly defined definition of academic advising that can be instituted in high schools and colleges across the United States (Larson et al., 2018; Voller et al., 2010).

If academic advisors counsel, teach, and inform, then the more informed all constituents are, the better prepared students are for post-secondary pursuits (Gordon et al., 2008; McGill, 2021). In examining academic advising in private Christian high schools, the goal is that more data and information help academic advisers do what they do better. By being better prepared and improving processes, advisors are proactive in helping their students. Since Christian high school academic advisors partner with their students and better prepare them for their futures,

students, families, teachers, and administrators would all benefit from learning more about academic advising in private Christian high schools. The more informed all constituents are, the better prepared high school students are for postsecondary pursuits beyond their high school careers.

**Theoretical Context**

The only academic advising conceptual framework currently used is O'Banion's (Cook, 2009; O'Banion, 2009). To expand O'Banion's model of academic advising using his five dimensions, one must fully understand each dimension. The first dimension, according to O'Banion, involves helping students identify and name what and how their college choices impact their lifelong goals after college (O'Banion, 1972). To build upon this dimension into the rest of the conceptual framework, academic advisors would then help students look at future career goals, choose their courses and significance, and then, of course, help them schedule their courses. These five dimensions covered in O'Banion's academic advising model do not cover all that academic advisors accomplish for their students (Cook, 2009; Gordon, 2008).

As O'Banion was exploring a conceptual framework of academic advising, another researcher, Crookston (1972), described two different types or perspectives of academic advising: the prescriptive method and the developmental method. The prescriptive method involves an expert, the academic advisor, telling their students what to do, whereas the developmental method is where the academic advisor works alongside each other as partners. However, since O'Banion's model and Crookston's perspectives of academic advising were developed in 1972, researchers have yet to come up with a universal definition of what academic advisors do (policies, procedures, and practices) for their institutions and constituents (Cook, 2009). This has led to ambiguity and confusion regarding academic advising at every academic

level, and this confusion is due to the lack of a universally accepted definition/model of academic advising. Current research reveals a need for not only a universal definition of academic advising, but a conceptual framework that describes what academic advisers do, how they prepare, what credentials they hold, and what certifications they need (Gordon et al., 2008; Larson et al., 2018; Zarges et al., 2018). To begin to understand what academic advising is, more recent research has focused on defining what academic advisers do and how they partner with students (Larson et al., 2018; NACADA, 2006). Students and academic advising professionals need a clearer theoretical framework of what academic advising is and how it impacts the partnership between a student and his or her academic advisor (Young-Jones et al., 2013). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was chartered and officially recognized in 1979 and currently has over 10,000 members worldwide. With so many stakeholders involved in the academic advising process, academic advisors play a crucial role in the education process (Gordon et al., 2008; McGill, 2021). Even with O'Banion and Crookston's seminal research on academic advising in 1972 and current research, more investigation needs to be done to create a working conceptual model or framework, including a definition that is relevant and purposeful in the current educational culture.

## Problem Statement

The problem is that Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses for their students are not adequately prepared to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential. The research on college academic advising is vast; however, the research on high school academic advising, particularly in Christian schools, is not as well-researched (Clayton, 2019; Larson et al., 2018). Most of the academic research on academic advising is relevant to the college landscape (Baird,

2020; Gordon, 2008). Individuals desire to have a deeper understanding of their lives and how they live them including their occupations (Creswell, 2007). By way of a phenomenological study using Christian high school academic advisors as participants, this study reveals themes regarding preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors, including what led them to pursue this field, previous experience and training, educational background, and type of degree. Regarding the practice of academic advising in general, the field of academic advising does not have an applicable conceptual framework, and the practices employed by academic advisors are widely variable (Larson et al., 2018; Robbins, 2012). To further illustrate this concept, academic advisors at all levels do not work from a common theory or framework; therefore, the definition of who academic advisors are and what they do differs from institution to institution at the college level (Larson et al., 2018). If Christian high school academic advisors are not adequately prepared based on a similar conceptual framework, then practically measuring how they advise their students can be difficult at best (Troxel et al., 2021).

The transcendental phenomenological approach utilized in this qualitative study allows themes to emerge surrounding the training and preparation that Christian high school academic advisors have. If advising is completed well and with professionalism, then students have overall improved learning experiences and create a connection between academic advisors and their students that increases engagement and maybe even increase the percentages of high school graduates (Zarges et al., 2018). The importance of strong relationships between students and academic advisors has been highlighted in the research (Lynch & Lungrin, 2018). The importance of this relationship is significant since the research on high school academic advising is limited (Clayton, 2019). Therefore, understanding and examining the training, preparation, and education needed as a Christian high school academic adviser helps lessen the research gap and

enables high school academic advisors to better equip their students for college while also identifying what Christian high school academic advisors do every day and how they prepare for success.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors needed to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States. At this stage in the research, the training and preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors can be generally defined as their previous education, experience, and training; educational background; and degree level and type of degree obtained. The transcendental phenomenological approach utilized in this qualitative study allows pertinent themes to emerge which can then be used to understand how individuals can prepare to become Christian high school academic advisors who can best help and advise their students. Research has revealed that academic advising, when completed well, can help students by increasing engagement in their educational journeys (Zarges et al., 2018). Qualitative data described by Patton (2014) is data that inquires at the deepest level, and it is interconnected between the participants and the researcher (Maxwell, 2012). The participants are able to share their thoughts about what led them to the field of academic advising, educational preparation and experience, and work experience in an indirect and experience-driven way via interview questions and open-ended journal prompts, and themes emerge (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). People want to understand and know more about their jobs and the world around them. Qualitative analysis aids in this deeper understanding of all the things that influence and impact individuals (Creswell, 2007).

## Significance of the Study

### Theoretical

Theoretically, one of the most popular academic conceptual models is the O'Banion Model of Academic Advising (O'Banion, 1972). The following five dimensions are part of this model: (1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocational goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses (O'Banion, 1972). Most of the research in the realm of academic advising is related to college advising (Baird, 2020; O'Banion 2009). Furthermore, Crookston (1972) described two different types or perspectives of academic advising: the prescriptive method or the developmental method. Both researchers, O'Banion and Crookston, focused on the college population. Looking at the high school realm using the O'Banion Model of Academic Advising would expand the reach of these concepts to more than the college level (Clayton, 2019). The information gained from this study can build upon and expand the former research.

### Empirical

Empirically, the impact of academic advising cannot be underestimated (Smith & Allen, 2018). The concept of academic advising is based on what advisors do to help their students reach their future goals, and we must look at the influence and effectiveness of academic advising on their students (Gordon et al., 2000). Research on the topic of defining academic advising closely resembles the concept I am interested in studying empirically (Larson et al., 2018). What do academic advisors do and how do they prepare to do it effectively? In examining academic advising in private Christian high schools, the goal is that more data and information helps academic advisers do what they do better by knowing how to prepare to do the job and improving processes. To my knowledge, there are no studies on the preparation needed to be

Christian high school academic advisors even though many exist for college academic advisors (Gordon et al., 2008; Larson et al., 2018; Zarges et al., 2018). By adding to the scope of research in this area, the research data provides important benefits to Christian high schools and their constituents.

### Practical

Practically, students, teachers, and administrators would all benefit from learning more about academic advising in private Christian high schools. The role of an academic advisor is paramount, and maybe even the most important function in the world of student engagement and affairs (Larson et al., 2018; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). The more informed all constituents are, particularly at the high school level, the better prepared students are for post-secondary pursuits. The knowledge and insight generated from this study is significant to the participants and the population, and the impact of their choices daily. Academic advising, when completed correctly and professionally, according to Zarges (2018) and McGill (2018), can greatly impact students and their academic endeavors in high school, including in their post-secondary pursuits. The importance of academic advisors building relationships with their students cannot be understated (Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; McClellan, 2005; McClellan, 2007; McGill et al., 2020; Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

## Research Questions

In seeking to understand more about the world that Christian high school academic advisors live in each day and how they got there, the central research question looks at the job preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors (Creswell, 2006). Each sub-question analyzes a different aspect of the preparation process, including certifications, on-the-

job training, and educational backgrounds. The central research question and the sub-questions that I plan to use include the following:

**Central Research Question**

What are the job preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses to help their students develop the highest academic and future potential?

**Sub-Question One**

What are the educational experiences, both degree type and level, of Christian high school academic advisors who help students reach their highest academic and future potential?

**Sub-Question Two**

What are the on-the-job training experiences Christian high school academic advisors or certifications required to become a Christian high school academic advisor who helps their students reach their highest academic and future potential?

## Definitions

1. *Academic Advising* – An academic profession at the high school and college level where trained professionals partner with and empower students to navigate the path of current and future educational pursuits successfully (Larson et al., 2018).
2. *Developmental Method of Academic Advising* – A type of academic advising where the academic advisor and students work together as a team to build a path forward (Crookston, 1972).
3. *High School Academic Advisors* – Student advisors who work for high schools in the role of advising students about their goals, courses, and academic endeavors (Larson et al., 2018).

4. *National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)* – Founded in 1979, this professional organization started the process of academic advising becoming recognized as a profession in the world of academia (Cook, 2009).
5. *Prescriptive Method of Academic Advising* – A type of academic advising where the academic advisor is seen as the expert and tells students what to do (Crookston, 1972).

## Summary

Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses for their students are not often adequately trained or prepared to best advise their students. This creates a problem that this research study examines to better help all stakeholders understand the training and preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors to best advise, counsel, and teach their students. Using this phenomenological study with Christian high school academic advisors as participants, themes are revealed regarding the training and preparation for Christian high school academic advisors. These findings include what led the academic advisors to pursue this field, previous experience, educational background, and type of degree. Since an applicable definition of academic advising does not exist, a conceptual framework also does not exist in the field of academic advising (Larson et al., 2018).

By adding to this research, the definition of who academic advisors are and what they do may come into clearer focus. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the training and preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors at private Christian high schools in the southeastern United States. The transcendental phenomenological approach utilized in this qualitative study allows pertinent themes to emerge which can then be used to understand how individuals can prepare to become Christian high school academic

advisors who can best counsel and advise their high school students. As a result of better preparation and understanding, based on a shared conceptual framework of what Christian high school academic advisors do, the relationship between academic advisors and their students can be practical, engaging, effective, and purposeful so that students can reach their educational goals (Zarges, 2018).

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview

The influence of high school academic advising in private Christian schools must be considered, and the effectiveness of academic advising in the lives of high school students needs to be examined (Baird, 2020; Gordon et al., 2000). The most popular academic advising conceptual model is the O'Banion Model of Academic Advising. Most of the research in academic advising is related to college academic advising (Baird, 2020; O'Banion, 2009). This chapter reviews the current academic literature related to academic advising. First, the conceptual framework relevant to high school academic advising is discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature that discusses the influence of high school academic advising (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012). Then, an exploration of existing literature illustrates how academic advisors can better prepare to advise their students. Finally, the need for the current research study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding high school academic advising. College academic advising has been studied extensively, but high school academic advising has not been researched (Baird, 2020; Gordon et al., 2000). In examining academic advising in private Christian high schools, the goal is that the information learned helps Christian high school academic advisors adequately prepare themselves to be able to advise Christian high school students embarking on their post-secondary academic pursuits.

## Conceptual Framework

The O'Banion model of academic advising (1972) became the first workable model or conceptual framework of academic advising. O'Banion would argue that academic advising is the second most important action item on college campuses, directly behind academic instruction and teaching (O'Banion,1972; O'Banion, 2012). These integral practices and functions of the

college experience called *academic advising* should occur each term of every student's college career (O'Banion, 2012). Furthermore, the reason academic advising was regarded as so important to O'Banion is because it helps each student develop his or her highest academic and future potential (1972; 2012). Most research would agree that academic advising is a critical component of the college experience; however, there is general disagreement in these two areas regarding how academic advising should be done and who should do it (O'Banion, 2012). Students need to be aligned with someone or something who can help them achieve their academic goals and give them direction, but the process and who leads them is not clear.

Academic advising, according to the conceptual framework that O'Banion created, is a guided relational process that has several orderly components which include looking at and deciding upon specific life goals, examining career goals, deciding upon an academic program or major, choosing classes specific to the chosen major of study, and then scheduling those classes to meet the requirements for timely degree completion and graduation (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012). The role of an academic advisor would include these practices outlined by O'Banion and others that help the advisor meet the needs of their student population at every level of academia from high school through post graduate work.

Based on research into all levels of academic advising, O'Banion's model (2009) is the only academic advising model or conceptual framework currently being used to advise students. There are other approaches being used which are explored later, but no other conceptual frameworks, models, or theories. To expand O'Banion's model of academic advising using his five dimensions, one must fully understand each dimension and how they build upon each other in a cumulative and meaningful manner. Each step much be completed in an orderly fashion, and the first step sets the stage or anchors the following steps. The first dimension involves helping

students identify and name what and how their specific college choices impact their lifelong goals after graduation from college (O'Banion, 1972). This is the launching pad or starting point in the conceptual model of academic advising, as each student must have a working knowledge of their dreams, pursuits, and aspirations of their post-secondary goals after high school graduation.

To build upon this dimension with the rest of the theoretical dimensions, academic advisors would then help students look at future college, graduate school, career, and vocational goals and how their courses would line up with their goals (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012). As academic advisors help students choose their specific programs, they would also help them understand the significance of taking certain courses that would lead to graduation. Lastly, academic advisors would then help their students schedule the academic courses most relevant to their future graduation and career goals. These five practical dimensions covered in O'Banion's original college academic advising model, unfortunately, do not cover all the facets and nuances of academic advising, the relationships academic advisors represent, and the planning they facilitate for the students within their realm of influence.

Within these five dimensions, O'Banion revealed in his research that effective advisors have a certain number of skills and knowledge, along with the correct attitude to deliver the information needed to their students (2012). Within the first dimension, exploring life goals, O'Banion thought academic advisors needed to have personal knowledge of each student they are working with, along with knowledge of how to make decisions. He also thought they should have backgrounds in helping fields, such as psychology, sociology, or counseling to be most effective. Lastly, he shared that effective academic advisors should be able to see that all students have potential and work. Regarding the second dimension, looking at vocational goals,

effective academic advisors need to have knowledge of the existing career fields and how they are evolving, as well as skills in different types of careers or vocational testing, all while preserving their students' dignity in their choice of future careers.

The third and fourth dimensions of O'Banion's conceptual framework (2012) demonstrate that academic advisors are effective when they have a strong knowledge base in helping their students choose the correct and best fit programs and courses within their chosen career paths. Within these dimensions, effective academic advisors need to have knowledge of what programs and courses are available; this preparatory knowledge includes program requirements, time commitments, length of programs, instructors' style of teaching, success percentages, and any pitfalls that may exist in their students' chosen programs and required courses . Lastly, effective academic advisors, according to O'Banion's fifth dimension, must have a working knowledge of the courses offered and when they are offered so they can help their students choose the correct courses toward their degree completion plans. This also includes how to drop and add courses, any schedule changes, professors and their research areas, and any additional requirements for each course.

If a collaborative effort is used, each member of the academic advising team must perform his or her collaborative role effectively as described above for the benefit of all involved, students and fellow team members (O'Banion, 2009). In the end, O'Banion said the real issue is ensuring the students get their needs met and that a system where only academic advisors advised students on their academic goals would best serve the students qualitatively. Students' ability to meet their academic goals and needs in beneficial ways that allowed them to benefit positively from the college experience was the most important goal of academic advising (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2009; O'Banion, 2012).

The O'Banion theory of academic advising is relevant to high school academic advising in private Christian schools since it was the first academic advising model discussed in the research area of academic advising. Not much has changed in this research area relating to a model of academic advising since the early 1970s when O'Banion (1972) pioneered his conceptual framework. The gap in the literature exists because a model of academic advising for high school students, particularly high school students attending private Christian high schools, does not exist in the current research. Due to this research gap, the development of a relevant academic advising model at the high school level is needed to address the academic advising needs. A new theoretical framework or model needs to be built for academic advising at the high school level for private Christian high schools. This model could be used as the foundation for the process of helping high school students not only at Christian high schools, but at public, charter, and independent as the students transition from middle school to high school and then to college and beyond.

## Related Literature

Research on academic advising, particularly Christian high school advising, is challenging to find (Baird, 2020; Clayton, 2019; Gordon et al., 2000). Inconsistencies and gaps occur in this secondary area of academia. This phenomenological study examines issues with adequate preparation at the high school level of academic advising and, therefore, the often misguided or underdeveloped practices used in Christian high school academic advising offices by well-meaning, but ill-prepared advisors. The first theme involves developing a working definition and conceptual framework of Christian high school academic advising, as the research has revealed the need for a universal model of high school academic advising (Gordon et al., 2008; Larson et al., 2018). The five dimensions of O'Banion's conceptual framework are used as

a starting point for the development of a universal model, which enables academic advisors to adequately advise their students (1972).

The second theme involves the importance of strong, purposeful, and engaging relationships between Christian academic advisors and high school students that supports them in their academic journeys (Alvarado & Olson, 2020; Baird, 2020; Drake, 2011; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; O'Banion, 2012; Pitts & Myers, 2023; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). The third theme reveals that some researchers have not found the academic advising relationship to be as critical or relevant to students' academic success as other important variables, such as student engagement, clear pathways to goals, developing responsibility, accountability, and autonomy for students, and healthy learning environments for every student regardless of his or her background (Kuh et al., 2005; Young-Jones et al., 2013). The fourth theme involves the academic, professional, and institution specific preparation needed to become an academic advisor at the high school level (Gordon et al., 2000; Larson et al., 2018). These themes have emerged from an exhaustive review of the existing literature regarding college academic advising.

**Model of Christian High School Academic Advising**

A theory of academic advising at all academic levels has not been developed since the O'Banion Model of Academic Advising in 1972, more than 50 years ago (Larson, 2018; O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2009). The practices of academic advisors, in general, are widely variable due to the need for applicable policies and procedures to build upon and use in daily practice. Technology has led the way as the world of academic advising has evolved in many ways in the 50 years since the seminal study by O'Banion (Larson, 2018; O'Banion, 1972; Zarges, 2018). Academic advisors use many resources to help them to help their students (Gordon et al., 2000; Zarges, 2018). To replicate daily practices and mentor others in the realm

of academic advising, advisors lean on and practice what they have personally done that was successful, but by quantifying academic advising with a conceptual model, the quality of academic advising would be more consistent and measurable.

However, since O'Banion's model was developed in 1972, researchers have yet to come up with a universal definition of what academic advisors actually do (preparation, policies, procedures, and practices) for their institutions and constituents. This has led to ambiguity and confusion regarding academic advising at every academic level, and this confusion is due to the lack of a universally accepted definition/model of academic advising (Gordon et al., 2020; Zarges, 2018). The conceptual framework created by O'Banion discussed a counselor or faculty academic advising model where one person manages most, if not, all the academic advising (1972). He did not disqualify a cooperative and collaborative team approach where multiple people would advise students based on their backgrounds, competencies, and professional interests (O'Banion, 2009). The members would include students, instructors, and counselors, maybe even administrators, depending on the size of the school.

After O'Banion created this initial conceptual framework (1972), the founding of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1979 began the process of academic advising becoming recognized as a profession (Cook, 2009; Gordon et al., 2000). But, prior to the middle of the 1970s, members of the college faculty served as the academic advisors for all students . As the demand grew due to increases in enrollment and student populations, universities started looking for ways to decrease the demand on faculty. As a result, the early beginnings of academic advising began to take root when the NACADA firmly established the niche of academic advising at the college level in 1979.

The NACADA continued to grow in popularity and function, publishing the first issue of

the NACADA Journal in 1981 (Alvarado & Olson, 2020; Cook, 2009; Gordon et al., 2000). Others, like Habley (1981), were beginning to see the potential of academic advising on college campuses to help with retention of students and increase graduation rates. Habley thought advising was a developmental model where students are the center, and advisors help them to develop and grow (Cook, 2009). In 2008, Gordon et al. wrote *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook,* which has become an extensively used educational resource at the college level and is used worldwide (Cook, 2009; Larson et al., 2018). This handbook quickly became the epitome of academic advising on the college landscape and was used by post-secondary institutions as their guide to help their students succeed and to increase retention rates (Cook, 2009; Gordon et al., 2000; Gordon, 2008). However, this universal advising handbook does not address the concept of high school academic advising at all, as it only addresses college and university academic advising.

*Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook*, written by Gordon et al. (2008), does not include high school academic advising, further revealing the need for a landmark or seminal handbook for Christian high school academic advising. An effective model for academic advisors would include three components that high school academic advisors would rely upon: informational and knowledge based, built upon relationships between advisors and their students and families, and being able to conceptualize or frame the academic processes for their students from high school to the post-secondary level (Brown, 2008; King, 2008). Once students know what to do, they truly feel heard, and that they have the potential needed to succeed, then they can work the plan they developed with their academic advisor.

However, individuals working as academic advisors come to the role with many different skill sets and backgrounds (Larson et al., 2018; McGill, 2020). With so many different

backgrounds and skill sets, the development of a unified definition and model of academic advising has been difficult to establish. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a clear definition of academic advising and the preparation needed to perform well as an academic advisor, setting up their students to reach their fullest potential, the preparation needed, including the skills, training, degrees, and certification needed to successfully advise students, is unknown. Lastly, how would one measure success or nonsuccess? In order to know if something works, one must know what he or she is measuring.

Academic advising is a relationship between the advisor and advisee or student where the advisor helps to clarify educational goals using sound communication and then assists the advisee or student in the best path forward to reach those goals in a timely and effective manner (Alvarado & Olson, 2020; Ender et al., 1982; Gutierrez et al., 2020; Okewu & Daramola, 2017). In his research in the early 1970s, O'Banion (1972) found that academic advisors who possess certain social skill sets, including backgrounds in psychology, sociology, child development, counseling, and other social sciences, are better equipped and able to help their students explore their lives and future educational goals. He also shared that academic advisors who believe that all of their students have personal worth, value, and potential are better able to support and champion for their students' futures (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012).

The type of information and knowledge that an academic advisor possesses sets him or her apart from those who work in other areas of academia, and academic advising is akin to teaching on a one-to-one level with appropriate feedback (Harrison, 2009; Kramer, 2003; Lowenstein, 2005; Pitts & Myers, 2023). For example, the ability to help their students explore vocational goals and how careers evolve over time is an attribute that academic advisors can use to help advise their students in a small group or one-on-one setting (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion,

2012). This may be why many teachers transition from their classrooms to the academic advising office where they teach one-on-one. The research supports that academic advisors share specific characteristics that enable them to advise their students but that a pure definition of academic advising at the high school level does not exist (Gordon et al., 2000; McGill, 2018). However, people see academic advisors in a positive light and as professionals who are competent.

In 2017, the NACADA shared a list of the personal communicative traits that an academic advisor should embody, which included being able to build rapport, communicate, plan, educate, solve problems, make decisions quickly, and build relationships with their students. These personal characteristics and attributes provide a solid foundation upon which to build a description of not only what academic advisors do, but who they are as people and professionals. Individuals with these traits have the disposition and soft skills needed to build strong relationships with their students. The influence of high school academic advising goes beyond the twelfth grade and into post-secondary education, where even more significant decisions are made based upon decisions made in high school (Clayton, 2019; Smith & Allen, 2018; Zarges, 2018).

Decisions made while in high school affect many things, suah as class choice (College Prep, Honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, among others), strength of schedule, volunteer opportunities, tutoring for standardized tests like the ACT and SAT, taking classes online or dual enrollment through colleges and community colleges, and, therefore, opportunities to go to more academically challenging colleges. High school academic advisors play a monumental role in these choices for their students and helping them make choices that better their chances of academic success and retentions in the future, both in high school and in post-secondary opportunities. As high school academic advisors align themselves with their

students, a model to lead the way would be beneficial for all constituents. A model or conceptual framework would allow academic advisors and their students to build the relational and educational framework needed to build future success in high school and beyond. This concept builds into and leads to the second theme which emerged from a review of the existing literature: the significance of solid, gratifying relationships, and connections between culturally aware Christian high school academic advisors and their students and families.

**Christian Academic Advisors and High School Students**

The importance of strong and evolving relationships at the Christian high school level is evident in the research on academic advising in general (Baird, 2020; Drake, 2011; O'Banion, 2012; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Many researchers have highlighted and detailed the need for strong relationships between students, families, and academic advisors (Drake, 2011; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; Zarges, 2018). Even more so, O'Banion (2012) shared that effective academic advisors believe that all their students, even the ones who are apathetic about their educational futures and goals, have potential, worth, value, and dignity. Other researchers have shared that academic advising at its core is helping students by building lasting connections and guiding them along the way if they get disconnected from their educational goals, helping redirect and reconnect them to the futures that they cannot imagine (Drake, 2011; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; Zarges, 2018). The retention rates and persistence in high school from ninth grade to graduation are related to the strength of the relationship between academic advisors and students, especially in specific student populations who may fall through the gaps without direct and significant connection to an advisor who can help them persist and reach their academic benchmarks (Dipre & Luke, 2020; Drake, 2011; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018;Tippetts et al., 2020; Zarges, 2018).

Positive relationships are pivotal in the lives of students who need guidance, support, and connection with their peers and academic advisors as they pursue their academic and career goals (Dipre & Luke, 2020; Drake, 2011; Pitts & Myers, 2023; Reimers, 2022; Tippetts et al., 2020). Drake (2011) shared that academic advising at any level is way more than clerical note taking and keeping records for students; it is an artform where academic advisors help their students connect their students and their interests to their life and career goals. In this way, academic advisors are much more than place holders along the path towards graduation from high school or college; they can be the reason students persist to graduation. Building trusting relationships among Christian high school academic advisors and their students' needs to be built upon a firm foundation of information, knowledge, expertise, trust, empathy, cultural awareness, and the ability to help students who they believe have potential and worth (Clayton, 2019; Dipre & Luke, 2020; Drake, 2011; O'Banion, 2012; Zarges, 2018). Additional research by Light (2001) revealed that quality academic advising may very well be the most highly correlated and underestimated factor of a successful college educational experience that ends with the epiphany of graduation.

Often, the relationship or interaction between students and individuals who are concerned about their success is a huge contributor to student success and increased graduation rates (Drake, 2011; Habley, 2004). Even more so, this is likely the position of an academic advisor. Students who meet with their academic advisors even once a semester are more likely to enroll the next semester than those who do not (Tippetts et al., 2020). The trust that grows in the servant-style leadership relationship between students and their academic advisors provides fertile soil for future growth and exploration of future career goals (Drake, 2011; Gordon et al., 2008; Greenleaf, 2011; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). As academic advisors serve their students,

they gain trust and build rapport, which provides the relational means needed to advise and guide their students. The more informed all stakeholders are in critical areas, the deeper and more connected the relationships between Christian high school academic advisors and their prospective students are (Clayton, 2019; Drake, 2011; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015).

Communicating effectively, being able to relate to others, and having specific knowledge pertinent to their institution are effective means of guiding students (Gordon et al., 2000; Menke et al., 2018). The core competencies that academic advisors need when working with adults or students who do not fit the traditional profile are communicating well, relating with purpose, and knowing pertinent information so that students feel informed (Fiddler & Alecia, 1996; Hughey, 2011; Menke et al., 2018). Many competencies exist and include the ability to plan, the ability to organize, effective communication, being professional, being prepared, and having a solid ethical foundation. These findings were replicated by the formerly mentioned Menke et al., (2018). The core competencies needed to be an effective academic advisor seem to focus on effective and purposeful communication (Fiddler & Alicia, 2008; Hughey, 2011; Menke et al., 2018). The stronger the alliance between the academic advisor and the advisee, the more beneficial and supportive the advising (Bahr, 2008; Hughey, 2011).

The theme of building stronger relationships with students is important because, as it is developed, it provides detailed insight into how Christian high school academic advisors can leverage dynamic relationships with their students to help them reach their current and future academic goals in high school and beyond (Clayton, 2019; Gordon et al., 2008; Young et al., 2013; Zarges, 2018). The more often students meet with their academic advisors, the more positive the correlation with self-report measures, such as grades and success, and the more often academic advisors meet with their students, the stronger the relationship and the overall benefits

of academic advising (Bahr, 2008; Hughey, 2011; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). The key to successful academic advising according to the research is connecting well with students, and the number of advising meetings with an academic advisor is not nearly as important as the quality of the meetings (Coll & Draves, 2009). The power in meaningful quality of meetings versus quantity of meetings reveals the value of the relational aspect of academic advising versus the mechanics of meeting without purpose.

For academic advising, research has shown that the depth of the relationship over information or facts significantly impacts the academic advisor and advisee relationship (Gordon et al., 2000; Zarges, 2018). The more informed and reputable Christian high school academic advisors are, and the stronger the relationships between them and their students, the better prepared high school students are for college (Young-Jones et al., 2013; Zarges, 2018). One of the primary goals of an academic advisor is to help their students reach their academic, career, and current life goals, and help students bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be (Grites, 2013; Tippetts et al., 2022; Zarges, 2018). Grites (2013) elaborated on this by sharing that students need mentoring, just like their professors and or teachers need mentoring with their educational, career, and personal goals. Research by Tippetts et al. (2022) revealed that students who met with their academic advisors one or more times during a semester were more likely to enroll in the next semester.

Academic advisors also use conflict resolution skills to help their students, and they help their students see what opportunities exist as they journey from high school to college (Drake, 2011; McClellan, 2007). As an academic advisor coaches and guides his or her students in high school, this relationship helps set the stage for future choices in high school and college. According to at least two studies, if the relationship is not central, then the process becomes

mechanical and one-dimensional, and effective academic advising happens when students benefit from the inter-developmental and mutually beneficial relationship.

**Academic Advising Relationship Versus Other Variables**

The third theme reveals that some researchers have not found the academic advising relationship to be as critical or relevant to students' academic success as other variables, such as student engagement, clear pathways to goals, and healthy learning environments for every student regardless of his or her background (Kuh et al., 2005; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Students with different backgrounds and/or needs do not need the same things from their academic advisors as other students. Unique student populations, such as minorities, transfer students, adult students, under prepared students, students with undeclared majors, international students, low performing students, and student athletes, have needs that other students who fall into the majority population do not have (Frost, 1991; Nix et al., 2021; Queen, 2022; Wang et al., 2020; Young-Jones et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2024). The sense of belonging and empathy that an academic advising relationship fosters increases retention and student success (Yuan et al., 2024). The relationship between students and their academic advisors is important, but other important and covert variables can also have a strong and lasting influence on student academic success, retention, and graduation rates at the college level (Frost, 1991; Nix et al., 2021; Queen, 2022; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Other variables can include student engagement, a strong focus on student goals and learning, a clear pathway to successful completion of educational goals and objectives, environments where students can learn and grow regardless of their backgrounds, and a sense of shared responsibility and community among the many different stakeholders (Hart-Baldridge, 2020; Kuh et al., 2005; Young-Jones et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2024). These variables create

conditions that matter so that student success can be a viable and purposeful outcome (Kuh et al., 2005; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Something as simple as knowing how to create student engagement by asking open ended questions so students can share their personal histories and future desires is a way for academic advisors to connect with their students (Lochtie et al., 2018). Some believe a more student-led and developmental type of academic advising would be the best practice and most effective, instead of an expert-driven academic advisor model, such as O'Banion's conceptual framework (Crookston, 1972; Gordon, 2019; O'Banion, 1972).

The collaborative concept of developmental academic advising where the community of college advisors and students work together to achieve their academic goals may be a better alternative (Crookston, 1972; Wang et al., 2020). Instead of using academic advisors as experts who students would utilize as their primary source of information and questions as in the prescriptive model by Crookston (1972), there would be a learning community where each person in the community shares information, helps, and benefits (Gordon et al., 2000; Gordon, 2019; Wang et al., 2020). This is the working developmental model that Gordon (2019) recommends in his research and values to improve the world of academic advising as opposed to the more widely used one person knows everything, prescriptive model that O'Banion based his original 1972 research on when he developed the first academic advising conceptual framework.

The developmental academic advising approach is one that has been explored over the past several decades since Crookston's major work in 1972. The working definition of this approach has evolved over the years, but Grites (2013) summarized the developmental academic advising approach with the following points: it is not theory based, it is holistic; it is based on student success or growth, and it is a shared activity between advisers and students. This simplistic approach uses the relationship between the academic advisor and student to create a

safe place for the students to grow and be successful. Again, the academic advisors are not the experts, it is a partnership. The developmental advising approach as described by Grites, allows each academic advisor/advisee relationship to be differentiated based on where the student is in his or her academic journey.

In his early research, Grites (1977) was creating a developmental model of academic advising when he described a four-by-four model of academic advising based off O'Banion (1972) and Crookston's (1972) research. His model featured four academic advising processes: primary or providing pertinent information, professional or specific career and college planning, personal or therapeutic and counselor led, and programmatic or engaging (Grites, 1977). He then added the following time dimensions to this model: preview or what has already happened, planning or what does the student want to happen, process or how to make goals happen, and postview or taking the time after some time has passed to review what went right and what went wrong . This model of academic advising is relevant to a more holistic approach, but it is not systematic, in that, it allows for more flexibility and generalities than a theoretical approach would.

Another option explored in the literature involves using an advising strategy where an academic advisor helps his or her students find solutions by asking questions based on their unique experiences versus telling them what to do, as most academic advisors do (McClellan, 2005; Zarges, 2018). This solutions-focused method requires trust where the academic advisor leads, and the students follow their inquisitive and curious questioning. But trust comes from being predictable and trustworthy as a professional who can problem solve and help their students reach their personal and individual academic goals. Although the research on academic advising has shown that the depth of relationship over information or facts significantly impacts

student success, there may be another model that would create the same results by using a more solutions-focused process versus a relational method that requires time to develop.

Many different variables are involved in the academic success or failure of students at all levels of learning (Gordon et al., 2000; Yenney, 2020; Young-Jones et al., 2013; Van Pletzen et al., 2021; Zarges, 2018). Researchers, such as Kuh, et al., have not found the academic advising relationship to be as critical or relevant to students' academic success as other variables, such as student engagement, clear pathways to goals, and healthy learning environments for every student regardless of his or her background (2005). Different student populations, such as minorities, transfer students, adult students, undecided students, students from countries outside of the U.S., students who are not prepared academically, and student athletes, have needs that students who do not fall into these populations do not have (Frost, 1991; Matthews et al., 2023; Yenney, 2020; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Online students present another layer of academic advising and issues with retention (Meyer et al., 2022). Meyer et al. found that building trust and community was vital for online students when working with an academic advisor. In order to include the needs of all populations, Frost (1991) and Matthews et al. (2023) both recommended that academic advisors use a systematic advising plan that focuses on student needs with a mission statement that is clear and measurable.

Along the same discovery process that Kul et al. used to see which variables are relevant to student success, other researchers like Sheldon, et al. have looked at pertinent relational variables (2005, 2015). To distinguish between which relational variables were most important or influential, Sheldon et al. compared three different variables: the advisor's knowledge or ability to help their students, the amount of time an advisor was available, and how the advisor supported their students' autonomy as a student (2015). Each of these unique variables were

found to have a positive impact on student satisfaction with their academic advisors and, therefore, with student success (Kul et al., 2015; Sheldon et al., 2015). The most defining variable related to student satisfaction was how the academic advisors supported their students' autonomy as students (Sheldon et al., 2015). This finding means that the better academic advisors can mentor and build confidence in their students, helping them access and utilize their own personal resources versus the academic advisors' knowledge and resources, the higher the students' satisfaction with the academic advising process in general (Hart-Baldridge, 2020; Kul et al., 2015; Sheldon et al., 2015; Yenney, 2020). This type of academic advising is more like mentoring that allows the students to take responsibility for their futures. Mentoring students to take initiative and responsibility is different from other models of academic advising where the advisors are the experts, and the students aimlessly follow them. Mentoring requires students to be engaged and aware, accountable and present, and open to learning how to take the lead on their academic futures (Kul et al., 2015; Sheldon, et al. 2015).

**Preparation Needed for Academic Advisors**

Research shares that academic advisors are often equipped with similar skill sets and personalities, setting themselves apart from their coworkers by what they do differently each day to impact their students (Harrison, 2009; McClellan, 2007; O'Banion, 2012). These skills, such as knowledge of counseling, psychology, sociology, and individual differences, enables academic advisors with these types of backgrounds to engage with students uniquely to build strong relationships quickly, building vibrant community with students and within the institution (Harrison, 2009; McClellan, 2005; O'Banion, 2012; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and some assume that anyone on staff at a college or university can be an academic advisor without any specific preparation, base of knowledge, or training (McGill et

al., 2020). Due to cultural advancements and changes in technology, academic advising practices are changing rapidly and novel ways of advising students are being investigated using virtual platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Pelletier, 2022; Steele, 2018). By being able to meet virtually, academic advisors may be able to synthesize their daily tasks and accomplish more (Steele, 2018).

Academic advising should be mandatory, according to O'Banion (2012). Furthermore, academic advising should be the number one thing that happens prior to instruction on campuses . However, the field of academic advising is a field that is still coming into its own and emerging as a focus on college campuses where the colleges provide on-the-job training and development (McGill, 2018). Academic advisors have multifaceted backgrounds with bachelors, masters, and terminal degrees in many different areas of study (Gordon et al., 2000; McGill, 2018; Zarges et al., 2018). Some professors would be beneficial in advising students in their fields of expertise; however, they lack the training needed in overall academic advising even though they are experts in their fields of study (Hutson, 2013; McGill, 2018). Their academic schedules often do not allow them to become knowledgeable about areas outside of their expertise; therefore, they may be able to mentor, but not advise.

Furthermore, academic advisors at all levels do not share the same backgrounds both professionally and academically. In other words, the academic backgrounds of academic advisors vary and are not consistent in major, preparation, experience, or practice, (Hutson, 2013; McGill, 2018). Therefore, academic advisors at all levels require specific on-the-job skills training which could then be implemented at each specific institution at all academic levels (McGill, 2018; Voller et al., 2010). There are no degree programs at the college undergraduate level for academic advisors, and one cannot major in academic advising as a college student (Hur

et al., 2019). It seems as if anyone who has a college degree and wants to be an academic advisor can become one depending on where he or she works and if the opportunity presents itself. Often times, the person with the most knowledge of the college and the best interpersonal skills gets the nod to advise students (Hutson, 2013; McGill, 2018).

This creates an interesting dilemma. If one wants to be an academic advisor, what should he or she major in in college? Furthermore, when one does not work in the field of his or her degree, terminal or otherwise, it is called a *horizontal mismatch* (Cook, 2009; McGill, 2018). In other words, ironically, all academic advisors do not work in their degree field. Due to conflict in determining the best fit with degree program and career choice, academic advisors often experience role ambiguity (Englert-Copeland, 2023). Academic advisors come from a plethora of different occupational and academic backgrounds, and some have only bachelor's degrees, while others have earned advanced and terminal degrees (Cook, 2009; McGill, 2018). It is assumed that one would need at least an undergraduate degree in something, but what? There are a few graduate school programs offering degrees in academic advising, but not at the undergraduate level (Cook, 2009). And then, for post graduate work, the degree options are not specific to academic advising at each university as some on the job learning is not only necessary but should be required training, such as mentoring (Cook, 2009; Hur et al., 2019; McGill, 2018).

The review of literature and research is consistent and states that academic advisors need to be adequately trained and prepared (Ford, 2007; Higginson, 2000; Larson et al., 2018; Lochtie et al., 2018; Reimers, 2022; Van Pletzen et al., 2021). The training needed consists of both conceptual and relational qualities for best practices (Drake, 2011; Reimers, 2022). However, Reimers also suggested that there is a way to create academic advising professionals from support staff professionals who are already on the payroll (2022). This would alleviate the

financial burden that some universities may be experiencing by not having to hire or onboard new academic advising professionals as they are continuing to recover from the covid pandemic of 2020-2021 and beyond. The demand for academic advising could also be alleviated by upskilling already existing educational professionals who may already have the foundation needed to advise students academically (Drake, 2011; Reimers, 2022). Reimers (2022) suggested that a specific degree in academic advising is not needed with the proper upskilling, preparation, and training that could be provided by each specific university.

Reimers (2022) first had to figure out the competency gap between an academic advising professional and an academic professional, also called a student support specialist. In this set up, the degree obtained by the upskilled student support specialists would not be as significant, whereas the on-the-job training would be the most important. The results of Reimer's research revealed that it is possible to upskill student support specialists with the hard skills (information, institution specific knowledge, and data) needed to advise students, but it was harder to upskill them with the soft skills (relational, rapport, trust, and support) needed to be successful in the role of an academic advisor (Drake, 2011; Reimers, 2022). The clerical type skills, including using relevant technology where needed, would also be included in the hard skills according to Drake (2011).

In order to create a sustainable model of academic advising, academic advisors need both the hard skills and the soft skills as described by researchers (Drake, 2011; Reimers, 2022). If a student feels supported, heard, and understood by his or her advisor, he or she is more likely to persist in pursuing their personal academic goals and retention towards graduation in a timely manner. According to Dipre and Luke (2020), it is the responsibility of academic advisors to be culturally aware and meet each student where he or she is instead of treating all of their students

the same. Academic advisors also need to keep in mind that they are in a position of power over their students and need to tread carefully as they advise them (Dipre & Luke, 2020; McGill, 2018; Reimers, 2022). Additionally, it is important to note that academic advisors also need to feel valued and work in an environment where they are recognized and rewarded for their efforts (Solon et al., 2022; Survase & Johnson, 2023). The better resources and working conditions academic advisors have, the more sustainable their efforts to help students achieve their goals .

Lastly, academic advisors need to focus more time on developing positive relationships with their student advisees or soft skills and less time on the hard skills that seem to have been researched more over the past half century (Dipre & Luke, 2020; O'Banion, 2012; Reimers, 2022). According to Mbindyo et al. (2021), academic advisors can become transformational leaders by influencing, motivating, and helping their students as individuals. Stealth advising, described by Wei (2022), is a process whereby academic advisors help students by making suggestions, listening, and giving feedback in a relational model versus a rote model of disseminating information. The need for academic advisors who are adequately prepared, trained educationally, and prepared culturally and relationally to ensure their students are valued, understood, and have potential to be successful cannot be underestimated when one attempts to create a sustainable and effective model of academic advising (Drake, 2011; O'Banion, 2012; Reimers, 2022). People over practices and procedures, according to Dipre and Luke (2020), should pave the way forward in the evolving field of academic advising.

Other research reveals that training programs for academic advisors should consist of three key components, which include information specific to the institution where the advisor works, how to share or deliver the correct information to their students, and how to assess the successful delivery of the pertinent information whether in person or by way of using technology

(Assiri et al., 2020; Higginson, 2000; Steele, 2018). Current and growing technology would allow for analytics to be used to assess how to structure the content, scope, and sequence needed for the conceptual framework so that the proper advising curriculum would line up with student goals and desired accomplishments (Assiri et al., 2020; Higginson, 2000; Shatnawi et al., 2021; Steele, 2018). This analytical process would strengthen and structure the advising process by creating measurable outcomes, which could then be implemented in the conceptual framework.

In addition to using technology for analytics and compiling statistics on academic advising, the use of specific academic advising technology called AutoScholar Advisor System (Auto-Ad) has been researched by Khumalo et al. (2023). AutoScholar Advisor System (Auto-Ad) is an advanced technological tool that allows students to increase their overall performance by way of advising that is computer generated and automated without human interaction (Khumalo et al., 2023). The possibilities are endless with the use of technological intelligence like data mining and association rule mining to enhance the academic advising experience of students at all levels (Akiba & Fraboni, 2023; Hu, 2020; Shatnawi et al., 2021). For example, Tippetts et al., (2024) found that something as simple as texting students creates and builds relationships. This is a new way for academic advisors to reach out to students. This relates to the preparation of academic advisors in ways that allow for them to use and adapt technology to meet the ever-changing needs of their students. The ability to use artificial technology to increase support and enhance learning for students enables students to take on a more central role in the process of their education goals and puts the responsibility on the students for taking ownership of their success (Akiba & Fraboni, 2023; Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023; Lucien & Park, 2024). Research by Mangundu (2022) revealed that e-academic advising does not come

without flaws and concerns. Faster and more efficient is not always better than an in-person advisor, but the hope is that artificial intelligence will get better with more practice.

Artificial intelligence may allow for more degree specific academic advising and better ways to prepare students for their future educational goals (Akiba & Fraboni, 2023; Lucien & Park, 2024). However, even if artificial intelligence is used, who should use it? Should academic advising be done by professors, specialized advisors, student affairs professionals, trained professional counselors, or professional administrators? Or should academic advising be adequately facilitated by an advisor or counselor, and then student led instead of advisor led? Lastly, should new and alluring advances in new technology and artificial intelligence play a role in high school academic advising, or should it be done by adequately prepared human academic advisors only (Akiba & Fraboni, 2023; Hu, 2020; Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023; Mangundu, 2022)?

Since the preparation needed for academic advisors varies from institution to institution due to specific needs and academic requirements, being able to use an artificial intelligence model like AutoScholar Advisor System (Auto-Ad) and others has the potential to greatly decrease the workload for academic advisors as they work with all their students (Gordon, et al., 2008; Hu,2020; Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023; Lema & Agrusa, 2019; Zarges, et al., 2018). In the near future, academic advisors may be utilized in a very different way (if at all) if artificial intelligence continues to grow in popularity. However, as mentioned previously, the relational and personal aspects of academic advising could potentially be lost as a result of the use of artificial intelligence, which would replace human beings in the role of academic advisors. The personal quality of academic advising would decrease, potentially, but the quantity or amount of academic advising interactions would not be limited by the availability of literal

human resources (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023; Lema & Agrusa, 2019).

Another key aspect of preparing academic advisors involves using an advising handbook that is specific to the institution where the advisor works, such as a high school planning guide or degree completion plans that are used on the college level (Ford, 2007; Zarges et al., 2018). Advising handbooks are created by each institution to be used during the advising process from freshman year through senior year. The advising handbook would serve as a guide to the educational journey and partnership between academic advisors and their students, and it would be used by academic advisors so that the knowledge and specific information needed would be transferred their students (Ford, 2007; Gordon et al., 2000; Zarges et al., 2018). One of the unique dilemmas or challenges that stands in the way of preparing academic advisors exists because every academic institution has different requirements for matriculation towards graduation based on differing degree completion plans. As a result of the different requirements, each academic advisor must advise their student populations according to their institutions unique and differentiated pathway only. Loucif et al. (2020) recommended involving the students and faculty members in the process by guiding students to register for classes that are a best fit based on prior performance in similar classes.

Although the pertinent advising information needed to be included in the advising handbook or planning guide is universal, each educational institution has specific course information, registration details, course drop and add details, information about majors and minors, including how to change majors (Ford, 2007; Gordon et al., 2000; Zarges et al., 2018). This information is based upon what they recommend and offer to their students as they matriculate towards their institution specific degrees and diplomas. Every academic advisor at

each different institution would need to effectively memorize and work with the unique advising handbook guidelines specific to his or her high school or college. The possibility of using artificial intelligence like AutoScholar Advisor System (Auto-Ad) in this particular niche of academic advising may provide some relief for academic advisors and memorizing planning guides or other pertinent resources (Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023).

However, many common themes exist so that a conceptual framework, which included an example of an advising handbook, could be created with room for growth and change; the conceptual framework could be flexible so that it would work for any institution of higher learning at the high school and college levels (Ford, 2007; Gordon et al., 2000; Zarges et al., 2018). A working model or conceptual framework would give Christian high school academic advisors the guiding framework needed to prepare and to help their students not only during high school, but lasting relationships could be formed (Ford, 2007; Lochtie et al., 2018; Reimers, 2022; Zarges et al., 2018). Although many questions remain about the preparation needed to qualify and prepare one for the career of a Christian high school academic advisor, the literature review based on relevant research reveals that adequate and specific training and preparation are needed for academic advisors at all levels (Ford, 2007; Higginson, 2000; Lochtie et al., 2018; Reimers, 2022). Furthermore, artificial intelligence models are showing promise in the field of academic advising and could be used to enhance the advising process at all levels by decreasing the workload on academic advisors and streamlining the process (Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023).

**How the Four Themes Relate to Each Other**

The first theme involves the lack of a conceptual model of Christian high school academic advising or even high school academic advising reveals the need for this research

study. Second, the theme of building trusting relationships and healthy rapport between Christian high school academic advisors and their students' needs to be built upon the foundation of information, knowledge, expertise, trust, empathy, cultural awareness, and the ability to help students who they believe have potential and worth (Clayton, 2019; Dipre & Luke, 2020; Drake, 2011; O'Banion, 2012; Zarges, 2018). The third theme stands in opposition to the second theme and reveals that the academic advising relationship may not be as critical to student success as other variables, such as other variables including personal student engagement, clear pathways to goals, cultivating student autonomy where students use their own internal guide to direct them, and healthy educational and learning environments for every student regardless of his or her background (Dipre & Luke, 2020; Kuh et al., 2005; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Lastly, the fourth theme examines the finding that professional and academic preparation, skills training, and best use of technology for Christian high school academic advisors is not clearly defined in a way that allows student success to be adequately measured (Gordon et al., 2008; Mathew & Ibrahim, 2023; McGill, 2018; Zarges et al., 2018).

The preparation needed for academic advisors to practice at all levels varies tremendously and from institution to institution due to specific needs and unique academic requirements at each institution (McGill, 2018; Zarges et al., 2018). Students have legitimate concerns about their academic futures and how to work within the sometimes confusing and disconnected academic advising conceptual framework of their institutions at the high school level and the college level. Academic advisors are sought for answers and guidance and are professionals who are expected to have the preparation, tools, knowledge, skills, and resources to help their students be successful academically while clearly understanding their roles and responsibilities (Kuhn et al., 2006; Mathew & Ibrahim, 2023; O'Banion, 2012). The diversity of

academic advisors and their unique backgrounds is a benefit for students who are also unique, but it also further supports the notion that specific and adequate preparation and skills training based on a conceptual framework is necessary to equip academic advisors with the tools they need to do their jobs well.

There are certain skills and vocational backgrounds that academic advisors share, such as having knowledge about all fields and careers from blue collar jobs to white collar jobs, from service type jobs to professional oriented jobs, and seeing all these future career paths as achievable and worth pursuing (O'Banion, 2012). By having this approach, academic advisors are able to help all of their students and remain nonjudgmental in their inclusive approach to help every student within their reach. However, the sometimes-overwhelming responsibilities that academic advisors encounter each day in their vocations are often unpredictable, numerous, complex, and sometimes unrelated to student engagement or academic advising at all (Englert-Copeland, 2023; Kuhn et al., 2006; Larson et al., 2018; Robbins, 2012; Solon et al., 2022). Academic advisors are sometimes the first line of help when a student has a true and significant counseling need (Cook, 2009; Kuhn et al., 2006; Larson et al., 2018; Robbins, 2012). This makes the concept of adequate preparation, such as the knowledge of how to refer to other professionals as needed even more valuable.

Learning while doing or on-the-job training is a considerable part of the learning curve for academic advising professionals at all levels and institutions. New artificial technologies that have transformed the academic advising landscape have continued to grow quickly, and academic advisors have had to learn to adapt to the next helpful technological advancements while continuing to manage their ever-growing student loads (Jokhan et al., 2022; Khumalo et al., 2023; Steele, 2018; Troxel et al., 2018). Academic advising completed the right way can be

described as laborious and difficult due to the amount of time required to build relationships with possibly hundreds of students, each with unique needs and differing future educational goals (Troxel et al., 2021). However, regardless of the difficulty and time constraints, building relationships with students has been a basic premise and cornerstone of academic advisors who can be transformational leaders since the early 1970s (Mbindyo et al., 2021; Dipre & Luke, 2020; O'Banion, 1972). There are certain facets and practices of academic advising that can be formalized, but students often need to know someone cares about them and their futures (Dipre & Luke, 2020; O'Banion, 2012). Fostering growth relationships where all parties benefit in a mutual way is considered successful relational academic advising.

Online learning, even prior to the covid pandemic, created a new area of tremendous growth and development for academic advisors who may never be able meet their students in person (Naughton, 2021; Steele, 2018; Survase & Johnson, 2023; Wang & Houdyshell, 2021). Naughton (2021) found that at risk students prior to the covid pandemic fell even further through the cracks as a result of being forced online due to being unable to get the help they needed to persist. Some researchers believe advising can be completed effectively using an online format where a dialogue is created by using preformulated questions and by clicking boxes (Steele, 2018; Wang & Houdyshell, 2021). However, some researchers do not share this conclusion and believe that in person, face to face relationships are critical (Dipre & Luke, 2020; Steele, 2018; Troxel et al., 2018). Will the same conceptual framework and preparation work for online and in person students so that both cohorts receive the same level of quality academic advising? That is an important question that has emerged as a result of the explosive growth of online learning and the use of artificial intelligence due to need for flexible learning opportunities for students of all

ages, geographic locations, and backgrounds (Steele, 2018; Troxel et al., 2018; Wang & Houdyshell, 2021).

As the relevant themes have emerged from the literature review, this phenomenological study can be used to understand more about how interested individuals can prepare to become Christian high school academic advisors who can best help their students explore life and career goals, advise and guide in choosing programs and courses, and lastly schedule the appropriate courses for their high school students (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012). The question that has emerged is how can Christian high school academic advisors work from a trustworthy and predictable conceptual model that helps them build healthy relationships with their students and constituents, redirect as needed to other resources including planning guides and advancements in artificial technology, and adequately prepare themselves for the career path of an academic advisor?

## Summary

To date, one of the most popular academic advising theoretical models is the O'Banion model of academic advising, which was first described over 50 years ago (O'Banion, 1972). Most of the relevant research in academic advising is related to college academic advising only versus high school academic advising (Baird, 2020; O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2009; O'Banion, 2012). However, high school academic advising research is not as far-reaching and the gap in literature is wide (Clayton, 2019; Zarges, 2018). To look at the high school realm using the O'Banion Model of Academic Advising would expand the reach of this theory to more than the college level, and all stakeholders would benefit from a researched and well-developed academic advising model . Through a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, I would generate themes and patterns that could be applied to the world I live and work in every day involving a

conceptual model of academic advising, relationship building as an academic advisor, any other relevant variables associated with high school academic advising, and the preparation needed to train to become an effective Christian high school academic advisor who helps his or her students reach their highest academic and future potential. In addition to high school academic advisors, students, teachers, and administrators would all benefit from learning more about the academic advising relationship and process in private Christian high schools. The more informed all constituents are, the better-prepared students are for post-secondary pursuits and furthering their educational goals and potential as students engaged in higher educational pursuits beyond high school. Christian high school academic advisors can play an integral role in the successful voyages their students embark on during and after high school, but there may be other ways to determine success according to the themes that may emerge. The research done in this study may help reveal the preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors to adequately advise their students.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

## Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors needed to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States. The major components of this phenomenological study involves examining the lived experiences of academic advisors in private Christian high schools with no predetermined suppositions (Moustakas, 1994). Academic advising is a means to provide academic services to students that may include counseling, teaching, mentoring, and informing (Gordon et al., 2000). By way of examining high school academic advising in private Christian high schools, the methodology chapter includes the research design and research questions. The setting, participants, researcher positionality, procedures, data collection plan, and data analysis plans are also included.

## Research Design

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study design was used to examine the lived experiences and understand the phenomena involved in Christian high school academic advising. Choosing a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study design instead of a case study, which would focus more on the person or academic advisor instead of the experiences and phenomena associated with the position of the person, allowed the researcher to look at shared experiences of all the participants (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas,1994; van Manen, 2016). This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study looked at and examined the lived experiences of academic advisors in private Christian high schools in hopes of capturing the true essence of what they experience in their daily routines where they work and

live (Creswell, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2016). By transforming everyday experiences into phenomena, I can portray the shared experiences of Christian high school academic advisors (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

The impetus of transcendental phenomenological research is to be able to understand what participants' experiences are and describe them in rich detail (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). Researchers performing transcendental phenomenological research must set aside any prejudgments so that the descriptions they discover in the experiential examination of situations in real-life contexts become the target of their research and knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, I can systematically set aside any biases and presuppositions, described as epoche by Moustakas, with an emphasis on intuition and imagination so that the true essence of the participants' experiences can be revealed and described by the researcher without any assumptions. The shared experiences of Christian High School Academic Advisors and their descriptions enable meaningful themes to emerge so that I accurately synthesize and report the qualitative data (van Manen, 2016).

Evolving themes potentially revealed the lack of consistent preparation that exists at the high school level of academic advising in Christian high schools. Furthermore, the field of academic advising does not have an applicable theory, and the practices employed by academic advisors are widely variable (Larson et al., 2018). All phenomena can lead to a viable reason to investigate and research something (Moustakas, 1994). By looking at qualitative data through an unfettered and curious lens, the data leads the way instead of my own experiences and prejudgments that could influence the data. Researchers during a phenomenological study become the experts on the phenomena, help develop new knowledge in that area of expertise, and become well-versed in what future research could deepen the future knowledge on the topic.

By looking at the lack of consistent preparation for Christian high school academic advisors, I hope to become an expert on the topic, develop new knowledge on the topic, and deepen the knowledge base on the topic so that all stakeholders benefit from the expanded knowledge base.

The three data collection approaches I used for my proposed study are individual interviews, journal prompts, and document analysis. Qualitative data can be described as observations that truly capture the participants' lived experiences and perspectives in a detailed way (Patton, 2014; van Manen, 2016). I believe interviews allowed me to collect most of the data I analyzed. However, with interviews, the interviewer must not inadvertently influence the interviewee in any way (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The strength of any research including qualitative data, relies upon the analysis being carried out in a competent and trustworthy way. I must take great strides in the interview process to not allow my input to affect the data. Interviews are the cornerstone of qualitative data collection procedures and must remain free of any interference from me (Creswell, 2006).

Next, open-ended journal prompts allowed Christian high school academic advisors to freely and openly share their thoughts in an unpressured way. Qualitative data can be described as in-depth questioning (Patton, 2014). The participants shared their thoughts and experiences in an indirect and experience-driven way. I think the depth and richness of data I gathered from open-ended journal prompts enhanced the results of this transcendental phenomenological study and elaborated on the shared experiences of the participants. Furthermore, naturalistic inquiry involves doing research in the natural setting and not taking things out of context by separating or fragmenting parts from the whole of the experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By using participants' professional advising documents, I maintained contextual integrity for natural settings and documentation that each participant used.

Lastly, most Christian high school academic advisors that I know use a high school planning guide. The guide is what I analyzed to see the similarities, differences, and themes that evolve for all participants. The rationale for using this data collection approach involved being able to see how Christian high school academic advisors collect information from their students and see the information they share with their students. By using these three data collection approaches, I collected qualitative data that allowed me to naturally investigate the phenomena that are present in the world of Christian high school academic advising when they partner with their students.

## Research Questions

The research questions relate to the job preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors. These questions reflect the problem statement, which states that Christian high school academic advisors are not adequately prepared to advise their students. The questions reveal the type of preparation, why each participant chose to become a high school academic advisor, which method of academic advising they use (prescriptive or developmental), on-the-job training experiences, certifications needed, and educational backgrounds of each participant (Crookston, 1972).

### Central Research Question

What are the job preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses to help their students develop the highest academic and future potential?

### Sub-Question One

What are the educational experiences, both degree type and level, of Christian high school academic advisors who help students reach their highest academic and future potential?

### Sub-Question Two

What are the on-the-job training experiences Christian high school academic advisors or certifications required to become a Christian high school academic advisor who helps your students reach their highest academic and future potential?

## Setting and Participants

Due to my location, the southeastern United States, and my school's affiliation with the internationally recognized Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), I chose to use their email database to contact schools in the southeast that are members of ACSI. There are approximately 2,200 ACSI member schools in the United States (ACSI, 2023). The large database allowed me to reach my target sample of 10 participants for this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following paragraphs provide a detailed explanation of my setting and participants.

### Setting

The setting of this research study was Christian high schools in the southeastern United States that are members of and accredited by the ACSI (ACSI, 2023). This setting was chosen for the research study, since Christian high school academic advisors work in private Christian high schools, and ACSI is the largest accrediting agency for Christian high schools in the United States. Within Christian high schools, the organizational structure typically includes a head of school or headmaster, a high school principal, an assistant high school principal, and an academic advisor. At smaller Christian high schools, leaders may have multiple roles and the academic advising role may be shared with another position.

### Participants

The participants in this study were Christian high school academic advisors who advise and guide the high school students in their respective Christian high schools in the southeastern United States. They were males and/or females who had three or more years of experience in the realm of academic advising in Christian high schools so that they have had the opportunity to gain a minimum of three years of on-the-job experience in their role. Participants were also academic advisors who advise a minimum of 100 Christian high school students each school year. This eliminates participants from small Christian high schools where academic advisors may only advise a few dozen students. They did not have to be employed at the same Christian high school for three consecutive years. The number of participants in the study were 10 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were emailed about the opportunity to participate from a list of schools in the southeastern United States who are members of ACSI. The schools must have had at least 100 students in Christian high school for their academic advisor to be able to participate.

## Researcher Positionality

My motivation for conducting this study was to learn more about how Christian high school academic advisors can be better prepared to advise, counsel, guide, and teach their students. One of my biggest frustrations as a Christian high school academic advisor at a small private high school in the southeastern United States is lacking the knowledge and expertise needed to be able to adequately advise my students. By conducting this research, I hope to learn how other academic advising professionals have prepared themselves to adequately advise their students so that they can successfully bridge the gap between high school and college. As a result of bridging this gap, their students are better able to reach their highest academic and future potential.

## Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism is the research paradigm or interpretive framework upon which I conducted my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism is a paradigm whereby knowledge is created or constructed by people reflecting upon their experiences (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Knowledge then grows, as people work together to build a framework for making sense of their experiences. By examining the lived experiences of academic advisors in private Christian high schools, patterns emerge to construct and make sense of their shared experiences (van Manen, 2016). Individuals want to know and understand how their world operates and the role they play in it (Creswell, 2007). By way of a transcendental phenomenological research study, I have generated relevant themes and patterns that can be applied to the phenomena that make up the world I live and work in Christian high school academic advising.

## Philosophical Assumptions

The basis of my own personal values and belief system looks at using the following philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I explained how I view the world and approach the research in this study. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the nature of reality and truth as I see it personally, knowledge, and my relationship to what was researched, including my values and biases and how they relate to the research study.

### *Ontological Assumption*

The ontological assumption on the nature of reality is that God is the Creator and He holds all things together (New American Standard Bible, 1982, Colossians 1:17). God's truth is evident in creation, although humans are fallible and finite (New American Standard Bible, 1982, Revelations 1:20). I believe there is one universal truth, although I realize other people feel

differently. Different people view the world differently and from their perspectives and realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants I interviewed are Christians, so I assumed we share the same ontological assumption.

### *Epistemological Assumption*

In understanding the epistemological assumption, knowledge, and the relationship between what is being researched and the researcher is critical (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I wanted to get as close as I could to my participants so that I could understand the contextual layers of my participants' lived experiences . This unbiased study and the knowledge gained from the subjective experiences of the participants, and the qualitative nature of the participants' experiences determined the outcome of the research study. Lastly, their lived experiences help better understand the phenomena shared by Christian High School Academic Advisors.

### *Axiological Assumption*

Regarding the axiological assumption, what I know and value, is part of the research study. Reporting values and biases are equally as important as reporting the data received from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I am a Christian high school academic advisor, and I value what these professionals do daily. Even though I interpret the data, my values do not influence the study results in any way. I must be aware of my own biases and values, reporting them, but I seek the truth instead of allowing my biases to distort the data, even though the stories shared represent my role as a Christian high school academic advisor in a similar high school setting.

## Researcher's Role

As a private Christian high school academic advisor, I am passionate about my calling. In my role as a researcher, I have no authority over the participants. My goal was to be as invisible as possible yet fully engaged in the research process as much as possible. In examining academic

advising in private Christian high schools, the hope was that more data and information help academic advisers do what they do better by helping them to prepare more effectively. Since I am an academic advisor at a private Christian high school, I have a vested interest in this topic and findings, but as a human instrument, I did not affect the data or results in any way that distorts their validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Procedures

The steps taken to conduct the study are be examined here. I secured IRB approval before any contact with my participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). See Appendix A for IRB approval. My participants were Christian high school academic advisors who work for private Christian high schools in the southeastern United States. The schools were also members of the ACSI. I did not need site permissions as I interviewed my participants using the Zoom platform (Creswell, 2007). Virtual interviews have proven to be as effective as in-person interviews and, due to the impracticality of traveling to interview all my participants, I chose to use virtual interviews (Hawkins, 2018). I also used journal prompts to gain more insight in a narrative participant-driven form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, I used thorough document review to examine commonly used documents in the Christian high schools where my participants work (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ford, 2007). I had experts in the field review my interview questions and journal prompts. I secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval as my committee led me through the LU process.

### Permissions

The permission needed to obtain a list of emails from ACSI member high schools in the southeastern United States was requested from ACSI's website (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Permission to gain access to my potential participants allowed me to contact and interview them

without violating any ethical considerations. A screenshot of the approval email is shared in my IRB proposal application (See Appendix A). See Appendix B for participant consent form. Site permission forms were not needed and are not included, since I utilized the online virtual Zoom platform to interview the participants.

**Recruitment Plan**

The sample size consisted of 10 Christian High School Academic Advisors. I contacted ACSI via their website to gain access to their public database of private Christian high schools located in the southeastern United States (ACSI, 2023). I emailed the Christian high school academic advisors who work at high schools in the region with more than 100 students. The sampling method used was a convenience sampling method, which allowed me to fulfill my dissertation requirements in a timely and cost-efficient manner (Creswell, 2013). Informed consent was utilized to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

## Data Collection Plan

Qualitative data can be described as very detailed descriptions and observations that allow for deep inquiry (Patton, 2014). When participants are interviewed, capturing direct quotes help me to directly share their personal experiences, which reveal the essence of their job preparation experiences. Personal interviews are the cornerstone of the three data collection methods I used. Most importantly, personal interviews build rapport and trust (Moustakas, 1994). In his research, Patton (2014) described qualitative data as deep questioning. I applied these methods as I moved into this phase of qualitative research and data collection. Furthermore, naturalistic inquiry involves carrying research out in its natural environment, and for reality to be understood, it cannot be removed from its context or broken into smaller pieces; it must be looked at in context versus fragmented from the whole (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Phenomenology has its roots in philosophy, according to Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014). However, the ability to allow the data to lead the way intuitively is a fascinating by-product of what van Manen described as the moding and norming of meaning in real life, both before and after we observe it and reflect upon it. By way of analyzing word-for-word transcripts of each participant interview, reading and organizing their journal entries, and lastly, by examining each high school planning guide, I was able to code, build themes, and analyze the data effectively by following a van Kaam method or Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994). The three data collection approaches I used for my proposed study were interviews, journal prompts, and document analysis. Interviews allowed me to collect most of the data I analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, I believe open-ended journal prompts allowed Christian high school academic advisors to freely and openly share their thoughts in an unpressured way. Lastly, I assumed that most Christian high school academic advisors have something like what I use in my position, called *a high school planning guide*. This universal document is what I analyzed to see the similarities, differences, and themes that evolve. By using these three data collection approaches, I was able to collect qualitative data that allowed me to naturally investigate and explore the world of Christian high school academic advising.

With interviews, the interviewer must not inadvertently influence the interviewee in any way. Qualitative data is only as strong as the level of competence with which the data is analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I took great strides in the interview process to not allow my personal experience to affect the data. By way of interview questions, open-ended journal prompts, and documents, I was as invisible as possible in the data collection process so I would not impact the participants in any way. The data was collected meticulously and stored with password-protected digital files, and all printed documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office

where no one else has the key.

## Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

Interviews were conducted virtually via the Zoom platform, which provides an online face-to-face format where I was able to see and communicate with the participants. I recorded Zoom sessions and used a backup recording method via an iPad (Creswell, 2007). I used my home office, which was in a quiet and private location to meet virtually with the Christian high school academic advisors who participated in this study. I asked each question and then listened without interrupting as each participant responded. I scheduled the virtual interviews for times that work best for the participants, which included day and evening appointment times, and I was respectful of my participants' schedules by staying within the specified time limits. I used an interview protocol where I asked each question, and then I listened diligently as each participant responded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also took notes, but not in a way to distract the participants, since I was also audio recording.

### *Individual Interview Questions*

1. Please describe what led to you working in your current position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (CRQ)
2. Describe the preparation you have acquired that helped prepare you for your position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (SRQ1)
3. Describe the certifications you have acquired that helped prepare you for your position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (SRQ1)
4. Describe any mentor training that helped prepare you for your position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (SRQ1)

5. What professional development experiences have you had that prepared you to advise high school students as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (SRQ1)
6. What else would you like to add to our discussion of the experiences of Christian High School Academic Advisors in preparation (training, certifications, etc.) that have not been discussed? (SQR1)
7. Describe the daily standard operating procedures that you use as you work with high school students? (SRQ2)
8. Describe the quarterly, semester, and yearly standard operating procedures that you complete as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (SRQ3)
9. What else would you like to add to our discussion of the standard operating procedures that have not been discussed?
10. Describe your daily experiences as a Christian High School Academic Advisor? (SQ3)
11. Describe daily successful practices you use when advising high school students? (SQ3)
12. Describe daily challenges that you encounter when advising high school students? (SQ3)
13. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your daily experiences advising high school students that have not been discussed? (SQ3)

The reasoning for including the questions are as follows: questions one through six relate to the purpose and the problem, whereas questions seven through 13 relate to the conceptual framework of academic advising in private Christian high schools.

***Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan***

The data analysis for individual interviews was conducted in a quiet and confidential location (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used data analysis procedures including transcribing by listening to each interview individually, using a transcribing tool, such as Otter or Rev, reading

through the transcribed interviews to familiarize me with them, and then coding them using keywords and multi-colored themes. The reason for using this type of analysis was to stay as non-biased as possible and allow the data to lead the way (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The word *phenomena* originate from a Greek word that means *that which appears* (Williams, 2021). I coded primary data and then used a multilayered thematic approach to organize the data and looked for reoccurring themes that appeared as the coding evolved.

## Journal Prompts Data Collection Approach

The process for utilizing open-ended journal prompts involved informing each participant at the end of the interview that I was emailing them with journal prompts. I told the participants that they would have two weeks to email me back with their journal prompt answers. My personal email was password protected and was checked by no one except me. The rationale for using open-ended journal prompts assumes that participants may be more willing to share when they can answer an open-ended free-response question in narrative form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There is no pressure and a much longer time to process and think about the prompts. The journal prompts included:

1. What are the top three things that prepared you to be an academic advisor?
2. Who influenced your decision to become an academic advisor?
3. What additional training do you think you need to grow as an academic advisor?
4. What aspects of your educational degree(s) have proved to be most beneficial to you as an academic advisor?

### *Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan*

I used a data analysis plan like the one I used for individual interviews for the journal prompts. The data analysis for journal prompts was conducted by using data analysis procedures,

including reading through the typed journal prompts to become familiar with them, and then I coded them by looking for keywords that appear consistently and use different colors to easily organize the data into color-coded themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The reason for using this type of analysis is to stay as non-biased as possible and allow the data to lead the way as I read the biographical narratives in the journal prompt answers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). By coding the primary data from the journal prompts and then building themes that appear, the phenomena of Christian high school academic advising came into a clearer focus. A multilayered thematic approach was used to organize the data and look for reoccurring themes as they appeared via the systematic coding process (Williams, 2021).

## Document Analysis Data Collection Approach

The process for document analysis included examining the primary document that the participants use when advising their high school students. At my school, this document is called the high school planning guide. We use it as a resource to guide and advise our students on their high school journey. The rationale for using the participants' high school planning guide is to gain access to the approach that each participant uses, as he or she helps students, answers questions, and discovers commonalities and differences among the high school planning guides (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although every high school is different, I assumed there must be similarities and commonalities in the documents that Christian High School Academic Advisors use in their daily practices. By examining this document, relevant themes emerged that added to the insights and knowledge gained.

### *Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan*

Like the data analysis plan for individual interviews and journal prompts, the documents were analyzed using a multilayered thematic approach so that the themes emerged naturally

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Williams, 2021). I read through each document and organized them based on similarities and differences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I then coded them using keywords and colors to streamline the coding process. The primary reason for using this type of multilayered thematic analysis was to stay as non-biased as possible and allow the data to lead the way so that personal experience and biases cannot corrupt the data (Moustakas, 1994).

### Data Synthesis

The three data collection approaches I used for my proposed study were individual interviews, journal prompts, and document analysis. To synthesize the data derived from individual interviews, journal prompts, and document reviews, the themes revealed from all three data analysis methods were merged so that a single set of themes emerged from all three methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Multilayered thematic analysis, color coding, and keyword coding allowed all the data analysis methods to be represented equally and the data to be synthesized properly (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Williams, 2021). I coded the data manually and merged the themes that emerged using a data tracking tool, such as Microsoft Excel (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). I had three different Microsoft Excel worksheets that were combined into a fourth worksheet that contains all the overarching themes. From this vantage point, I described and articulated the findings in written form qualitatively.

## Trustworthiness

In this section on trustworthiness, I described the measures I took to make sure the research study was completed with rigor, validity, reliability, and objectivity. These terms are often used to measure trustworthiness in quantitative research studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I refrained from personal influence and remained objective in individual interviews. I also repeated the procedures consistently and without variation. Whether or not I achieved

trustworthiness is up to my readers as a subjective measure of certain criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

If this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study on understanding the daily routines, duties, and responsibilities of Christian high school academic advisors is credible, it can accurately reflect the phenomena associated with their preparation practices, daily realities, and daily activities. The goal was for the perceptions of the participants to accurately describe the phenomena in question as closely as possible so that credibility is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I achieved credibility by way of peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checking.

**Transferability**

In the world of academic research, the ability to apply the research findings to other populations or contexts is called *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although I only interviewed Christian high school academic advisors, my curious mind thinks the research findings will be transferable to non-Christian high school academic advisors as well. The context of high school would be the determining factor as opposed to the religious affiliation of the high schools or the backgrounds of the academic advisors. High school students need certain things from their academic advisors, and by way of interviews, open-ended journal prompts, and document review, I suspect that the results are transferable to high school academic advisors in general.

**Dependability**

Dependability shows us that the results are consistent enough to be repeated by other researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I adequately described my procedures and how I obtained the data from Christian high school academic advisors so that others can replicate the process in

the future to build upon my research findings. By way of an inquiry audit, my dissertation committee thoroughly reviewed my procedures and recommended any edits or additions needed to strengthen my research process.

**Confirmability**

Although I am very interested in the phenomena of Christian high school academic advisors and what they do each day, I maintained a degree of neutrality so that the findings are not skewed by the respondents or my biases. This degree of neutrality is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and it is needed to mitigate the amount of research bias due to personal motivation and/or vested interest in the subject matter. The research findings could change the course of my future, but I pledged to remain neutral and allow the research to speak for itself. I did this by creating an audit trail, using triangulation, and remaining as reflexive as possible. Reflexivity involves systematically completing the research so that, as the researcher, I do not affect the research in any way (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). I always remained neutral so not to impact the results.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations and implications of the research study were approved by the IRB and a screenshot of the consent form agreement was uploaded to my IRB application. See Appendix A for IRB approval letter and Appendix B for Informed Consent letter. Other ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, informing them that the study is completely voluntary, and that they may withdraw at any time. Furthermore, the participants' confidentiality was protected by using site and participant pseudonyms. The electronic and physical data was stored securely and will be stored for three years in a password-locked electronic format and a locked file cabinet in my home office (The Trustees of Princeton

University, 2023). After three years, the physical data and electronic data will be destroyed per the Liberty University IRB specifications. The risks to participants are minimal if the data is stored and destroyed securely upon the three-year mark post-completion of the research study. However, the benefits to the participants are many. In examining academic advising in private Christian high schools, the goal is that more pertinent data and information can help academic advisers do what they do better by making changes and improving processes for Christian high school students embarking on their post-secondary academic pursuits.

## Summary

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study design was used to examine the lived experiences and understand the phenomena involved in Christian high school academic advising. Using a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study design allowed me to examine the shared experiences and phenomena associated with the position of a Christian high school academic advisor (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas,1994). This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study looked at and examine the lived experiences of academic advisors in private Christian high schools in hopes of capturing the essence of a Christian high school academic advisor's experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). I used interviews, open-ended journal prompts, and document reviews to gather qualitative data. I predicted that evolving themes would potentially reveal the lack of consistent preparation that exists at the high school level of academic advising in Christian schools. The current research reveals a gap that allows me to contribute to this field of research and impact students, families, teachers, and administrators, but most of all, give Christian high school academic advisors a voice.

# CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

## Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors needed to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States. This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and findings. Participant descriptions are included, as well as the data in the form of narrative themes. Next, charts and tables that display the data presented by theme are explained. The outlier data is presented and explained. Lastly, the research question responses from the interview questions and the journal prompts are included to complete this chapter. A sample interview transcript can be viewed in Appendix C. A sample email journal prompt can be viewed in Appendix D.

## Participants

Pseudonyms were used to protect participant confidentiality. The following is a description of each participant. I was successful in soliciting participants who are academic advisors from ACSI certified Christian high schools located in the southeastern U.S. I emailed my future participants to ask for their willingness to help. Three potential participants let me know by email that they did not meet the requirements due to not having three years of experience.

### Gayle

Gayle had been an academic advisor for five years. She worked with high school students but has worked with college students in the past. She had a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Human Services. She wanted to continue in her profession and maybe even get her terminal degree in education one day. She advised approximately 210 students each year.

**Jolene**

Jolene had been an academic advisor for nine years. She worked with high school students as an academic advisor, but she also taught one class each day at her high school. She had a bachelor's degree in secondary education with a concentration in history, a master's degree in history, and a doctorate in Educational Leadership. She advises approximately 300 students each year.

**Susan**

Susan had been an academic advisor for four years. She worked with high school students for half the day and taught three classes during the other half of the day – psychology, sociology, and religion. She just recently finished her Reading Specialist master's degree. She advised approximately 150 students each year.

**Mark**

Mark had been an academic advisor for five years at his Christian high school. He was also the high school assistant principal. He had a bachelor's degree in business, a master's degree in education, and a master's degree in business. He advised around 130 students each year.

**Melanie**

Melanie had been an academic advisor for four years at her Christian high school. She also worked in another state in a similar capacity as an assistant academic advisor for four years. She had a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in school counseling. She also had a certificate from the National School Counselor Associate. She advised around 180 students each year.

**Kate**

Kate had been an academic advisor for six years at her Christian high school. She worked as an English teacher prior to becoming the academic advisor at the same school. She had a bachelor's degree in secondary education English and a master's degree in English. She advised around 220 students each year. She also taught a daily writing class.

**Samantha**

Samantha had been an academic advisor for eight years at her Christian high school. She worked as a high school teacher prior to becoming the academic advisor at her high school. She had bachelor's degrees in political science and economics. She advised approximately 260 students each year. She had an assistant who helped her, and she held a Professional Certificate in College Admissions Counseling.

**Jordan**

Jordan had been an academic advisor at her high school for seven years. Prior to her current position, she taught history in the public school system for 30 years. When she retired, she was recruited by her current high school principal to work as the academic advisor in her current position. Jordan had a bachelor's degree in history and a minor in education. She advised approximately 160 students each year.

**Ann**

Ann had been an academic advisor at her high school for three years. She had a master's degree in theological studies. Prior to becoming an academic advisor three years ago (from the time of this study), she taught Bible in several different Christian high schools. She reached out to her administrator to ask about growth and development, and he recommended she apply for the academic advisor opening. She also taught a psychology course. She advised approximately 220 high school students per year.

**Carol**

Carol had been an academic advisor at her high school for three years. She had a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She applied for the academic advisor position after a co-worker recommended that she would be good at it. She advised approximately 300 students each year.

**Table 1**

*Academic Advisor Participants*

| Academic Advisor Participant | Years in Profession | Highest Degree Earned | Degree Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gayle | 5 | Masters | Human Services |
| Jolene | 9 | Doctorate | Educational Leadership |
| Susan | 4 | Masters | Reading Specialist |
| Mark | 5 | Masters and MBA | Education and Business |
| Melanie | 4 | Masters | School Counseling |
| Kate | 6 | Masters | English |
| Samantha | 5 | Bachelors | Marketing |
| Jordan | 7 | Bachelors | History, minor Education |
| Ann | 3 | Masters | Theological Studies |
| Carol | 3 | Bachelors | Elementary Education |

**Table 2**

*Academic Advisor Participants Mentoring and Participation*

| Academic Advisor Participant | Mentored by an Academic Advisor? | Who Influenced Decision to be an Academic Advisor? | Certification Required other than ACSI? | Certificate Held by Choice? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gayle | No | Former Teacher | No | No |
| Jolene | No | God | No | No |
| Susan | Yes | Co-worker | No | No |
| Mark | No | Principal | No | No |
| Melanie | No | God | No | American School Counselor Association |
| Kate | No | Friend | No | No |
| Samantha | Yes | Administrator | No | Professional Certificate in College Admissions Counseling |
| Jordan | Yes | Principal | No | No |
| Ann | No | Administrator | No | No |
| Carol | No | Co-worker | No | No |

## Results

A thorough examination of the data collected from Christian high school academic advisors revealed three themes with relevant sub-themes. Theme one involved the lack of mentoring and job specific preparation that Christian academic advisors wished they had. All participants in this cohort, but one, did not feel adequately prepared to do their jobs most days. Several even shared that they learned on the job and did the best they could to problem solve each day. Theme two revealed that the most important thing academic advisors at Christian high schools do is build relationships with their students. This requires time and intentionality. Theme three emerged as academic advisors discussed their responsibilities. Simply said, there is not enough time in the day to accomplish all the tasks needing attention. Along with this theme, academic advisors shared that they wear too many hats and are responsible for too many things.

**Table 3**

*Themes & Subthemes*

| Theme | Subtheme 1 | Subtheme 2 | Subtheme 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of Preparation | Mentoring | Job Specific Training | On-the-Job Training |
| Not Enough Time in the Day | Wearing too Many Hats | Responsible for too many things | |
| Building Relationships with Students | Intentionality | Time to get to Know Students | |

## Lack of Preparation

Throughout the interviews and journal prompts, all participants felt as if they were not adequately prepared to perform their job well. Many participants shared that they are still learning as they go, and every day brings new surprises. None of the participants were required to have any licensing or certification as an academic advisor other than to be certified by the ACSI by their member schools (Table 2). Only two participants had earned and maintained certificates in some relevant academic advising genre, Melanie and Samantha (Table 2). Regarding mentoring, only three participants shared that they were mentored by the prior person in their position, or another person, to be an academic advisor (Table 1). Most learned on the job as they went and did not have a formal mentoring relationship. Additionally, one participant had a terminal doctoral degree, seven had master's degrees, and two had bachelor's degrees only (Table 1). Of the majors represented, they were various in type and representation: Human

Services, Educational Leadership, Reading Specialist, Education and Business, School Counseling, English, Political Science and Economics, History (minor Education), and Elementary Education. Mentoring, job specific preparation, and on the job training experiences were codes that were examined and developed into three sub-themes. Each of these sub-themes were coded in every interview and most of the journal prompt submissions.

### *Lack of Mentoring*

The codes *mentor* and *mentoring* made up this sub-theme. Only three participants shared that they were mentored by the former academic advisor or another person. Mentoring is time intensive, and, according to most of the participants, did not happen formally or informally. When asked to describe any mentor training that helped her prepare for her position as a high school academic advisor, she quipped, "I learned from the school of hard knocks." However, Jordan was mentored by the "previous advisor for about three months before she officially retired."

### *Lack of Job Specific Preparation*

Participants were asked about job specific preparation, and, although most shared various examples, the most common theme revolved around God leading them to their positions. Of the 10 participants, eight shared that they sensed God preparing them for the role of a Christian academic advisor more than anything else. The job "fell in my lap" and was based on "the need of the moment" according to Mark. Kate did share that she had "a certificate in writing instruction which helped me help students write college essays." Two participants, Jordan and Jolene, shared that coaching sports teams helped them prepare for building relationships with students.

### *Lack of On-the-Job Training Experiences*

When asked about on the job training, all participants shared that they learned every day on the job and that they would start with a plan, but often the plan was interrupted by the emergent needs of the day. As Mark shared, “I may plan to watch a seminar or other online training, but the emergent needs of the day get in the way.” Other than the required professional development hours, most participants do not complete other trainings regularly. When asked about her on the job training, Jolene laughed and then added, “None. The only on the job training experiences I got were by doing the job and learning each day by researching and googling questions I had.” Another participant, Melanie, shared this sentiment and revealed that she “spends a lot of time researching questions and problem solving each day.”

**Not Enough Time in the Day**

Theme two was mentioned by all participants who were interviewed. All participants shared that they were often interrupted by emergency situations that were time-consuming. In addition to not having enough time to complete daily tasks, all participants shared that they took work home and worked on the weekends. Only two participants shared that they met with each student or family every year to discuss academic advising topics, such as scheduling, college planning, among others. Most participants shared that they offered meeting times and only met with those students who requested to meet. Evidence of not enough time in the day appeared across all interviews and was mentioned in several journal prompts. The sub-themes, wearing too many hats and being responsible for too many things, appeared in all interviews as well. The codes time, tasks, and responsibility appeared a total of 87 times in the interviews and journal prompts. These three codes helped form theme one – not enough time in the day.

***Wearing too Many Hats***

The codes time and tasks made up this sub-theme. Jordan shared that she felt like, “I am

jumping from role to role trying to meet the needs of students all day." Kate said, "When I'm in the classroom teaching, I'm thinking about all the other things I have to get done for the day." Melanie shared that often "tasks take priority over people" and "emergency situations that have to be dealt with immediately" consume the hours in her school days. In essence, all participants had roles other than just advising students regarding academics.

### *Responsible for too Many Things*

The code responsibility was examined for this sub-theme. All participants felt they were responsible for things other than their primary responsibility as academic advisor. I also looked at the other hats the participants wore for their respective schools. Only one of the participants was strictly an academic advisor, Samantha. All other participants had multiple duties, job titles, and/or responsibilities. Mark shared that as assistant high school principal and academic advisor, he struggled "to separate the advising role from the administrative role. Often discipline and other behavior related emergencies come first." Jolene admitted that she "starts the day with a plan, but almost every day is like trying to drink out of a firehose." Unfortunately, Susan shared that "some students fall through the cracks because tasks and duties take over."

## Building Relationships with Students

Theme two revealed that the most important thing academic advisors at Christian high schools do is build relationships with their students. This requires time and intentionality, which are the sub-themes. When asked about daily successful practices, Gayle said, "building rapport and relationships with my students is the most important thing I do each day. That might look like going to a basketball game or writing a thank you note, but it is critical." Samantha noted that she tries "to call every student by name, and that is not always easy to do. I make it a daily practice." The codes relationships, meetings, and students appeared 101 times across the

interviews and journal prompts.

### *Intentionality*

Seven of the participants shared that being intentional in their relationships with their students was very important to them. Jolene shared with enthusiasm that "daily interactions with students is key to being successful as an academic advisor." Additionally, Melanie added that even if it meant she had to "work from home" in the evenings, she would take the time to "minister to students' needs" by being intentional and help them reach their academic goals and milestones. Susan shared that she went out of her way to "learn each student's name."

### *Time to Get to Know Students*

All participants shared that taking the time to get to know their students was one of the most important things they did. Jordan added by sharing that "students know when you really care about them or do not care about them" and "kids want to be seen and know they have value." When asked about daily successful practices, Susan shared that she knew she had a successful day if she had "taken the time to get to know one student better." All participants discussed taking time to get to know students in one way or another as one of their priorities and successful practices.

## Outlier Data and Findings

The first unexpected finding or outlier that I encountered was that all but one of the participants started their current jobs with no academic advising experience. Most were former teachers, not advisors, who happened to land in the position of academic advisor or their administrators hand-picked to fill the role as academic advisor. The second unexpected finding or outlier that I encountered was that only three academic advisors used a high school planning guide or form to help their students as they plan for high school and beyond.

### *Former Teachers Become Advisors*

Looking at all participants, only one had a degree in the counseling or advising field. The participant who had a master's degree in School Counseling was Melanie. All other participants had degrees representing various other fields including Human Services, Educational Leadership, Reading Specialist, Education, Business, English, Political Science, Economics, History (minor Education), and Theological Studies. Only Melanie started her current position as an academic advisor at a Christian high school with academic advising experience at a previous school. All other participants were in a teaching or administrative capacity prior to their current positions. Four participants mentioned the word "need," and they were willing to fill a need when asked by their administrators.

### *Lack of High School Planning Guide*

Going into this study, I assumed all participants would use a high school planning guide or something like a degree completion plan to help students track their high school journey and into college. I was surprised when only two academic advisors were able to share a form of this nature (Appendix D). What I discovered was that the remaining participants used online tools via their school websites to help their students plan for high school and beyond. This finding makes sense in light of the technology available to students. However, Jordan shared that even though she used online resources, she still got many questions daily via email that "could be easily answered by a form or sheet listing out the graduation requirements for each student." Then she sighed and said, "That would require more meetings, and I don't have time for that!"

## Research Question Responses

For this research study, the central research question inquires about the preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors. There are two sub-questions that discuss

the educational experiences and on the job training experiences of Christian high school academic advisors. In this section, these questions have been answered as a result of working through and examining the data collected.

**Central Research Question**

What are the job preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses to help their students develop the highest academic and future potential? The participants' perspective is that they work hard every day and try to build relationships with all of their students, but most do not feel adequately prepared to mentor and advise high school students. Several went as far as to say they know they need more training, but they do not have time due to being responsible for too many things and wearing too many hats. Susan said she used "Google as her advisor so I can help my students and answer their questions." Another participant, Jolene, also admitted to using Google daily to help her answer questions for students when she did not feel adequately prepared to advise her students. Only one participant, Samantha, felt adequately prepared to advise high school students. In examining the data, I found that she was the only participant who was strictly an academic advisor with no other job roles, she had an assistant who helped with her student load, and she was one of the two participants who held a Professional Certificate in College Admissions Counseling.

**Sub-Question One**

What are the educational experiences, both degree type and level, of Christian high school academic advisors who help students reach their highest academic and future potential? The participants' backgrounds and preparation experiences were varied and diverse. All participants had at least a bachelor's degree, with most holding master's degrees. Only one

participant had a terminal degree. The participant who had a master's in School Counseling was Melanie. All other participants had degrees representing various other fields, including: Human Services, Educational Leadership, Reading Specialist, Education, Business, English, Political Science, Economics, and History (minor Education). One participant, Samantha, mentioned going back to school to earn her master's degree, but that "at the end of the day, I'm too tired to even think about taking that huge task on."

**Sub-Question Two**

What are the on-the-job training experiences Christian high school academic advisors or certifications required to become a Christian high school academic advisor who helps your students reach their highest academic and future potential? The participants' perspective was that there are few on-the-job preparation experiences due to the lack of time available to focus on specific training. Most participants cited emails, paperwork, and meeting with and building relationships with students as the three tasks that take up most of their time. These tasks leave little time for anything else, as all participants shared they often work at home during the evenings and weekends. All participants shared that taking the time to get to know their students was one of the most important things they do, and this requires them to be intentional, which of course requires more time. Mark shared that he is a "lifelong learner and [he] wants to learn more, but there's not enough time in the day." Aside from required professional development training, only one participant was able to share an optional advising specific on-the-job training experience in the past year. Only two participants held certifications in their fields, Melanie and Samantha.

## Summary

The job preparation experiences, the educational experiences, both degree type and level, and the on-the-job training experiences of Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses to help their students develop the highest academic and future potential have been examined in the previous paragraphs of chapter four. The significant themes discovered were the lack of preparation, including mentoring, job specific training, and on-the-job training; not enough time in the day for academic advisors to do their jobs well due to other responsibilities and dual roles; and building relationships with students is time consuming and requires intentionality, but it is necessary for academic advisors to feel as if they have done their jobs well. A significant finding is that only one participant, Samantha, felt adequately prepared to advise high school students. She was the only participant who was strictly an academic advisor with no other job roles. She had an assistant who helped with her student load, and she was one of the two participants who held an academic advising specific certificate, which is in Professional Certificate in College Admissions Counseling.

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

## Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors needed to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States. The preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors is defined as their previous education, experience, and training; educational background; and degree level and type of degree obtained. By way of using interviews, open-ended journal prompts, and examining that relevant data, themes emerged to help understand how individuals can prepare to become Christian high school academic advisors who can best help and advise their students. The themes are used to discuss the following in this chapter: interpretation of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

## Discussion

The purpose of the discussion section is to critically discuss the findings mined from the data into developed and relevant themes. The interpretations of findings are supported with empirical and theoretical sources in addition to evidence found via the research. Next, any implications for policy and practice are shared. Additionally, theoretical and empirical implications are discussed prior to examining any limitations and delimitations. Lastly, recommendations for future research are shared.

As someone who has worked in this field for seven years, at the time of this study, I have met many other academic advisors from other Christian schools. My job is very rewarding, but it

is also very demanding. I wear many hats, work from home at night and on the weekends, and never feel like I have enough time to get to truly know my students. My personal experiences led to the development of the following problem statement: the problem is that Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses for their students are not adequately prepared to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential. The purpose of the research was to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors. The findings of this research study aligned with my initial thoughts about the preparation experiences of Christian academic advisors.

After examining the interviews and journal prompts, I discovered that only one of my participants had a degree in School Counseling and only two participants had certifications in School Counseling or Advising. Only one participant felt as if he or she was adequately prepared to perform his or her daily, weekly, and monthly duties. Furthermore, only three participants were mentored in their current positions by the previous academic advisor. Lastly, all participants shared that getting to know their students better was a top priority, and, unfortunately, they did not have enough time to get to know their students due to their many roles and responsibilities.

Based on what I know personally and what the data points revealed, my initial thoughts were confirmed. Most Christian high school academic advisors are not adequately prepared to help their students develop their highest academic and future potential. However, my perspective has shifted from frustration to hope. Every participant shared that the most important daily responsibility they have is building relationships with their students so they can better help them reach their fullest and highest academic and future potential. This is a benevolent and God-

honoring goal that I also share. There has to be a way or path forward to help Christian academic advisors be better prepared to reach this worthy goal while still accomplishing their daily responsibilities.

**Summary of Thematic Findings**

The job preparation experiences, the educational experiences, both degree type and level, and the on-the-job training experiences of Christian high school academic advisors who explore life and career goals, choose programs and courses, and schedule courses to help their students develop the highest academic and future potential were examined by way of interviews and journal prompts. There were three significant themes discovered during examination of the research data (Table 3). The first theme discovered was Lack of Preparation with three sub-themes: lack of mentoring, lack of job specific training, and lack of on-the-job training. The second theme found was Not Enough Time in the Day for academic advisors to do their jobs well due to other responsibilities and dual roles with two sub-themes, including wearing too many hats and responsibility for too many things. The third and final theme discovered was Building Relationships with Students with two sub-themes: time consuming and requires intentionality, but it is necessary for academic advisors to feel as if they have done their jobs well.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

Based on the research findings, implications for future policy and best practices are discussed in the following sections. Specific recommendations for administrators and academic advisors are shared based on the research themes and findings of academic advisors in Christian high schools not feeling adequately prepared to do their daily jobs. Furthermore, all but one of the participants wore other hats and performed other duties as classroom teachers or assistant

principals, leading to less time to adequately perform well in their roles as Christian high school academic advisors. This would also account for the themes of wearing too many hats and not enough time in the day to perform their job functions.

### *Implications for Policy*

The main implication for policy could be a requirement for all academic advisors in Christian high school settings to earn or be awarded a certificate because of their completion of a required course or class. This requirement could also be fulfilled based upon their degree in School Counseling, as is the case with participant Melanie. As a requirement from a higher-level organization, such as a national accrediting agency, this policy change could help academic advisors obtain the extra training they reported they do not possess and would like to obtain. The certificate in School Counseling could also streamline the process and make academic advisors more prepared in their daily roles.

### *Implications for Practice*

Implications for practice discovered by way examining the data may include reducing the number of roles academic advisors in Christian schools perform, streamlining the process of what an academic advisor does each day, and requiring mentoring, when possible, for academic advisors assuming the role for the first time. While wearing too many hats or performing too many job duties is an important finding for the participants in this study, that may not be the case for all academic advisors in Christian high schools. However, if the role of an academic advisor were to be more clearly defined, and if the daily processes and standard operating procedures could be streamlined, then maybe academic advisors in Christian high schools would have more time to build relationships with their students, which all of the participants in this study shared as very important. The possibility of a mentoring relationship may be beneficial to reduce the

learning curve for academic advisors in their first months on the job. Lastly, while the participants in this study thought mentoring would be beneficial, that may not be the same desire or need for all academic advisors in Christian high schools.

## Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. The found themes are compared with O'Banion's theoretical framework and related literature (1972). Implications for future use and contributions to the field of academic advising are discussed and evaluated.

### *Empirical Implications*

The work an academic advisor does is paramount, and maybe even the most important function in the world of student engagement and affairs (Larson et al., 2018; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Considering the importance of academic advising, my research study examined concerns about adequate preparation for Christian high school academic advising and underdeveloped practices used by well-meaning but ill-prepared advisors.

**Universal Model of High School Academic Advising.** Previous research has revealed the need for a universal model of high school academic advising (Gordon et al., 2008; Larson et al., 2018). My research confirmed the need for a model that details the preparation needed for Christian high school academic advisors. All participants but one shared that they felt ill-prepared for their roles as an academic advisor. Several mentioned that they used Google as their guide when they had questions, and another said she had attended the school of hard knocks to get to where she was in her current role as an academic advisor. *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook*, written by Gordon et al. (2008), does not include high school academic advising, further revealing the need for a landmark or seminal handbook for Christian

high school academic advising. Lastly, the research also revealed that the academic backgrounds of academic advisors vary and are not consistent in major, preparation, experience, or practice, (Hutson, 2013; McGill, 2018). My research aligned with this finding in the current research. This may contribute to the inconsistencies in the field of Christian high school academic advising, but more research is needed in this area.

**Establishing Strategic Roles and Responsibilities.** According to current research, an effective model for academic advisors would include three components that high school academic advisors would rely upon: informational and knowledge based, built upon relationships between advisers and their students and families, and being able to conceptualize or frame the academic processes for their students from high school to the post-secondary level. Based on my research findings, one aspect that was not mentioned in previous research was the amount of time that Christian academic advisors devote to their daily standard operating procedures. I would add a fourth component to this potentially effective model: establishing strategic roles and responsibilities so that Christian academic advisors do not wear too many hats at once, preventing them from having the time to do their academic advising duties well.

**The Need for Strong and Supportive Relationships.** Another finding corroborated by previous research was the importance of relationship and rapport building. Once students know they truly feel heard and that they have the potential needed to succeed, then they can work the plan they developed with their academic advisor (Brown, 2008; King, 2000). The need for strong and supportive relationships between academic advisors and their students is evident in the research (Baird, 2020; Drake, 2011; O'Banion, 2012; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). More so, researchers have highlighted and detailed the need for strong relationships between students, families, and academic advisors (Drake, 2011; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; Zarges, 2018). O'Banion

(2012) proposed that academic advisors believe that all their students, even the ones who are apathetic about their educational futures and goals have potential, worth, value, and dignity. My research corroborated these research findings, with all participants reporting that building and growing relationships with students was their most important daily task.

**Wear One Hat and Wear it Well.** However, building relationships takes time and intentionality, and my research revealed time is one resource Christian academic advisors do not have in abundance. One area where my research study diverged from the previous research involved Chrisitan high school academic advisors wearing too many hats, and therefore, not having enough time in the day to finish required tasks, working in the evenings or on the weekends. This novel finding emerged as I gathered my interview data, and it may be specific to small private Chrisitan high schools where employees are expected to wear many hats. I cautiously wonder if this finding would replicate in studies where the participants work for public schools where academic advisors only wear one hat.

### *Theoretical Implications*

Academic advising is a guided relational process that has several orderly components, which include looking at and deciding upon specific life goals, examining career goals, deciding upon an academic program or major, choosing classes specific to the chosen major of study, and then scheduling those classes to meet the requirements for timely degree completion and graduation (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012). The role of an academic advisor includes these practices outlined by O'Banion and others that help him or her meet the needs of their student population. My research findings align with the conceptual framework O'Banion created (1972), in that, the participants all agreed that academic advising is a critically important relationship where advisors help their students reach their academic goals in high school and beyond.

However, the five components explained in O'Banion's college academic advising model do not cover all the responsibilities of academic advisors, the relationships academic advisors represent and build with their students, and the amount of time needed to do a thorough job (O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2012). Regarding the theoretical framework, my research study found that Christian high school academic advisors may not have the preparation they would like, but in regard to the relational aspect of academic advising, they cited this as the most important thing they do. Students are not checklists to be completed. They have needs, goals, and dreams and partner with their academic advisors to reach those goals within a conceptual framework very similar to the one proposed by O'Banion (1972). The ephemeral question remains: how does one best prepare to become an academic advisor? O'Banion's conceptual framework does not answer this question. My research study participants revealed the gap in preparation regarding a streamlined process or required degree and/or certification program. Future research could focus on filling in this gap to see what the best preparation path would be for future Christian high school academic advisors.

## Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations, or potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled, and delimitations, or purposeful decisions made that define the boundaries of the study, will be discussed in this section. Additionally, the rationale for limiting the scope and focus of the study is examined.

### *Limitations*

The limitations or potential weaknesses of this study that were beyond my control included gender and ethnicity of the participants, geographical location, and the use of convenience sampling strategy. All participants but one were females, and all participants to the

best of my knowledge were Caucasian. The limiting nature of the gender and ethnicity may create participant bias that would impact the ability to generalize the results to the population of Christian academic advisors at large. The geographical location of my study included the southeastern US (Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina), which may impact the generalizability of the results of this study to other regions in the U.S. and world.

### *Delimitations*

The delimitations, or decisions I made that defined the boundaries of the study, include using a transcendental phenomenological study over a more in-depth case study, using a convenience sampling strategy, and using only Christian high school academic advisors. By using a transcendental phenomenological study over a case study, I chose to look at the phenomena of preparation of Christian academic advisors. If I had used a case study, I would have been able to take a deep dive into the life of someone who is a Christian academic advisor and learn the nuances of his or her preparation experiences. This type of study could have provided more insight or understanding into why a Christian academic advisor is not adequately prepared to advise Christian high school students. With the transcendental phenomenological approach, I was limited to less in-depth information, but I acquired more data points about more participants in general.

Since I chose to use a convenience sampling strategy, I was not able to randomly select the participants. They were chosen based upon convenience of scheduling interviews and were the participants who replied back to my initial email. Again, this delimitation affects the generalizability of the study results. Lastly, by choosing to use only Christian high school academic advisors, I limited the scope of this study to only a small percentage of high school academic advisors as a whole. By limiting my participant pool, this delimitation inhibits

generalization to the entire population of high school and college academic advisors in the US and beyond.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In consideration of this study's findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, there are several recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is using a randomized participant pool instead of convenience sampling to see if the findings of my research study can be generalized to the overall population of Christian high school academic advisors all over the U.S. This recommendation for future research would include more males and non-Caucasian participants to diversify the participant population and make it more like real life, which would increase the possibility of generalization to population being studied. Surveys or questionnaires could be used by future researchers to streamline the process and gather relevant data. Furthermore, it would be interesting to expand the research focus and participant pool to public high schools to see if the academic advisors. Or often called *guidance counselors,* are required to have specific preparation that academic advisors in private Christian high schools do not have.

Another recommendation for future research would be to focus on the relationships of the Christian academic advisor and their students, since the participants in this study all shared that cultivating and building relationships is the most important part of their job. One way to explore this research area would be to use interviews or focus groups with Christian academic advisors and their students. Lastly, mentoring seemed to be a key missing component in helping Christian academic advisors learn their craft. More research can be done in this area of mentoring to see the impact it has in the world of Christian academic advising. This could be explored using a case study where a researcher could dig deeper into the essence of the lived experience of

mentoring and the nuances that foster learning.

## Conclusion

In this research study, I looked at the preparation experiences of Christian high school advisors using the O'Banion conceptual framework of academic advising (1972). The O'Banion conceptual framework of academic advising was first described over 50 years ago. Most of the current research since O'Banion's seminal study in academic advising is related to college academic advising versus high school academic advising (Baird, 2020; O'Banion, 1972; O'Banion, 2009; O'Banion, 2012). To examine the proposed problem that Christian high school academic advisors are not adequately prepared to advise their students and help them develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States, I used a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study with 10 participants. Upon examining the data from the interviews, journal prompts, and planning guides, I developed the following themes and subthemes: lack of preparation (lack of mentoring, lack of job specific training, and lack of on-the-job training); not enough time in the day for academic advisors to do their jobs well due to other responsibilities (wearing too many hats and responsibility for too many things); building relationships with students (time consuming and requires intentionality). In summary, all participants shared that the most important part of their job is building relationships with their students. Additionally, two significant take aways from this research study include the finding that only one study participant had a degree in academic advising or counseling and only one participant was strictly an academic advisor with no other roles or hats to wear. Christian high school academic advisors play integral roles in the successful voyages their students embark on during and after high school, but they are limited in their potential due to their educational backgrounds and other non-academic advising

responsibilities they carry.

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**APPENDIX A**
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 18, 2023

Lizzie Branch
Patricia Ferrin

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-908 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING THE REQUIRED PREPARATION EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS TO HELP CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DEVELOP THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC AND FUTURE POTENTIAL

Dear Lizzie Branch, Patricia Ferrin,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information**

**sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.**

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**
*Administrative Chair*
**Research Ethics Office**

## APPENDIX B

## INFORMED CONSENT

# Consent

**Title of the Project:** A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING THE REQUIRED PREPARATION EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS TO HELP CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DEVELOP THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC AND FUTURE POTENTIAL
**Principal Investigator:** Lizzie Branch, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must have three or more years of experience in academic advising in Christian high schools and must also advise a minimum of 100 Christian high school students each school year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the required preparation experiences of Christian high school academic advisors so they can help their students develop their highest academic and future potential at private Christian high schools in the southeastern region of the United States.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a one-on-one virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Answer via email four (4) journal prompts. This should take no longer than 20 to 25 minutes.
3. Share a digital copy of your high school academic advising planning guide with me. This should take approximately five (5) minutes.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include understanding and examining the training, preparation, and education needed as Christian high school academic advisers which will help lessen the research gap. The research benefits and findings will identify what Christian high school academic advisors do every day and how they have prepared for success in their chosen occupations.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

**How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Lizzie Branch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Patricia Ferrin, at [redacted].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

# APPENDIX C

## SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEWS

Researcher
Good morning. Please describe what led you to working in your current position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor.

Participant
I think opportunity and administration, as well as a desire to help students as they transition from one educational level to another. It's important it's good to see kind of the end result of how students have developed.

Researcher
Describe the preparation you have acquired that helped you prepare for your position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor.

Participant
Probably teaching for years. Middle School students are often worried about high school. So even in teaching eighth grade it's has a lot of comparisons to seniors who are also kind of searching for that next step.

Researcher
Describe the certifications you have acquired that helped prepare you for your position as a Christian High School Academic Advisor.

Participant
I've been licensed by the Christian Schools Association, as well as currently working on the ACSI accreditation. I've done a partial master's and a bachelor's in education.

Researcher
Very good. Describe any mentor training that helped prepare you for your position as a Christian high school academic advisor.

Participant
I think mentors are the probably the biggest impact on my training. I've had a mentor teacher unofficially or officially every year and they seem to put the practical information that classes talk about into real life situations. But, I did not have any mentor training from an academic advisor.

Researcher
Good. What professional development experiences have you had that prepares you to advise high school students as an advisor?

Participant

Only the ones required by ACSI, but I think walking through the process by watching videos on things like the Common App is important. It helps me see it how the students see it and how they feel about applications is helpful. I think going to professional development is good but knowing about the kind of key issues currently that are happening in colleges is also vital.

Researcher
Very good. What else would you like to add to our discussion of the experiences of Christian high school academic advisors in preparation training certifications that we have not discussed?

Participant
I guess I'm looking at other schools. I think the job descriptions can vary greatly between schools so it would be maybe helpful to kind of have schools have a general explanation of what the job entails because it can go anywhere from counseling students with problems to dealing with people with academic questions like how to fill out an application, contact colleges. It's a great difference in job descriptions out there.

Researcher
Describe the daily standard operating procedures that you use as you work with high school students. What do you do on a daily basis that you can repeat?

Participant
I think communication is key. So I would you know check emails, make sure you're set up for meetings. If you have meetings scheduled, printing out transcripts and looking at any information or data that you have on the student, because meetings go quickly and streamline and then also making sure that you're communicating with the parents, even though they're in high school they still need that second layer, I believe of accountability. They're not really adults yet.

Researcher
Describe the quarterly semester and yearly standard operating procedures that you complete as a high school advisor. What do you do on a quarterly basis or yearly basis?

Participant
For quarterly yes, we're looking at report cards grades. We also look at transcripts, make sure everybody is set up for graduations, especially paying closer attention to our seniors. But also looking at those credits numbers and making sure students are prepped for the following year. We have a lot of meetings with course request and interest. And then as needed, probably we deal more on studying helps and tips on surviving high school.

Researcher
I understand. What else would you like to add to our discussion on the standard operating procedures that have not been discussed?

Participant
I think streamlining processes and writing them down helps and having a calendar or schedule of what needs to be done. monthly, weekly daily is vital for that organization.

Researcher
Okay. Describe your daily experiences as a high school academic advisor?

Participant
Well, I try to check my email first thing. Then I help the front desk with tardies. I have two class periods to work on transcripts and meet with students. Then I teach 3 classes psychology, AP psychology, and bible. After I teach, I have 2 class periods for academic advising with my students. I typically get interrupted a lot and have to tend to the current crisis.

Researcher
Describe your daily successful practices you use when advising high school students?

Participant
I like to read a short devotion in the mornings before work at my desk. Then I try to check my emails and respond to any problems. This time in the mornings helps me start the day well.

Researcher
Okay. Thank you. What daily challenges do you encounter with your high school students?

Participant
High school students are like any other person. And so I think life happens and dealing with those interruptions which are really opportunities to impact their lives and speak truth. And that's what we're here for. So not viewing them as interruptions but opportunities to build relationships with students.

Researcher
And then anything else you want to add to our discussion of your daily experiences that have not been discussed.

Participant
Every day is different, which is good.

Researcher
I'm going email the journal prompts to you, but I want you to listen to them now and then you can be thinking about them. What are the top three things that prepared you to be an academic advisor? Who influenced your decision to become an academic advisor, or additional training? What do you think you need to grow as an academic advisor? What aspects of your educational degrees have proved to be most beneficial to you as an academic advisor? All right. Thank you. This has been a great experience here.

# APPENDIX D

## SAMPLE JOURNAL PROMPT

**1) What are the top three things that prepared you to be an academic advisor?**
Walking my own two children through the process (along with being on the sidelines for many of their friends) gave me a decent understanding of the moving parts. My own children had very different paths -- my firstborn was a collegiate athlete who attended a small private college in the midwest while my daughter attended a large public state university. Walking through their different admissions and enrollment processes helped prepare me for the role. My school had a class that helped my children complete college application elements during the school day (something we still have, 10+ years later) which enabled me to know the type of support a high school could provide. Without that class, it would have been harder to figure out how to connect with students. My natural aptitude for planning and process helps me connect the dots between what students need to take to graduate and what they are interested in pursuing after high school.

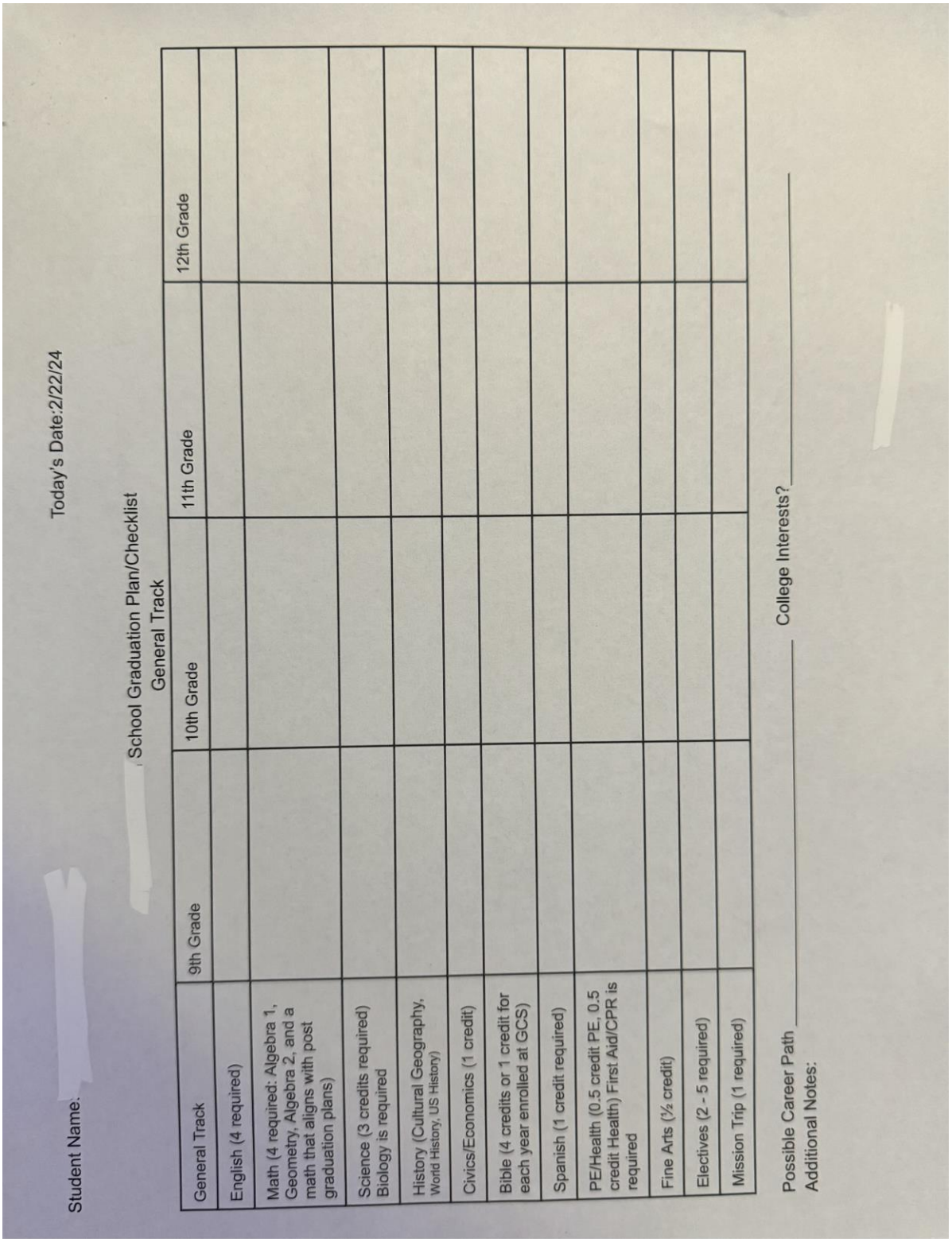
**2) Who influenced your decision to become an academic advisor?**
My now son-in-law (first generation, pell-eligible, Hispanic, earned a BS in Engineering) is still paying off student loan debt because he didn't know about scholarship organizations who would have supplemented his need-based aid to cover the cost of attending college. My initial desire was to help students like him. My predecessor turned in her 2-week notice about 3 weeks before school started. I stepped into the role (Director of College Counseling) from my previous role (Director of Marketing & Communications) to fill that void.

**3) What additional training do you think you need to grow as an academic advisor?**
The training I am looking for now is more specialized. Better understanding of athletic recruitment, of performance-based majors (auditions), and applications that require submitting portfolios. I would also benefit from forums in which I could learn best practices from other high schools. I have used the NACAC forum to crowd-source solutions or standard practices and have found the ideas offered and/or validation from the college counseling community to be especially gratifying.

**4) What aspects of your educational degree(s) have proved to be most beneficial to you as an academic advisor?**
My BS in Marketing continues to pay dividends. Instead of marketing my school to individual families (my former role), I am helping students "market" themselves to colleges by focusing on how they represent the mission, vision, and values of the institutions they are applying to. Being able to help students see institutions as "brands" helps make a discussion of acceptance rates less about how good or "bad" a school is to how strong or weak its brand is. This helps students consider institutions for fit instead of for name recognition and gives them more confidence to apply to and enroll in less selective institutions. My Graduate Certificate in College Counseling provided me with a broad understanding of the role and responsibility of the college counselor along with a good foundation of the ethics involved in my role. Additionally, it generates credibility for my comments in discussions with our families about college-related issues.

# APPENDIX E

## HIGH SCHOOL PLANNING GUIDE SAMPLE



Student Name: Today's Date:2/22/24

School Graduation Plan/Checklist
General Track

| General Track | 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English (4 required) | | | | |
| Math (4 required: Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, and a math that aligns with post graduation plans) | | | | |
| Science (3 credits required) Biology is required | | | | |
| History (Cultural Geography, World History, US History) | | | | |
| Civics/Economics (1 credit) | | | | |
| Bible (4 credits or 1 credit for each year enrolled at GCS) | | | | |
| Spanish (1 credit required) | | | | |
| PE/Health (0.5 credit PE, 0.5 credit Health) First Aid/CPR is required | | | | |
| Fine Arts (½ credit) | | | | |
| Electives (2 - 5 required) | | | | |
| Mission Trip (1 required) | | | | |

Possible Career Path _____ College Interests? _____
Additional Notes: