

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING THROUGH THE LENS
OF FIRST-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Allisha Hicks

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina. The theory guiding this study is Vygotsky's social constructivism. A qualitative methodology was used to achieve this study. The setting for this study was a community college located in a rural community with an enrollment of at least 1,200 students. A purposeful criterion sampling of 10 first-year community college students was used to help complete this study. Data was collected using individual interviews, focus groups, and letter writing. The data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) approach of identifying the phenomenon being studied, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from the participants who have experienced the phenomenon. The central research question for this study is: What are the lived academic advising experiences of first-year community college students? Data collected from this study resulted in common themes identified with first-year community college students. The themes included guidance and support, information accessibility, relationship building, and communication. The research findings indicate that academic advising is necessary for all first-year community college students. Meeting student's needs early in their educational journey can lead to student retention and success.

Keywords: advisor, academic advising, persistence, retention

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Dedication

“I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me” (King James Version, 1987, Philippians, 4:13). I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to continue the process of walking in my purpose of facilitating change. I would also like to thank my husband, Junius, for believing in me. I could not have done this without your unconditional love and support. In addition, I would like to thank my son, Jalen, for encouraging me to finish what I have started.

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I would like to thank my colleagues and friends for the encouraging words of support and believing in me throughout this journey. Your listening ears and encouraging talks motivated me to move forward. I am forever grateful. To my dissertation committee, thank you for believing in me and sharing your expertise. Most of all, thanks for all the prayers of family and friends. I could not have done it without you.

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List of Abbreviations

Career and College Promise (CCP)

Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE)

Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19)

Education Attainment (EA)

Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Pressure on higher education institutions to retain students has heightened the focus on the importance of first-year student success (Martin & Clayton, 2020). To address student success, one of the areas of focus has been academic advising. Through academic advising, faculty and staff can work on providing resources that help community college students get off to a good start. “Academic advising is among the most effective retention strategies utilized by U.S. colleges and universities” (Martinez & Elue, 2020, p.110). Research has indicated that students with solid advising experience have higher persistence and completion rates, making advising a crucial component of a student’s college experience (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021). Academic advising sets a solid foundation for first-year college students by providing a clear plan for their educational goals.

More importantly, academic advising provides students with information and proactive engagement opportunities, allowing them to network and become familiar with other helpful resources while developing meaningful relationships with faculty and staff (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021). Chapter one will provide information on the academic advising process and its meaning to higher education institutions. Reviewing the history, social, and theoretical background may help readers understand academic advising and its significant impact on student success. Chapter one will also include the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, essential definitions, and summary.

Background

Higher education institutions are responsible for ensuring students receive a quality education, graduate, and enter the workforce prepared. One way to help prepare students for the

workforce is through academic advising by establishing a shared responsibility for student progression and success. Academic advising educates students on the institution's objectives, program requirements, and course offerings. It also aims to help students improve by assisting them in achieving academic and professional success (Assiri et al., 2020). When departments incorporating uniform policies and procedures across campus communicate with one another, higher education institutions reduce the risk of confusing students. Therefore, establishing the structure for academic advising is a crucial first step in making student success a top focus, helping to create and understand goals and purposes (Marthers & Rosowsky, 2021). Creating an academic advising model that can handle students' needs and concerns is ideal. The research findings in this study validate the importance of academic advising for first-year community college students and its contribution to student success and retention rates.

Historical Context

The role of the community college is to focus on providing higher education opportunities for both the community and the workforce (Ives, 2022). Harvard College started offering counseling in 1636 to support students with their academics, extracurricular activities, and lives outside of college (Cook, 2009). During the 1870s, institutions like John Hopkins University realized students should not choose courses without consulting faculty members (White, 2020). The goal was to assist students in getting the information they required about their major as soon as possible. Establishing early the importance of offering services to students increased as higher education institutions grew.

One method used to inform students about the services being offered on campus was through freshman seminars. The first freshman seminar was presented at Boston University in 1888 (Cook, 2009). The freshman seminar helped students become more familiar with college

and the academic advising process. As academic advising gained popularity, professors started using it to strengthen the bond between students and themselves (Cook, 2009). To provide students with academic guidance, higher education institutions had to keep expanding, and academic advising took on a more prominent role. From the 1600s until the 1900s, academic advising was the faculty's responsibility. They fulfilled their parental duties and imparted valuable knowledge to college kids.

At Ohio's Kenyon College, where students were given advisors, established the first official act of academic advising in 1841 (Cook, 2009). Higher education institutions began offering students various curriculum options, realizing that students' professional interests and skill sets for such jobs are diverse. Academic advisers created a method to help students in navigating college since they needed to teach and assist students in understanding how to achieve their intended goals (Cook, 2009). To build a positive college experience and retain students, it is crucial to meet them where they are, as they join higher education institutions with different needs.

The development of community colleges and federal financial aid during the 20th century coincided with the rise of professionals with special responsibilities for academic advising, which increased access to higher education for many American communities (Roessger et al., 2019). Not to mention, World War II veterans returning home with the option to use their GI Bill to attend a higher education institution. The objectives of academic advising are multifaceted since advisors assist students in choosing a program of study that will satisfy their needs and institutional standards, pursuing subsequent educational options, or pursuing career ambitions (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019).

In 1979, The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was chartered with

429 members (Cook, 2009). The goal of NACADA was to highlight the significance of advising and how it can help students grow academically and personally. With the help of NACADA, academic advising has become system wide as higher education institutions continue to grow and meet the needs of students. The strategies and ideas about academic advising continue to change to help meet the needs of students. More importantly, the academic advisor's role allows students to link their academic decisions to overall academic and professional goals. The need to help guide students became more evident, thus reinforcing the need to advise students about academic and career goals. The support provided to students by faculty or staff is a direct connection to the institution and can impact students' satisfaction with their educational experience (Queen, 2022).

Social Context

Attending community college and having a positive experience is essential to the success of first-year community college students. It is an entry point to higher education and baccalaureate degree pathway, especially for low-income, first-generation, and racial/ethnic minority students (Sanchez & Morgan, 2022). According to estimates, 80% of community college students enroll in bachelor's programs to transfer to 4-year institutions, but only 17% finish their programs (Sanchez & Morgan, 2022). Often the barriers that students face hinder their intentions of completing degree requirements.

College students who seek academic advising receive guidance or insight regarding academic, social, or personal issues (Pitts & Myers, 2022). Advisors provide unique possibilities for teaching students about educational goals and lifelong learning through academic advice (Pitts & Myers, 2022). Consequently, the bond that develops between students and academic advisors is crucial to students' performance and success throughout their educational journey.

Advising also provides an informational and proactive engagement for students and allows students to connect with other relevant support systems, building a positive relationship with faculty and staff (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021). It allows students to speak with academic advisors about their educational goals and other concerns while attending college. A meaningful advising experience is deliberately created to support a student's academic journey (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021).

Theoretical Context

Constructivism is a learning philosophy founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our understanding of our world (Kovalenko, 2019). In addition, education reveals that learners can learn well when actively participating in the learning process (Iqbal et al., 2021). Student success depends on teaching students the value of using the resources on campus and finishing program requirements. Academic advising is a crucial intervention for reducing early community college student departure, as it provides structured interaction with institution representatives, making it a critical college support service (Hatch & Garcia, 2017).

The literature on advising's effects is limited, primarily focusing on retention and satisfaction at a single institution, neglecting its impact on students' learning and development (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). The constructivism theory focuses on understanding behavior through observing behaviors in a social setting and learning how individuals think. The learning aspect of social constructivism is from the perspective that learning and knowing do not take place in isolation but through social interaction (Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2020). In the current research, social constructivism encourages collaborative learning based on student interaction, discussion, and information sharing (Akpan et al., 2020). Incorporating the social constructivism theory

allows academic advisors to establish a pleasant advising environment that encourages students to progress toward graduation. Researching the academic advising experience through the lens of first-year community college students may help academic advisors understand how students relate to the academic advising process.

Problem Statement

The problem is that not all first-year community college students receive academic advising while enrolled at a community college. This leads to college administrators working together to determine what can be done to keep students registering but not completing. To decrease the number of students withdrawing, academic advisors continuously work to connect with students to ensure their needs are addressed. Research indicates that students with a strong advising experience tend to have higher persistence and completion rates in college (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021). Academic advisors can enhance a student's sense of belonging and self-efficacy by simplifying academic decision-making processes, potentially leading to increased college persistence rates (Tippets et al., 2022).

The student-advisor connection is crucial in academic advising, influencing students' motivation and confidence, and their perception of advisor support significantly predicts educational outcomes (Johnson et al., 2023). Academic advisors usually meet with students at least three times per academic year in hopes that they are taking the classes required for their specific program. Additionally, all students must receive academic advising of the same caliber. All students need to feel connected and receive the same consistent interaction, whether taking classes face-to-face or online. Faculty-student interactions contribute to positive student outcomes, such as increased graduate and retention rates (Nguyen & Blalock, 2023).

For colleges to increase student retention rates, academic advisors must understand the culture and demographic makeup of the students they serve. In addition, it is imperative that students are engaged and feel part of their educational plan. Researching the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students can help higher education institutions understand the academic advising experience and its effect on student retention rates. Higher education institutions cannot function without the academic advising process. More significantly, the role of the academic adviser is essential for student satisfaction and retention (Uddin & Johnson, 2019). First-year students have a high rate of student dropout. According to Al Hassani and Wilkins (2022), 26% of first-year students did not complete their second year of study in 2019–2020. Understanding the quantity and caliber of interactions each student needs to measure student satisfaction with academic advising is critical.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina. At this stage in the research, academic advising, which takes place in situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter (Pitt & Myers, 2022). The theory guiding this study is social constructivism because we will look at the academic advising practices currently in place through the lens and experiences of first-year community college students. Lev Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory addresses how students process learning. Learning is influenced by the culture in which the individual lives and the social process that shapes an individual's substantial experience (Duelen, 2013). The research findings in this study will help

validate the importance of advising first-year community college students and its contribution to student success and retention rates.

Significance of the Study

As an advisor at a community college, I have witnessed both the negative and positive impacts of academic advising. Community colleges were designed to provide an affordable and flexible education experience (Endenfield & McBrayer, 2021). In addition, community colleges enroll students with unique challenges that require resources to help them persist despite various barriers. To help alleviate barriers that prevent student success, academic advising is encouraged. Understanding how students process information that is received from their academic advisor can help higher education institutions develop advising guidelines that will help all students persist while attending community college.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of this study is grounded on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory. Learning is an active process based on the premises that social interactions enhance the process of learning. Social constructivist learning incorporates engagement with mentors, discussions with other learners, and social observations during the learning process (Shank & Santiago, 2021). Researching academic advising and its relation to student experiences is critical to understanding how students can receive quality academic advising. Through social constructivism, academic advisors can effectively advise in a manner that is relatable to students. Improperly advising students can lead to students taking the wrong courses and increase their unwillingness to reach out to support systems, which can eventually lead students to dropping out of college.

Empirical

Academic advisors offer unique opportunities to teach students about educational plans and lifelong learning (Pitts & Myers, 2022). They interact with all students regardless of major, class standing, residential status, and other characteristics. Academic advising is an interactive process involving the student and the academic advisor, with the sole purpose of enabling student to progress through the educational program in a timely manner (Loucif et al., 2020). Academic advisors are assigned to provide students with the necessary connections to resources for educational and personal needs that lead to success and retention (Zarges et al., 2018).

Although there is an abundance of information on academic advising, there is very little research on the amount of contact faculty have with students and what students consider quality interactions. Tinto argues that academic advising can aid in reducing the complexity of decisions for college students by providing clear pathways that prioritize students' interests and goals, creating self-efficacy, and facilitating persistence to graduation (Tippets et al., 2022). Academic advising services, facilitated by knowledgeable faculty, significantly impact student retention and graduation rates, as they are available for appointments and provide necessary time with students (Springer & Tyran, 2022). Yet engaging students in quality advising continues to be a shared challenge for higher education institutions across the globe (Mann, 2020). While advising scholars have paid significant attention to defining what kind of content constitutes quality advising, less attention has been paid to how advisors actually deliver such content in practice (Wei, 2022). The results from the research may help determine the significance of academic advising and the impact it may have on student retention rates.

Practical

Academic advising has become an indispensable part of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to support student's academic achievement and contribute towards institutional goals of maximizing student retention and persistence thereby leading to overall academic excellence (Bilquise et al., 2023). The expectations of interaction and engagement are being reshaped as students need immediate support for their academic queries. In addition, it has also become increasingly vital to involve all students in the advising process to create an advising environment that provides inclusivity to all (Bilquise et al., 2023). It is important to recognize that academic advising is critical to retention rates and is part of relevant literature that addresses its importance in higher education. It provides guidance and direction to help students navigate registration and the course selection process (Zhang et al., 2019). Suppose colleges consider the 22% of students who report not meeting with an advisor at all, with the 44% who say they are satisfied and the 7% who are not happy. This research study may help faculty and staff understand the importance of academic advising and implement advising practices that support all community college students.

Research Questions

Academic advising plays a central role in helping students experience academic success, and it is essential for a college system to maximize the students' satisfaction (Assiri et al., 2020). A central research question and three sub-questions are used in this phenomenological study. The phenomenological study aims to describe the lived academic advising experiences through the lens of first-year community college students. The sub-questions are follow-up questions to help paint a clearer picture of first-year community college students' academic advising experience.

Central Research Question

What are the lived academic advising experiences of first-year community college students?

Sub-Question One

How do first-year community college students perceive the influence of academic advising on students' comprehension of academic expectations?

Sub-Question Two

What do first-year community college students perceive as the most effective way to maximize the time spent with academic advisors?

Sub-Question Three

What information do students expect to receive from academic advisors?

Definitions

1. *Academic Advising*-Academic advising is a method of facilitating a shared dialogue with students that empowers them to set, act towards, and stay committed to their goals (Reimers, 2022).
2. *Academic Advisor*-Academic advisors are typically the initial point of contact to provide continual support related to academic progress for incoming students (Witkowsky et al., 2020).
3. *Persistence*-persistence in higher education refers to students who continue their enrollment from the time of their matriculation to their graduation (Gilstrap, 2020).
4. *Retention*-retention is the set of actions that higher education institutions design and execute to achieve that their students can stay from admission to graduation (Torres et al., 2021).

Summary

As academic advisors continue to meet with students, it is imperative that they understand the lived experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students. Building relationships with our students, identifying areas where they may get detached, and assisting them in making new connections are all part of academic advising (Troxel et al., 2021). The problem is that not all first-year community college students receive academic advising while enrolled at a community college. Exploring the different variations of advising and how it impacts first-year community college students can help determine the quality of advising needed to ensure students get the best results from their academic advising experience. To better understand the academic advising process, this study investigated the lived experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students. This phenomenological study aims to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina. The results from this research study may help academic advisors improve the academic advising process not only for first-year community college students but for all students and the information that students receive.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This phenomenological study aims to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina. Academic advising is a critical component in the educational experience of community college students. Advisors must connect with students early and establish relationships that help students succeed. Making a meaningful connection allows students to transition into college life smoother. In addition, academic advising sets a solid foundation for first-year college students by providing a clear plan for their educational goals. If students want to succeed academically and graduate from higher education institutions, academic advising is critical.

The effectiveness of academic advising services may have a significant impact on students, including increasing retention and graduation rates (Springer & Tyran, 2021). Academic advising is a collaborative process involving the student and the academic advisor, with the goal of enabling the student to progress through their selected program of study in a timely manner (Loucif et al, 2020). Understanding the importance of academic advising and ensuring advisors are meeting the needs of "all" students can ensure that community college students are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to complete the requirements to graduate and be productive members of society. Chapter two of this qualitative study will discuss the theoretical framework, related literature, and summary of academic advising.

Theoretical Framework

The guiding theory for this qualitative study is the social constructivism theory. It provides a foundation for understanding how individuals experience learning. Social constructivism was first developed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), who believes

that thinking occurs beyond the body and beyond the individual (Light & Clark, 2021). He also believed the understandings and capabilities that emerge from social interactions within a group are greater than those that are possible at an interpersonal level (Light & Clark, 2021). Through social interactions with others such as adults and peers who possess higher knowledge and cognition, learners construct the knowledge of the world and ask for the help they need (Chowdhury & Halder, 2019). Social constructivism claims that people form meaning and understanding through engagement of one another and their interactions with surroundings (Xu et al., 2023). For advising to be successful, advisors must understand how students process and internalize information that can aid in the academic advising process.

According to recent reports, for every ten students that enroll in college in the United States, seven will only return for a second year, and five will earn an undergraduate degree (Mitra & Zhang, 2020). To help increase the chances of students returning, one must understand constructivism. Constructivism leads to achieving knowledge through his own experience (Fitria et al., 2021). It defines learning as the active process of constructing knowledge by learners while they are trying to make sense of their experience; learners elaborate and exercise mental structure until one is satisfied (Fitria et al., 2021).

Constructivism also aims to maximize student comprehension. Making connections within social interactions with others creates an atmosphere of understanding and learning. Constructivism is based on the premise that meaningful learning happens when people actively try to make sense of their world (Qureshi et al., 2021). It allows the student to play an active role in their learning process as well as emphasizes how an individual learns. Vygotsky (1978) explains that cognitive growth occurs on a social level and then develops individually (Qureshi et

al., 2021). Understanding the students and the environment in which they thrive can increase opportunities for effective academic advising to take place.

Related Literature

The culture of the academic advising process across college campuses can play a unique role in the success of students. Academic advising is especially critical for first-year community college students who may find the college environment overwhelming and challenging the first year. Research has indicated that academic advising sessions were correlated with an increase in students' academic planning (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). It allows students to speak with academic advisors about their educational goals, career goals, and other goals and concerns while attending college.

Academic advising should be "a learning-centered, student-focused activity that engages the student and advisor in the cocreation of clear and intentional educational plans that lead to completion of goals and future success," (Hu, 2020, p.914). NACADA National Survey suggests that 18.4% of U.S. institutions depend on full-time faculty to advise students (Hart-Baldrige, 2020). Research indicates that faculty and student interactions through academic advising are critical to students' academic and social success while in college (Hart-Baldrige, 2020). "The Community College Survey of Student Engagement or CCSSE found that 83.9% of students enrolled for more than one semester reported meeting with an advisor at least once" (Strawn & Littlepage, 2021, p.4). In addition, 38% reported satisfaction with their advisor, 39% were somewhat satisfied, and 7% were not (Strawn & Littlepage, 2021). Not to mention, 16% of the students never met with an advisor (Strawn & Littlepage, 2021).

A college student's participation in the social or interpersonal community of the university has a big impact on their academic performance (Skelcher et al., 2020). One session

with an academic advisor can help improve a community college student's self-efficacy and use of self-regulated learning strategies (Roessger et al., 2019). Researchers have found that academic advising improves student satisfaction, registration time, and program completion (Roessger et al., 2019). When academic advising presented to students lacks essential information or involves no advising, severe educational deficiencies are highly expected to affect their progress in the academic program, which can cause graduation delays (Abdelhamid & Alotaibi, 2021). Academic advising is supported by literature that discusses various methods used to advise students. For community college students, academic advising can make a difference in whether students will persist or drop out. Identifying students' needs and the resources available to them early is essential for student success.

Community College Students

Community College is a gateway to providing quality education to students who thought attending college was not an attainable goal, and it is an alternative route to higher education (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Its open-door policy allows students to pursue both educational and career goals. However, student retention has become a critical issue facing community colleges today (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Students who attend community college come from various backgrounds that may lend themselves to being academically, socially, and economically challenged.

Community colleges are essential for retaining and leading students to degrees, which has implications for higher educational equity and socioeconomic mobility (Monaghan & Sommers, 2022). The inability of students to obtain required advisement in the first year or before changing majors can weaken motivation, increase the likelihood of dropping out and for those who continue, resulting in increased time to complete a degree (Elliott, 2020). “First-time college

students who used advising had higher grade point averages and lower attrition rates than their peers who did not” (Nix et al., 2021, p. 216). Students who attend two-year public institutions struggle to persist and graduate, with only 60% continuing to their next academic year; therefore, literature has advocated a stronger focus on educational advising services (Kapinos 2020). Understanding the factors that keep community college students from graduating is key to increasing retention rates.

The first year for most students can be challenging as they learn how to adjust to being a college student. Students may become discouraged about how to navigate college life once on campus. To help first-year community college students navigate the college experience, students need to feel a sense of belonging. Belonging is essential for motivation and success in higher education institutions (Gillen-O'Neel, 2019). Students who feel a sense of belonging may engage more in their studies, leading to student persistence and success (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). Research has shown that students who feel a sense of belonging utilize campus resources to their advantage (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). As part of getting students acclimated to the community college experience, academic advising is integral to helping students feel a sense of belonging.

Community colleges are popular among students for a variety of reasons. The flexibility to explore other educational and employment alternatives, accessibility, and proximity to one another are a few factors. Students enroll to acquire specialized knowledge, qualifications, and training to compete in the job market. To further emphasize the importance of community colleges is to recognize that many community college students are first-generation and need help understanding the importance of building relationships. First-generation college students require social capital from campus relationships with students, faculty, and staff to successfully complete college (Almeida et al., 2021).

Educational Attainment in Rural Communities

Rural communities face challenges like low-skilled economies, poverty, outmigration, and lower educational attainment, with educational attainment being crucial for employment, income, and civic participation (Yang & Venezia, 202). A recent study concluded that rural youth were less likely to attend a selective institution, more likely to delay entry to postsecondary education, and less likely to be continuously enrolled in college than their nonrural counterparts (Sorensen & Hwang, 2021). The obvious geographic barrier that there are, on average, fewer nearby colleges and universities is one common explanation for the low postsecondary enrollment in far rural locations. Another typical argument is that some rural regions lack a robust work market for persons with college degrees (Sorensen & Hwang, 2021). Supporting regional, rural, and remote students to aspire to and commence university study through greater access, opportunity, and choice is critical to reducing the participation disparity between these students and their metropolitan counterparts (Reimers, 2022).

It is important to note that individuals who grow up in rural and remote areas are 40 percent less likely to gain a higher-level education and less likely to earn a bachelor's by the time they are 35 years old than individuals from metropolitan areas (Reimers, 2022). Rural students need to be more supported throughout the college-going process, facing obstacles with academic readiness, which increases the risk of dropout and decreases graduation rates (Yenny, 2021). Understanding a student's background and defining their sense of community is critical to advising the whole student. We must examine how educational attainment is perceived to support individuals who grow up in rural communities.

Educational Attainment, or EA, is defined as the highest level of education that an individual completes (Sorensen & Hwang, 2021). Compared to adults in metropolitan regions,

adults in rural areas have lower rates of high school and college completion, and poorer labor market returns from higher education (Sorensen & Hwang, 2021). Students that live in rural communities have a solid connection to the community in which they live, thus guiding their decision to seek out postsecondary education within their community. The lack of exposure to various career opportunities influences the idea that the options available in rural communities are the best students can obtain.

The motivation to attend community college in rural areas diminishes because of the location. Most rural areas are classified as an education desert, with most community colleges within a reasonable distance (Wells, 2019). The changes in economic resources indicate that college degrees were necessary for rural areas. However, the financial crisis in rural areas needed to be improved, thus making it harder for students to find resources to attend college (Wells, 2019). For rural students, advisors taking the time to develop a genuine, positive rapport is essential, allowing them to feel a sense of belonging (Yenney, 2021).

Students may develop a sense of belonging through information exchange and on-campus faculty and staff interactions. Most community college students describe this as instrumental in their adjustment to college (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020). In addition, rural communities face many challenges in accessing critical resources for students to succeed. As an academic advisor, understanding this concept means working with students to help remove some challenges that can hinder student success. Meeting with students early and making a connection may help students take advantage of the academic advising process and other resources available to them on college campuses.

Academic advising is not specific to a particular group of students but to all students pursuing higher education. The importance of student experiences beyond college can help shape

learning, development, and outcomes so that students are understood. Understanding how to help underrepresented students navigate college is challenging for higher education institutions (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). In addition, the completion rates for underrepresented students are lower than for other students. One group of students that can benefit most from community colleges is those who live in rural communities.

Academic advisors ensure students are informed and knowledgeable about their resources while attending community college. Advisors also play a critical role in positively shaping and supporting students' educational experiences, aspirations, and trajectories, particularly those who validate students (Martinez & Elue, 2020). Learning takes place in the context of a community; therefore, understanding the needs of students when they enter the community college setting can help prepare and lead students toward graduation. Doing so can increase student satisfaction, thus leading to graduation and increased retention rates.

Traditional and Nontraditional Students

Students enrolled in the community college have unique characteristics and various career and educational aspirations (Xing & Gordon, 2023). Community colleges prepare the workforce by focusing on middle-skill jobs, which require postsecondary education but not a four-year bachelor's degree (Xing & Gordon, 2023). The student population consists of both traditional and nontraditional students. Over the past three decades, the number of 18 to 24-year-old college students living on campus has decreased, and today, many students are nontraditional and frequently have full-time jobs (Hutson et al., 2022).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 14% of nontraditional students were enrolled in community colleges in the year of 2012, yet 67% of nontraditional students were found dropping out of college before receiving a degree (Hart & Park, 2021). The adult

population for community colleges continues to increase as they seek to improve their quality of life. The adult learner population consists of adults who have delayed entry to college after high school, have dependents, work full-time, have no high school diploma, or are financially dependent (Kamelita, 2020). They are often skeptical about pursuing higher education because of insecurities related to previous experiences and current life changes (Kamelita, 2020).

To help ensure first-year community college students have a chance of being successful regardless of their age while attending community college, the academic advisor must create a positive advising experience. Academic advising incorporates and examines students' educational experiences, and their foundation of ambitions and abilities allows them to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes (Holland et al., 2020). For adult learners with responsibilities, providing clear guidance and expectations through academic advising enables students to manage their lives while attending a community college. In addition, helping students become more self-aware of their specific interests, talents, values, and priorities enables students to see the connection between their present academic experience and their plans (Holland et al., 2020). The student experience includes academic learning and engagement and non-academic experiences that contribute to student persistence (Mann, 2020).

Role of an Advisor

Academic advisors bridge theory-practice gaps, evaluate learning, and facilitate experiential learning through reflection. They aid in resilience building, reducing dropout rates and promoting better engagement in experiential learning. (Wenham et al., 2020). Academic advisors also aid students in decision-making, prioritizing future well-being, navigating personal and academic obligations, and fostering relationships, facilitating integration into college culture (Tippetts et al., 2022).

It is one of the many roles for many faculty members; therefore, meeting with students can sometimes be challenging. Their roles can range from an instructor, career advisor, social worker, counselor, or whatever is deemed necessary at any given moment. They must incorporate various skills on the spot and have an in-depth understanding of the campus and the institution's curriculum (McGill, 2021). Academic advisors can ensure students know the resources and practices that support learning success. While it can establish official advising channels that proactively contact students, academic advising is a fair way to support students (Dollinger et al., 2021).

One of the primary missions of academic advising is to support students and sometimes advocate on their behalf (McGill, 2021). As an academic advisor, recognizing barriers that discourage or hinder students from completing degree requirements is essential. Students leave community college because of life events (Evans, 2020). Life events, along with students lacking clear goals and a genuine understanding of the importance of community college, are often sidetracked by challenges and setbacks, leading them to drop out (Evans, 2020). Administrators and academic advisors must comprehend what constitutes great academic advising because of their impact on students' lives (Museus, 2021).

Ensuring faculty have the needed resources, such as ongoing professional development and a balanced faculty workload, to adequately serve the needs of their students beyond the course curriculum is essential (Finnegan, 2019). For academic advisors, working closely with advisees helps break down stigmas around failure and struggles in a safe, supportive environment (Jones, 2019). Assisting students to develop and reach their full potential contributes to earning the opportunity to graduate, which is the goal when advising in higher

education. Ideally, the advisor serves as a teacher and guide in an interactive partnership to enhance each student's self-awareness and fulfillment (Troxel, 2019).

Academic advising is the cornerstone of practical institutional efforts to teach and retain students (Elliott, 2020). Advisors promise to make sure that student's academic needs are addressed. They also support students who have unresolved problems with things unrelated to their studies. Academic advisors can be a pleasant liaison for students to talk to about their course choices, involvement in extracurricular activities, and other opportunities or events on campus that they may need to be made aware of (Dollinger et al., 2021). Because academic advising is essential to student success, community colleges have incorporated some of it into college success courses. College success courses refer to the knowledge of, familiarity with, and use of college norms, processes, and resources, which students may gain through social capital networks and use as a type of social literacy (Hatch-Tocaimaza et al., 2019).

Academic advisors can better understand student aspirations and, when necessary, address individual needs and concerns while working with students to establish educational plans. Advisors must use a distinct narrative since first-generation, low-income students' education and life experiences differ from those of affluent, well-off students. Therefore, our duty as counselors and educators is to comprehend the notable differences between the college experiences of wealthy, privileged, and impoverished students (Rendon, 2021). Early in the advising process, establishing relationships with students assists in resolving possible issues.

Connecting with Advisees

Significant advising help is given so students can create a clear academic plan and consider their life and career goals in light of their chosen academic program (Donaldson et al., 2020). More importantly, student achievement is driven by interactions between students and

other faculty and staff at community colleges (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). Researchers have discovered that when academic advice was necessary for particular courses or academic programs, students increased program completion, became more satisfied with their classes, and spent less time registering for the upcoming term (Roessger et al., 2019). Student engagement is the key to students becoming satisfied with classes and the institution.

Higher education institutions know student engagement and satisfaction contribute to positive learning experiences (Hwang & Wao, 2021). As a result, advising procedures that align with student needs help ensure the success of all students. Aligning student engagement with academic advising allows students to understand the importance of advising and its contribution to their educational journey. In addition, engagement is critical to a student's motivation in school. It is essential for students to feel connected to the institution and the faculty members that help teach them. There may be an instantaneous connection between pupil achievement and retention while students feel belonging (Ahn & Davis, 2020). It is also essential for faculty and staff to connect with community college students within the first few weeks of enrollment. Without making a genuine connection, the chances of those students not succeeding within their first year of community college increase drastically.

Student engagement and its impact on student success is helpful when advising students. Student engagement refers to the extent of students' active involvement in a learning activity (Tani et al., 2021). Therefore, transforming the academic advising experience into a learning activity helps promote positive student satisfaction. Student engagement often arises when educators discuss or emphasize educational tactics and teaching practices that address the developmental, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, physical, and social elements that improve or impede students' learning (Hekmat et al., 2022).

Understanding students deeper ensures that advisors can identify potential obstacles hindering students from progressing in their educational studies. A critical aspect of academic advising is understanding the student population being served. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism approach indicates that their culture influences learning. Academic advisors must develop cultural competence skills to advise students. Cultural competence combines beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skills for working in culturally diverse contexts (Álvarez-Bernardo et al., 2022). More importantly, academic advisors should also know how cultures' values and histories might differ and modify their behaviors to increase competence (Squire et al., 2023). Developing the capacity to provide students with culturally engaging support and relevant learning opportunities positively impacts academic advising experience (Museus, 2021).

Each student has different academic interests and skills in a range of topic areas; as a result, advisers must take this into account when giving advice (Loucif et al., 2020). If a student succeeds well or poorly in college, it may come down to the advice they receive. As an advisor, offering students the tools they need to succeed in college is imperative. By providing ongoing advice, advisors can establish the connections necessary to help students on their educational journey. The quality of the academic advising services a school provides is one factor that affects the school's and its students' success (Loucif et al., 2020). Successful academic advising enhances students' learning opportunities.

Academic Advising Online

Interactive communication technology, primarily for online, adult, and graduate students, is a complementary method for academic advising, not a replacement for face-to-face advising (Wang & Houdyshell, 2021). Technology has dominated education, and traditional instruction methods are no longer necessary for a positive learning experience. Higher education institutions

use technology in advising to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and streamline services, which can increase graduation rates and student satisfaction levels (Assiri et al., 2020). Being able to meet the needs of students both in-person and online ensures that all students are being advised. More importantly, technology is used as a supplement or convenient way to meet students' needs, including academic advising. It can reach a wider audience, and students have reaped the benefits from the flexibility of an online program. It is convenient and can increase student engagement and collaboration (Herridge et al., 2020). In addition, technology can increase advising accessibility regarding time and location (Hu, 2020).

As online programs continue to grow within higher education, online students' retention, morale, and improved academic success should be at the forefront of higher education institutions' agendas (Skelcher et al., 2020). The demand for support for online students has grown as more students enroll in online programs. Academic advising using technology is uniquely positioned to shape a student's educational experience by accessing resourceful advising information (Hu, 2020). Through academic advising, students can identify what is required to graduate.

Increasing attainment is not easy for community colleges, as many students entering through the open door are underprepared for the demands of college-level coursework (White, 2022). The percentage of students completing programs represents a concern for higher education institutions. Through online academic advising, advisors can support and intervene before a student drops a class or withdraws from the community college. Due to their limited possibilities of interacting with faculty and staff, online students require academic advisors to develop positive, meaningful relationships with them. Online students need consistent

communication to have a sense of belonging to the school. Therefore, establishing a sense of belonging and connection creates solid opportunities for success.

Online academic advising may help increase student completion rates, leading to increased retention rates. However, while online undergraduate enrollment increases, high attrition rates in online classes compared to face-to-face courses are a concern (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021). Attrition rates in online courses have been documented as 10% to 20% higher than traditional face-to-face classes, and online persistence rates are low. Persistence in an online course is linked to several factors, including self-regulated learning, self-directed, and self-efficacy (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021).

To succeed in online courses, students will need determination, organization, and discipline. Whether students take in-person or online programs, academic advising is crucial for all students, especially those attending rural community colleges. Students' chances of finishing online courses and earning a degree will probably increase with support from academic advising. Advising is such an essential part of the educational experience that all students should have an opportunity to participate in a resourceful information session. It is essential to recognize that online students deserve the same support provided to students who attend classes on campus.

Higher education institutions must implement strategies to support online student persistence, promoting factors such as online orientation, scheduled advisement, technology training, and self-assessments. These measures are crucial for student success, university accreditation, funding, and reputation, as persistence rates are critical for success (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021). Students often choose online courses for personal reasons, unaware of potential issues with their entry-level skills or the technology used in online classes

(Simplicio, 2019). Therefore, implementing strategies to help students be successful in online courses is critical to student success.

Academic advising is critical to students' success and fulfilling the mission of higher education (Hu, 2020). Some online students need to feel a sense of belonging to the higher education institution they attend. Academic advising may help fill in the gap, allowing the student to feel a connection. Community college's academic advising helps to provide access and dramatically increases the number of students served, utilizing virtual technologies. This approach permits advisors to suggest college students who need to expand and reap non-public, expert, interpersonal, professional, and educational success through a guided relationship (Hu, 2020). Although academic advising online is convenient, advisors should consider technology as a helping tool to ease the advising process, enhance the advising experience and alleviate workload but they should not regard it as a substitute to human advice (Assiri et al., 2020).

Academic Advising Approach and Methods

The advising culture of an institution plays a crucial role in how information is shared with students (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Collaboration amongst administration, staff, faculty, and students leads to strategies to improve academic advising processes within higher education institutions. Identifying an educational advising model that could assist in advising every student is essential to quality academic advising. Academic advising is not the same for all students; therefore, identifying the best approach to interact with each student is listening and addressing a student's questions and concerns.

One approach is humanized advising, which involves cultivating meaningful relationships that permit students to view advisors as real people who care and are devoted to their achievement (Museus, 2021). This approach may allow students to consider the academic

advisor as someone they can relate to, making sharing their thoughts and concerns easy. Another approach to academic advising is proactive academic advising. Proactive advising is a strategic intervention aimed at boosting student motivation, fostering engagement between students and advisors, promoting success, informing students about available options, and addressing issues early (Donaldson et al., 2020). Early detection of high-risk students may help remove educational obstacles that cause students to drop out.

Holistic advising recognizes the critical role of advisors in helping students understand the broader purpose of decisions and learning opportunities in their undergraduate experience (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021). It entails understanding the complex aspects of students' lives and serving as a more extensive support network on campus to ensure students can access the support, they need to address problems that may affect their academic progress (Museus, 2021). For students who face academic deficiencies, academic advising can increase their chances of graduating (He, 2020). In a traditional setting, the advisor takes a copy of the student's academic record and requirements and discusses it with the student for a better understanding, giving him some face-to-face advice or suggestions (Assiri et al., 2020).

Under the developmental framework, the advising relationship involves the advisor learning about and understanding the individual student. Developmental advising is ideal because it involves a two-way conversation in which the student and the advisor engage, and the student takes an active role (Lowenstein, 2020). It should incorporate helping students improve their study skills, plan courses of study, improve interpersonal skills, understand their values, and explore career options (Gordon, 2019). Developmental advising relationships focus on identifying and accomplishing life goals. It displays a relationship centered on the student's or

advisee's requirements for personal development. It can be integrated into a 20-minute interview or a series of advising sessions (Gordon, 2019).

In contrast, prescriptive advising focuses on knowledge dissemination while addressing difficulties related to grades, credits, and institutional standards (Bolkan et al., 2021). It helps students become informed about the policies and procedures at the institution. With prescriptive advising, advising using the internet allows advisors to provide students with an update on their academic progress and a checklist on what to expect moving forward (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Due to the need for a personal relationship with each student, effective academic advising is labor and time consuming (Troxel et al., 2021). Using one of these models creates a resolution to consistent and meaningful academic advising.

Academic Advising Strategies

The goal of academic advising is to transform the educational advising experience. Academic advising can be conducted by developing a relationship with the students and learning about their objectives and intended careers. In addition, taking the time to get to know the students beyond their major. Find out what goals they have established, how they feel about the institution, or if they are struggling with classes. Most importantly, identify what equity means for the institution and students. By simplifying every aspect of the academic decision-making process, academic advisors can help students feel like they belong and boost their self-efficacy. It is then assumed that these supports will boost college persistence rates (Tippetts et al., 2022).

Student engagement is a crucial signal of education value knowledge, information sharing, and quality improvement (Roy et al., 2023). If students are proactive in their education, they will stay connected and informed about resources, campus activities, and what classes are needed to graduate. Sharing the responsibility of staying informed and on top of student

expectations is a good indication that students understand the academic advising process.

Engagement is essential for attaining successful academic outcomes, such as degree completion, and for demonstrating the results of positive interactions between students and their educational faculty/staff (Snijders et al., 2020).

In the context of higher education, student engagement is best described as a good, fulfilling mental state associated with work and marked by vitality, dedication, and absorption (Snijders et al., 2020). Through this process, students learn how to become successful learners within the classroom. In addition, engaging with academic advisors helps students identify the resources and opportunities available on campus. Student engagement is defined as student involvement in educationally purposeful activities are commonly acknowledged to have a favorable impact on several important outcomes in higher education, such as persistence, learning, satisfaction, and graduation (Miller et al., 2021).

Research indicates that implementing effective strategies can enhance the percentage of students who successfully transition to college and make progress towards their degree (Bettinger et al., 2022). Utilizing strategies will help create a consistent academic advising culture and advising process. Students will be well versed in the expectations and requirements for their specific program of study, and students will also feel comfortable making decisions relating to classes required to graduate. Through collaboration, higher education institutions can establish shared responsibility for student success.

The success of a college student can be significantly influenced by faculty advising (Chaturvedi & Guerrero, 2023). For higher education institutions to remain viable and ensure that students are retained and succeed, it is crucial to establish a culture with defined guidelines and processes for academic advising. Higher education institutions face challenges in course

selection, student-to-counselor ratios, and individualized assistance, leading to a lack of academic advising. Survey research shows one-third of community college students never use academic advising, and nearly half don't understand graduation requirements (Bettinger et al., 2022). Therefore, identifying the correct advising method for each student may help determine how to meet the needs of the students.

Academic Advising Challenges

Not getting the necessary advice during the first year of college can decrease motivation to continue pursuing higher education and increase the likelihood of dropping out (Elliott, 2020). Academic advising is an excellent tool for students in higher education. However, academic advising challenges may prohibit students from reaching their most significant potential, including excelling academically, student persistence, and graduation. Factors associated with student satisfaction are instructional effectiveness, academic advising, campus climate, registration effectiveness, service excellence, admissions and financial aid, safety and security, and academic services (Alashuaybat, 2021). Most importantly, student satisfaction is evident when students participate in their educational journey.

Another challenge surrounding academic advising is how frequently students meet with advisors. Frequent meetings with academic advisors positively influence student learning outcomes and decisions (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Due to the lack of interactions with formal advisors, most college students mentioned that their number one resource of advice about their academic plans was from every other character aside from an academic guide (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Therefore, maximizing students' positive advising experiences is critical because academic advising has been found to affect student satisfaction and directly and indirectly affect student retention, completion, and transfer (McKinney et al., 2022).

One of the most difficult challenges is the faculty's obligation to teach and advise. It is essential to recognize that the abilities and skills associated with effective academic advising only sometimes come naturally to faculty advisors, and faculty often need to be trained to be effective advisors (Baird, 2020). It is important to note that advisors' roles extend beyond course selection and registration and require deep and holistic engagement with students. Faculty advisors are responsible for teaching, research, and service requirements, and administrative advisors balance administrative work and advising (Roos & Schreck, 2021). Good advising should assist students in understanding their higher education environment and identifying necessary skills for effective learning management and future aspirations (Holland et al., 2020).

Academic Advising During a Pandemic

The overall first-year enrollment was down in the fall of 2020 by 16% compared to 2019. Community colleges saw a 23% drop in enrollment for the first time (Naughton, 2021). The coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic presented different challenges related to academic advising. By April 2020, 98% of higher education institutions impacted by COVID-19 had moved most face-to-face classes to remote learning (Wang & Houdyshell, 2021). The community college system realized they must develop processes and procedures that allow continuous student services immediately. Ultimately, servicing students using technology became the new normal. Caught on the cusp of the transition were the students. Adhering to the stay-at-home order made it difficult for students to receive face-to-face academic advising.

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced academic advising, which is an essential component of teaching and learning. Academic advisors' responsibilities shifted to providing support and easing students' pressure and nervousness electronically (Mangundu, 2022). Students' connection to campus correlates to success, as students are more likely to succeed if

they are academically and socially engaged with faculty and student services (Martin & Clayton, 2022). Academic advising helps identify students' challenges early, directs them to appropriate resources, and shapes their worldviews in post-secondary education contexts (Mangundu, 2022). Making students aware of the different resources and classes available to select from is a critical part of the academic advising process. COVID-19 prevented in-person advising due to stay-at-home orders in most states, causing students with limited technology access to face increased challenges in staying informed and engaged (Hu, 2020). Colleges and universities used online academic advising technologies to keep guiding students during the pandemic.

Academic advising provides students with essential resources and tools to navigate college, serving as cultural navigators to help them understand their campus assets and leverage them in new environments (McKinney et al., 2022). At the height of the pandemic, it was imperative that community colleges were still able to reach their students. The pandemic made it challenging to connect with a live, responsive, informed representative of the higher education institution to answer questions and create a safe and reassuring atmosphere (Cicco et al., 2021). Early alert systems, online academic counseling, and other technology-based teaching and advising methods had to be used more frequently at colleges to keep students informed. Choosing this method helped keep students connected throughout the pandemic, increasing opportunities to reach more students. Academic advising is vital for all students, and if utilized, it can help all students. First-time college students who used advising had higher grade point averages and lower attrition rates than their peers who did not (Nix et al., 2021).

Academic advisors give insight or direction to college students about academic, social, or personal matters performs (Wang & Houdyshell, 2021). It became even more critical as advising may have helped students maintain a sense of belonging during uncertain times. Ensuring

students remain connected and engaged is crucial to student success. Through academic advising, advisors can keep students informed about their academic progress.

COVID-19 forced students to succumb to negative feelings about pursuing their education, and students may have felt a sense of hopelessness, anxiety, or even anger. The most significant contribution to the negative emotions involved continuing studies while at home. Research has found that first-generation students, working-class students, and students with caring responsibilities were less likely to have a stable learning environment (Raaper et al., 2021). COVID-19 only exacerbated these issues while at the same time causing financial hardships. Therefore, the need to meet students where they are and provide support at that moment was necessary to help keep students engaged.

Online students face higher attrition and anxiety due to a lack of supportive campus advisors, requiring proactive support to overcome disengagement and attrition (Burns et al., 2019). Community colleges utilize technology-mediated advising to support students in achieving personal and academic success (Hu, 2020). However, students' inability to use technology hinders academic guidance, thus creating a need for a balanced structure for technology-mediated advising to improve accessibility, relationship development, and support student learning (Hu, 2020). While technology may provide some immediate assistance, nothing is more critical than establishing relationships with students.

Post-pandemic, more students are utilizing an asynchronous approach to their learning. Therefore, moving towards a more digitalized way of advising through the use of technology was critical to student success. The virtual connection and advising components can support students with constant engagement with their academic programs and advisors with flexibilities

beyond in-person sessions (Hu,2020). Community colleges' role is to ensure all students can access virtual advising opportunities to support their academic success.

The pandemic's effects on the academic community necessitated some flexibility in how classes were arranged. Due to online teaching, instructors' workloads increased. In addition, because of the uncertainty of employment, there was also an emotional investment (Smith et al., 2022). To ensure that individual requirements are satisfied academically and professionally, it will take additional skills and time to comprehend the demands of staff and students.

Quality Advising

Academic advising has been instrumental in developing and progressing toward student success, persistence, and retention (Holland et al., 2020). Optimizing the benefits students receive while on campus reduces the chance of students making choices that hinder their progress toward graduation. More importantly, faculty and staff are instrumental in establishing relationships with students to facilitate student learning and ensuring they know the importance of being informed about available resources while on campus. Effective advising should assist students in identifying abilities that will enable them to manage their own learning and future objectives (Holland et al., 2020). Academic advising is geared toward enhancing students' success, increasing retention rates, minimizing major changing, increasing graduation rates, and educating the students about their academic, personal, and career goals (Assiri et al., 2020). More importantly, higher education institutions' primary objective is to help students pursue their educational goals.

The advising literature indicates that the core qualities that academic advisors' students value include knowledge, availability, helpfulness, approachability, and mentorship (Springer & Tyran, 2022). Academic advising should be implemented in colleges to ensure the satisfaction of

both current and new students by facilitating a smooth program completion (Alshuaybat, 2021). Students often feel excluded from institutional solutions, leading to a mismatch between expectations and support. Addressing this gap can be achieved through academic advising based on student insights (Mann, 2020). It can build social and emotional well-being, future employability, and develop a collegial working environment (Holland et al., 2020).

Academic advisors should have complete knowledge of their students to give them practical advice. Personal meetings between the advisor and the student should strengthen their relationship (Abdelhamid & Alotaibi, 2021). However, academic advising appears to be unproductive and time-consuming for many students. They perceive academic advising as only scheduling and registration, describing the educational advising experience as meeting with the high school counselor (Gordon, 2019). The relationship between students, faculty, and advisors is crucial for a successful advising model, considering the diverse needs of the student body and providing appropriate support (Jones et al., 2021). Academic advising is not a required activity; therefore, students are not receptive to meeting with their academic advisors when needed.

The most significant barrier to establishing an advising relationship is the lack of contact hours between the academic advisor and the student (Gordon, 2019). Frequent interaction with faculty is strongly related to satisfaction with college more than any other type of involvement (Hart-Baldrige, 2020). Therefore, establishing a connection between the academic advisors and the students can create an opportunity to get students involved in their educational journey. It also gives advisors a chance to hold the students accountable.

Quality faculty advising is essential to student success because faculty advisors help students understand and navigate the institution, helping students to connect academics and their future goals (Hart-Baldrige, 2020). Academic advising ranks high on the list of contributing

factors that increase retention rates. Student interaction with faculty correlates to students' satisfaction with the institution, demonstrating a feeling of belonging and connection (Hart-Baldrige, 2020). First-year college students' sense of belonging affects a number of academic outcomes, such as achievement, persistence, and retention (Murray et al., 2022). Through academic advising, students better understand the community college culture and what is expected of them while pursuing higher education.

Helping students understand the importance of academic advising is helping students learn the importance of understanding their educational experience. The college experience for each student is different. As an academic advisor, it is essential to know that each student is different; therefore, the needs of each student at the time of advising may be different. Academic advising helps students critically evaluate their academic choices, develop effective plans, monitor progress, provide personalized assistance, offer information on programs and majors, and offer academic and career mentoring (Suarez & Beatty, 2022).

Identifying quality advising can shift the way academic advisors advise students. Does quality advising mean more student engagement, or does it mean providing equitable advising services to "all" students? Equity in higher education is associated with a narrative of equal access and of equal outcomes that are to be affected by the removal of barriers and the implementation of targeted programs (Barrow & Grant, 2019). Equity is a principle that aids in enhancing an education system's capacity to cater to all community college learners (Wanti et al., 2022). Therefore, creating a campus that treats all students the same requires advisors to be culturally competent and relieved of harmful biases.

Creating an equitable campus requires establishing a shared responsibility for student progression and success through collaboration. Collaborative learning in academia fosters active

collaboration, enhances collective learning, and improves study outcomes and critical thinking abilities by promoting cooperation among peers and increasing motivation and satisfaction (Gonzalez-Cacho & Abbas, 2022). Collaborative learning, as it relates to academic advising, is establishing a relationship between faculty and students, whereas students can ask any faculty or staff member on campus a question regarding classes or information without being directed to other areas of the college. An academic advisor is responsible for providing students with valuable information about their goals, helping them identify obstacles, and assisting them in overcoming them (Troxel et al., 2021). Understanding what equity means for a community college campus can help support the needs of the students.

Quality advising involves helping students understand the meaning and value of education, the curriculum's logic, and their intellectual identities according to academic approaches (Wei, 2022). Therefore, establishing student-learning outcomes for academic advising can help determine if academic advising affects student persistence. The perception of the quality of advising has a positive association with students' loyalty, an indicator of persistence (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). It is imperative for first-year students attending community colleges to receive academic advising as it helps increase student success rates.

Teaching Self-Efficacy

Academic advisors must be knowledgeable of different academic options, such as the logistics of course registration and appropriate course load within the academic policies and regulations they observe. Successful academic advising brings together the attitudes, resources, coordination, institutional knowledge, and responsibility necessary for authentic learning with students (Reimers, 2022). The lack of interactions with formal advisors influences students to receive most of their primary sources of advice about their academic plans from another person

other than an academic advisor (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Therefore, meeting with academic advisors is essential for first-year community college student's academic success. Through academic advising, students can be confident in knowing that they are on the right path to student success.

The idea of self-efficacy development places ownership firmly with the student. It significantly influences student's effort, persistence, and resilience in adversity. Those with a keen sense of self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to avoid (Lin et al., 2023). Self-efficacy is defined as the individuals' belief that one is capable of learning and performing actions on designated levels (Duchatelet & Donche, 2019).

Through the use of self-efficacy and the academic advising process, students are able to get a better understanding of program requirements as well as what it takes to graduate. Self-efficacy in academic settings refers to confidence in knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for success in a course or task (Neroni et al., 2022). Academic advisors are essential for students' continued growth and persistence while attending community college. There is a responsibility to make sure that students are aware of the required courses needed to complete a program of study and identify the resources available to help each student reach the goal of graduating.

In addition, academic advisors have a responsibility to students to equip and prepare them for the journey of becoming informed students and productive members of society. Preparing students to advocate for themselves is a sure way of knowing they will transition into college life more manageable. Self-efficacy is a crucial component in daily life, influencing feelings and contributing to success by helping individuals set goals to achieve them. It plays a significant role in students' transition into higher education (Moussa, 2023). Self-efficacy is a personal and

social construct influenced by individual and collective activities, effort, persistence, tolerance, and success probability (Zheng et al., 2022).

The importance of students understanding what it takes to graduate can be motivating as it gives meaning to the task. Academic self-efficacy, academic experiences, college GPA, and academic support are critical factors explaining why students complete or depart college. These factors have been empirically linked to college outcomes, including retention and persistence (Kitchen et al., 2021). When academic advising presented to students is poor, or no advising occurs at all, severe repercussions are expected to affect their progress in the academic study and possibly cause a delay in graduation (Abdelhamid & Alotaibi, 2021).

Academic advisors must invest in strategies such as encouraging self-efficacy to help create a positive community college experience and retain students. With self-efficacy, students can recognize their ability to pursue their program completion goals and graduate from college. While adopting the mindset of self-efficacy, it is essential to support students that may be less than motivated or prepared to handle such a big responsibility. Self-efficacy influences a person's choice of activities, effort, persistence, and achievement. It refers to a person's perception of their capability to perform a task, influencing their motivation and persistence in challenging situations (Hawe et al., 2019). Academic self-efficacy challenges are prevalent among underrepresented and marginalized students, which can significantly impact their college success and completion (Kitchen et al., 2021).

Therefore, as academic advisors, being able to support each student is critical. Advisors should holistically get to know each student and intentionally discover their interests and passions. Showing consistency and support may help students stay the course and complete the required classes for degree completion. It is important to understand that the student experience

encompasses academic learning, engagement, non-academic aspects, cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions that contribute to student success (Mann, 2020). Academic advising is vital for success, promoting competency development, interpersonal interaction, major and career objectives fulfillment, and self-exploration, thereby equipping students with societal success capabilities (Spratley, 2019).

Summary

Academic advising significantly enhances student success in higher education by guiding students through the college experience, reducing dropout rates, and fostering a "can-do" attitude. It also promotes engagement, satisfaction, and career guidance, ultimately fostering student retention. Academic advising tailors' students' educational experiences to their aspirations, abilities, and lives, enabling learning to extend beyond campus boundaries and timeframes. (Holland et al., 2020). More importantly, academic advising is the core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students (Elliott, 2020).

Sometimes, community college students must be made aware of the courses required to finish a program. As a result, the importance of academic advising is crucial. The size of the college, the proportion of its student body, changes in the student profile, the administration's support, and the type of delivery method all impact advising procedures (Gordon, 2019). Students will be adequately supported in their academic achievements if advising is incorporated and made to be an established and encouraged activity. Academic advisors can significantly impact students' achievement and retention through encouraging their accomplishment (Nutter & Perrin, 2023).

Higher education institutions know that community college students come from different walks of life; therefore, understanding their reasons for attending college varies. Through

academic advising, advisors can determine student needs with course selection, degree planning, career choices, personal development, and other decisions supporting them during their academic journey. The effect of academic advising on college campuses is identified as a necessary element that results in the persistence and retention of college students (Larson et al., 2018). Therefore, the quality of the advising received should include all the elements of a good advisor. Academic advising allows advisors to inform students about their educational requirements and transforms their community college experiences. The goal is to ensure students are informed about their educational purposes and requirements.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This phenomenological study aimed to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina. A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding the academic advising process of first-year community college students and how important it is to student success is critical to improving the academic advising process. Chapter three provided an overview of the research design, research questions, setting, participants, and procedures. The chapter also included the role of the researcher, data collection, interviews, document analysis, focus groups, letter writing, data analysis, trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, ethical considerations, and the summary.

Research Design

The research method used for this study is the qualitative research design. It uses detailed descriptions to deepen our understanding of concepts and relationships (Knechel, 2019). Also, qualitative research is appropriate because it is internally consistent, rigorous, and helps us answer important questions about people and their lives (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Additionally, the phenomenological research design was used in this study. The phenomenological research describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Roth, 2018). The goal is to make sense of the phenomena of the first-year community college student advising experience. A phenomenological approach to qualitative research focuses on the lived experiences of the

phenomenon that can be observed or felt by people with different views (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

More specifically, the transcendental phenomenological design was used in this study. The transcendental phenomenological design focuses less on the researcher's interpretation and more on the description of the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The transcendental phenomenological study obtained a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon from the vantage point of an open self. To summarize, it is a scientific study of the appearance of things, or phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Understanding the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students may help improve the academic advising experiences of other students. Therefore, transcendental phenomenology enabled the researcher to examine academic advising in students' words, providing a documented description of their experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions are from different areas that support the importance of academic advising. They consist of a central research question and three sub-questions. More importantly, these questions help the researcher understand how students view academic advisors and their advising experiences. The research questions will add to the data collected and analyzed for further research.

Central Research Question

What are the lived academic advising experiences for first-year community college students in rural Eastern North Carolina?

Sub-Question One

How do first-year community college students perceive the influence of academic

advising on students' comprehension of academic expectations?

Sub-Question Two

What do first-year community college students perceive as the most effective way to maximize the time spent with academic advisors?

Sub-Question Three

What information do students expect to receive from academic advisors?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants provide detailed information related to the demographics and location of where the research took place. The researcher used first-year community college students who participated and received academic advising. Students were selected from various programs to allow a collection of different experiences to get a broad overview of academic advising experiences. Other data collected included age, gender, and ethnicity.

Setting

The setting of this research took place at a rural Community College, located in Eastern North Carolina. The student population is about 1700 students and consists of both traditional and non-traditional students pursuing higher education. The community college serves four school districts, to include Career and College Promise (CCP) and Early College students. The community college is in a rural community located in Eastern North Carolina in which pursuing higher education often seems impossible. The community college is under the leadership of the Board of Trustees, the President, four Vice Presidents, and host of faculty and staff working together to meet the needs of students. Choosing this community college provided an opportunity to research first-year community college students' academic advising experiences.

Participants

The participants for this study included 10 first-year community college students enrolled at a rural Community College located in Eastern North Carolina. Participants were selected from various programs. These programs include Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Information Technology, Nursing, Paralegal Technology, and Business Administration. The population of students selected for this study consisted of first-year community college students. The demographic makeup of this community college consists of 1% American Indian, 1% Asian, 31% Black or African American, 16% Hispanic, 42% White, 2% two or more races, and 5% race/ethnicity unknown. The age groups consist of 68% age 24 and under, 32% 25 and over, and 0% age unknown (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The enrollment data shows that 64% enrolled only in distance education, 22% enrolled in some distance education, and 14% not enrolled in any distance education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Recruitment Plan

The researcher recruited students for the qualitative study using flyers, email, and social media (see Appendix C). Social media creates online communities, allowing opportunities to share content (Chambers et al., 2020). The method of selection for the participants of the qualitative research study was taken from the purposeful and maximum variation sampling. Purposeful sampling requires selecting information rich cases for study in depth (Suri, 2011). Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Suri, 2011). Incorporating maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to select participants based on their age, gender, race, and the enrollment status of being first-year community college students. The maximum variation sampling approach consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants that are quite different from the criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An informed

consent was provided to participants of the research study indicating the study was voluntary and did not have students at undue risk (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Positionality

Advising students in my current role has brought to my attention the lack of knowledge students possess entering community college. Most students are undecided about their major and career choices as well as how to get there. Most noticeably, students are unaware of the tools and resources available on campus to help them persist while attending community college. My goal is to help create a positive community college experience while also providing students with information that may help lead to student success and retention.

Academic advising is vital because it contributes to student success, satisfaction, and retention of every student who enters higher education institutions (Zhang et al., 2019). Retention research suggests that an estimated 75% of college students who leave higher education institutions without obtaining a degree do so within their first two years of college (DeLaRosby, 2017). Therefore, connecting with students early and establishing an academic advising relationship may help improve retention rates.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework associated with academic advising is social constructivism. Social constructivism helps individuals understand the world they live in and work through their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Identifying strategies that will help create a better academic advising system for students entering higher education institutions, meeting students where they are, addressing needs, and working with students accordingly can help students gain a better understanding of how to get the education they want and deserve.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions play a crucial role in guiding the selection of theories that guide our research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Philosophical research involves the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our understanding and interpretation of the subject matter (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological research method was utilized to gain diverse perspectives on the academic advising process for first-year community college students, aiming to comprehend real-life student academic advising experiences. The reality is that each student's advising experience may be unique.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption aided in this study. It is based on individual realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My ontological assumption is that truth is realized through the students' lived academic advising experiences. Understanding and processing academic advising experiences is based on the information and facts of the students involved. Each student's experience is different, and it is their reality of how the advising session took place. The various academic advising experiences helped identify the positive and negative facts of advising derived from student experiences.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption lets researchers get close to the studied participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an academic advisor, building relationships with students and understanding their needs is crucial to the advising process. Accessing what students know and identifying what resources are needed to help create a positive learning experience is vital. More importantly, I believe that quality academic advising sets the tone for a positive educational experience. My experience is based on the premise of informing students about the expectations of a community college student, program requirements, and other campus resources that can help

deter a student from dropping out and encourage participation in their academic journey.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption describes the researcher's values and bias that they may have to the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Academic advising is a daily occurrence within higher education. I often meet students unsure about their chosen program of study or career path. As an advisor myself, it is important for me to cover the required information needed for students to persist while at the community college. Understanding how to read the program evaluation guide, selecting required courses, identifying their correct advisor, and researching other vital information is critical for students to thrive in a community college setting. Academic advising can help students understand the importance of knowing what is needed to graduate on time. The research study's results helped me identify the comparison of advising expectations from what students deemed as quality academic advising, the best methods needed to connect with students, and what information students expect to receive from academic advisors.

Researcher's Role

My role as the human instrument in this research study connected me to the phenomenon of academic advising and serving as an academic advisor to a specific group of students. My role is to identify gaps in the academic advising system that may prevent students from completing degree requirements while attending community college. Serving in the capacity of an advisor identifying the needs of students is an essential process of meeting students where they are. I did not involve students I currently advise for this specific study. I did not want students to provide false information because I was present, thus impacting the research study.

Often, students are unclear on what is required to succeed while attending community college. As an academic advisor, I am responsible for informing and educating students about

educational requirements and the available resources on campus. The available resources include tutoring, financial assistance, and even career services. Helping students understand the importance of meeting with an academic advisor and establishing a relationship is a positive aspect of the community college experience.

Procedures

The procedures section described the steps required to conduct this research study, including securing approval to begin research and defining the recruitment procedures. Information about methods used to collect and analyze data is also included. The reasoning behind the use of the triangulation method is also explained.

Data Collection Plan

Data for this qualitative study was collected from individual student interviews, focus group, and letter writing. Data collection is a series of related activities structured to gather information to answer research questions (Cypress, 2018). When data collection is implemented correctly, it enhances the quality and rigor of naturalistic inquiries (Cypress, 2018).

Individual Interviews

Phenomenology aims to understand a phenomenon from the people who experienced it (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews with a minimum of 10 individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews are the primary source of data collection but may be supported by observations (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The interviews were semi-structured, in-depth interviews, where the participants had to answer open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014). The interviews consisted of 8 first-year community college students. Students were contacted through student emails identifying the location and time of interviews.

Capturing first-year community college students' experiences helped me understand the academic advising experience. The interviews took place in a classroom away from heavy traffic areas. It allowed students the opportunity to speak freely and comfortably. Open-ended questions were used alone or in combination with other interviewing techniques to explore topics in-depth, understand processes, and identify potential causes of observed correlations (Weller et al., 2018). The interviews were recorded using an Apple 13 pro cell phone.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. What is your program of study?
3. What are your educational goals?
4. What was your academic advising experience like? CRQ
5. What is your idea of academic advising? SQ1
6. What information do you think your academic advisor should provide for you to be successful? SQ3
7. What do you consider quality academic advising? SQ2
8. How many times do you feel students should meet with academic advisors? SQ2
9. What information do you expect to receive from your academic advisor? SQ1, SQ3
10. What else would you like to share about your academic advising experiences? CRQ
11. What advice would you give to other students about meeting with their academic advisor? CRQ
12. What recommendations would you give to the administration about how to improve the academic advising experience of community college students? CRQ

Questions one, two, and three are comprised of core questions and are related to the research questions to help capture the data (Jamshed, 2014). These questions focus on the individual identity of each student and their academic goals. Each question may demonstrate how each student is similar as well as different. Questions four, five, six, seven, and eight, are to encourage elaboration and allow students to report what their academic advising experience was like in their own words and at their own pace (Powell & Brubacher, 2020). Questions nine through twelve are specific questions in which the information is sought about how to improve the overall academic advising experiences. The responses to the questions will provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and its effect on the students' community college experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Groups

A focus group is a group of individuals who have been assembled for a specific purpose (Gall et al., 2007). It will consist of 8-10 participants answering questions about their academic advising experience. The researcher will hold the focus group in a secluded location on campus, which would allow their identities to remain confidential. Focus groups are a way of collecting qualitative data needed to understand the phenomenon. The types of questions asked will be semi-structured interview questions. Semi-structured interview questions are a series of structured questions that allow for in-depth probing with open-form questions to obtain additional information (Gall et al., 2007).

Focus Group Questions

1. Who was the first point of contact when you arrived on the Community College campus?

CRQ

2. What is your understanding of the advising process? SQ3

3. When were you assigned an academic advisor? CRQ
4. If not, were you provided the contact information of your assigned academic advisor or seen by another advisor? CRQ
5. What information did you receive from your academic advisor about your specific major? SQ1
6. What information were you given about the resources available on campus? SQ1
7. What do you find most helpful in the academic advising process? CRQ, SQ1
8. What do you find most frustrating in the academic advising process? SQ1, SQ3
9. How does your academic advisor assist you with selecting classes for the semester? SQ1
10. What questions or concerns were important for you to discuss with your academic advisor? SQ1, SQ3

Questions one, two, and three are comprised of core questions that will allow the researcher to identify the type of customer service received when students arrived on campus. These questions focused on the friendliness of the faculty or staff member the student encountered. Each question may demonstrate how each student is similar as well as different. Questions four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and ten are to encourage elaboration and allow students to describe their academic advising experience in their own words and at their own pace (Powell & Brubacher, 2020).

Question ten is the last question that will give the student an opportunity to ask additional questions about their academic advising experience or the community college. Students may also provide information about how to improve the overall academic advising experiences. The responses to the questions will provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and its effect on the students' community college experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Letter-Writing

Each student received a writing prompt via email after the focus group portion of the research requesting them to write a letter describing their academic advising experience as first-year community college students (see Appendix D). Students were given two days to write the letter and submit via email to me. The letter included how they perceived their experience and what the community college and the academic advisors can do to improve future students' academic advising experience. The data collected from the letters supported identifying how students perceived their academic advising experience at the community college. Writing letters helped students freely express what they feel and provide academic advisors with further insight into how to advise first-year community college students (Lupton & Watson, 2021).

Data Analysis

Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's method of analyzing phenomenological data was used to analyze individual the data collected. This method of phenomenological data analysis involves organizing the transcribing data into individual textual and structural descriptions and composite structural descriptions of invariant codes of each experience (Brady et al., 2021). A code is a simple, short, descriptive word or phrase that assigns meaning to the data related to the researcher's area of interest (Lester et al., 2020). Coding will allow me to identify themes relevant to the student experiences. Coding is the simple operation of identifying segments of meaning in the data and labeling them with a code (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I used inductive coding. Inductive coding allowed me to develop codes from the data by using phrases or terms that were used by the participants (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

Finally, establishing a synthesis of textual and structural meanings and essences to represent the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students. This

helped paint a clear picture of student experiences (Brady et al., 2021). I gathered all the data and put it in one specific location. I transcribed the data, allowing me to become familiar with the collected data.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness poses the question, “Can the findings be trusted?” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Connelly, 2016). Trustworthiness is about establishing four parts: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (DeVaney et al., 2018). The strategies are intertwined and interdependent and serve as alternatives to the conventional, quantitative measures for quality, such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

The triangulation method helped correct data. Triangulation is a research method that helps increase validity, reliability, and legitimation, which encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of research findings (Moon, 2019). Triangulation benefits research because it enhances a study’s rigor through the collection of data from multiple sources (Moon, 2019). The end goal is to use triangulation to reduce systematic bias, which can improve the evaluation of findings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The identified data collection methods can ensure the triangulation of results, enhancing credibility and trustworthiness, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To help establish credibility, researchers can incorporate artifacts, and the researcher can use the information to expound on student advising experience. Credibility replaces internal validity and is rooted in the truth value (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The truth value derives from an in-depth exploration of human experiences as it is performed by the participants' lived experiences (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Using the data collected through student interviews, focus groups, and letter writing, I identified common themes and compared the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students.

The use of triangulation assisted with the interpretation of data. Incorporating the triangulation method allowed me to describe the behavior and the experiences to include the context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To help ensure credibility, I will use member-checking, allowing students to review transcripts for feedback. By doing so, I was able to correct any errors and allow students to eliminate information that they do not want to include.

Transferability

Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to other settings or groups (Cope, 2014). The results of the qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I assisted in the transfer by providing a thick description. I not only described the behavior but also the context so that the behavior and experiences are meaningful to others (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). More importantly, I provided a comprehensive description of academic advising details to ensure its transferability.

Dependability

Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Incorporating the different modes of data collection strengthens the dependability of the interpretation (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Keeping data consistent is important as it demonstrates that the study can be replicated. I checked the dependability of the study by utilizing the audit trail. The audit trail enhances the study's reliability by ensuring researchers remain accountable for their decisions and actions during the search process (Langtree et al., 2019). I cross-referenced and compared the data collected to ensure consistency and reduce the chances of individual biases.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints (Cope, 2014). To help with identifying confirmability, I used an audit trail. An audit trail provides documentary evidence for neutral experts or peer reviewers to review and verify the investigator's path from raw textual data to results (Carcary, 2020). The audit trail makes transparent the research design. It provides details of the data collection, analysis, reduction, synthesis, the researcher's theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices, and interpretations that led to the research findings (Carcary, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

I interacted with students to get information required, delving into their personal lives, which was essential to getting the data needed to conduct the research. Qualitative researchers must hold themselves to higher ethical standards (Mir, 2018). Working with human respondents who engage in an atmosphere of trust and mutual sharing requires ethical consideration (Mir,

2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), we must provide evidence of measures for respecting the privacy of participants and ensuring the consent process is clearly communicated, including the right of participants to withdraw from the study. To help ensure that I was respecting the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were used in place of the participant's real name. Transcripts and recordings from interviews are stored on a password-protected computer. Additionally, letters are stored in a locked file cabinet. Data obtained from research will be destroyed three years after the research is complete. If a student decides to drop out of the study before the research is complete, any data obtained will remain in a secure location until the research is completed.

Permissions

The research process began after obtaining approval from Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. The IRB approval letter is in Appendix A. I requested permission to conduct research at an identified community college. The site consent form is in Appendix B. The research process began once all approvals were received.

Other Participant Protections

Participants of this research study were provided with consent forms outlining the research details. I informed the participants that the study is voluntary, and they can withdraw anytime. Participants were also told that they would be given pseudonyms to help conceal their identity. Data obtained from research will be destroyed three years after the research is complete.

Summary

Chapter three of the study described the transcendental phenomenological approach that was used to explore the academic advising process. The goal was to understand the academic advising experience of first-year community college students. I took the information shared

through data collection from the interviews, focus groups, and letter writing to determine a phenomenon of academic advising experiences for first-year community college students. The documents analyzed in this research were collected from student interviews, focus groups and letters. All documents were reviewed and analyzed to help identify themes to develop an interpretation of the phenomenon. In addition, the data was reduced to significant statements or themes to determine the overall essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final step involved describing the individual student experiences and answering the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina. Chapter four will present the findings of the research obtained from data collection through individual interviews, focus group, and letter writing. Chapter four will also provide an overview of each participant highlighting the themes and subthemes that appeared from the data collected. The following themes emerged from the data collected: guidance and support, information accessibility, relationship building and communication. The participants' descriptions of their academic advising experience as first-year community college students at the community college were a result of the data collected which helped answer the research questions of this study. Finally, chapter four concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Participants

The method of selection for the participants of the qualitative research study was taken from the purposeful and maximum variation sampling. Purposeful sampling requires selecting information rich cases for study (Suri, 2011). Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Suri, 2011). The results from this research study are a combination of responses from ten participants using three methods of gathering data through individual interviews, focus group, and letter writing. The participants' demographic data includes name, race, age, gender, and program of study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North Carolina.

Donald

Donald is a 19-year-old Information Technology major whose educational goal is to pursue a bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity. He is a black male student who describes his academic advising experience as positive. The advisor guided him through picking out classes for his first semester. Donald also described his first-year community college experience as excellent and seamless.

Tom

Tom, a 35-year-old Information Technology major, returned to college due to health issues and an inability to work full-time. He is a white male student who describes his academic advising experience as fantastic. It was a smooth transition. The advisor was personable and provided Tom with a wealth of knowledge related to the Information Technology program.

Jessica

Jessica is a 31-year-old Associate in Arts major. She is a black female student who describes her academic advising experience as challenging. She switched majors due to the lack of information provided in her first choice for a major. Jessica prefers an advisor who is personable and reaches out to the student. Due to the advisor's unavailability, switching majors appeared to be the best option.

Susan

Susan is a 32-year-old Associate in Science major. She is a black female student who describes her academic advising experience as stressful. Susan needed more information about the resources available to her on campus. She found a lot of information on her own or through other outside resources.

Ashley

Ashley is a 40-year-old Associate in Science major. She is a black female student who did not have much information about the community college. Her academic advisor did not provide information that was beneficial to her success. Ashley wishes the advisors would be more helpful and open about resources that would benefit students.

Charlotte

Charlotte is a 36-year-old Nursing student. She is a black female student whose academic advising experience appeared rushed. Charlotte felt like she was misinformed and was not told about the paperwork that needed to be completed before she could start the Nursing program. Communication during this process was lacking.

Estaban

Estaban is a 35-year-old Nursing student. He is a white male student whose academic advising experience was positive. The advisor was knowledgeable and listened to his needs. Estaban was provided with all the information needed to achieve his goal of becoming a nurse.

Junior

Junior is a 43-year-old Business Administration student. He is a white male who wishes that his advisors were more informative and that educational options were provided upfront. Junior feels that if academic advisors are open to students about their options, it can help them make informed decisions about their educational goals.

Terry

Terry is a 22-year-old black male Business Administration student who aims to become an entrepreneur. He describes his academic advising experience as okay. He was uncertain about the next steps after admission, but the advisor helped him select classes needed for the fall semester.

Zena

Zena is an 18-year-old Paralegal Technology major. She is a black female student who describes her academic advising experience as confusing. The academic advisor she was assigned to was off campus. However, she was able to speak with a dean who helped her register for the fall semester. The dean also provided Zena with information that would allow her to thrive while attending community college.

Table 1

Student Participants Demographics

Name	Race	Age	Gender	Program of Study
Donald	Black	19	Male	Information Tech.
Tom	White	35	Male	Information Tech.
Jessica	Black	31	Female	Associate in Arts
Susan	Black	32	Female	Associate in Science
Ashley	Black	40	Female	Associate in Science
Charlotte	Black	36	Female	Nursing
Esteban	White	35	Male	Nursing
Junior	White	43	Male	Business Administration
Terry	Black	22	Male	Business Administration
Zena	Black	18	Female	Paralegal Technology

Results

The results derived from the study are organized by themes from participants interview questions, focus groups and letter writing. The themes were produced through coding the lived academic advising experiences of the participants. To help analyze the data and make sense of it,

Delve software was used. There were three common themes produced from the participants experiences: guidance and support, information accessibility, and relationship building and communication. Each of these themes has two subthemes: individual attention, timely support, resource awareness, program summaries, advisor-student rapport, and frequency of communication. Table 2 provides a snapshot of each theme and the subtheme.

Table 2

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
Guidance & Support	<i>Individual Attention</i> <i>Timely Support</i>	<i>Scheduling</i> <i>Number of advising meetings</i>
Information Accessibility	<i>Resource Awareness</i> <i>Program Summaries</i>	<i>Campus resources</i>
Relationship Building & Communication	<i>Advisor-Student Rapport</i> <i>Frequency of Communication</i>	<i>Relationships</i> <i>Communication</i>

Guidance and Support

Transitioning from high school to higher education can be stressful for many students. They must adapt to a new learning environment, create new relationships with peers and faculty, and navigate their evolving roles as college students (Dias, 2022). In addition, all students need support to gain the most from their experience, mainly to ensure a transformative experience (Wenham et al., 2020). First-year students are primarily concerned about two issues: developing a sense of belonging in higher education and building relationships with peers and faculty.

According to Donald, “Academic advising is about guiding and supporting students during their educational journey.” Steven stated, “Academic advisors should provide students with the steps they need to take, and the requirements needed to reach their goal.” Researchers

highlight the importance of trustful relationships in allowing students to engage in open, honest, and questionable discussions to enable transformative learning (Wenham et al., 2020). A sense of belonging refers to feeling at home at a higher education institution, feeling that one fits in, is a member of one or more communities, and is supported at the institution (Dias, 2022). Supporting students through this transition is even more critical as they learn the requirements and expectations of being a first-year community college student.

Individual Attention

Although no one advising approach is adequately situated to assist everyone perfectly, it is the advisor's ethical obligation to be well-informed regarding their methods and ways to adjust to meet their advisees' individual and contextual needs (Dipre & Luke, 2020). Through the individual interviews, students desired the personal attention of academic advisors explaining the requirements and expectations of their specific program area. Ashley mentioned in her interview that she wanted her advisor to sit with her and have all her questions answered so that she felt confident in navigating her first year of college. In addition, Donald stated that, “Personalized guidance is critical for me to be successful.”

Timely Support

The first year of community college can be a challenging transition for students. They are expected to know and meet the demands of college life as soon as they step foot on campus. However, that is an unrealistic expectation. Social support and factors such as study skills and motivation predict first-year students' academic success. It is becoming increasingly clear that first-year students benefit from developing a sense of belonging at higher education institutions (Cameron & Rideout, 2022).

The goal is to guide and advise students as soon as they become a part of your institution. Academic advisors must reach out to them later in their educational journey to avoid discouragement, failing grades, and even early dropout. Charlotte mentioned during her interview that she found out later in her academic journey that she needed to submit some necessary documentation to continue in the Nursing program. If she had been notified or advised early in the process, she would not have had the stress of worrying about submitting documentation, or she would have been released from the program. Notifying Charlotte late is a clear example of the importance of students receiving academic advising and additional timely support.

Information Accessibility

When students arrive on campus, most first-year community college students enter uncharted territories. They need more guidance in identifying the information and resources that are available to them. Higher education institutions continue to hold specific expectations and make assumptions about the knowledge and skills students must have to navigate academia's academic and social systems, such as applying for financial aid, registering for courses, attending office hours, etc. (Azpeitia et al., 2023). To help students gain access to available resources and information, the academic advisor can assist students in obtaining that information.

Resource Awareness

Inequitable opportunities rooted in socioeconomic class, citizenship status, and race and ethnicity determine how much students can access information about financial aid availability, application processes, and college admissions procedures (Boeck, 2022). As members of the higher education community, academic advisors are responsible for ensuring students know all available resources. For example, it is helpful for students to know that there are scholarships for

them to apply for while enrolled at the community college if they maintain a certain grade point average. In addition, it will be helpful for first-year community college students to know that resources are available to help with gas and even childcare.

During the individual interviews, Estaban and Charlotte struggled with finding childcare for their children because of the time they needed to dedicate to clinical. Charlotte stated, "Clinicals are part of the nursing program, and finding childcare can be challenging because, as a student, you are required to be at clinical during a specific timeframe." Also, needing gas to travel from home to clinical became a financial burden. Students would not have gone through the stress of worrying about finishing nursing school if they had known that gas cards and help with childcare were available. Working with academic advisors could have enabled students to use the resources that would have helped them get free gas cards.

Program Summaries

One of the essential elements of being a college student is understanding specific degree requirements for degree completion. For first-year community college students, this information does not come naturally. It takes the academic advisor to help students understand the criteria to progress toward degree completion. Outlining what courses are needed is usually the preferred method of helping students progress. However, it can be a step that is overlooked or underutilized. For Jessica, this step was overlooked. She needed help understanding the requirements for her first chosen program of study. Therefore, she switched majors and was assigned an academic advisor who was more attentive to her needs. Estaban stated, "I switched majors because the previous program was complicated, and I received very little personal interaction and help from my previous advisor."

Relationship Building and Communication

Research supports the importance of establishing a sense of belonging and building relationships in college, particularly with academic advisors, for student success and persistence in higher education. Through frequent communication and relationship building, students can address concerns, ask questions, and better understand what is required of them while attending community college. Most importantly, they have found a sense of belonging and can easily navigate their educational journey with an understanding of what it takes to graduate.

Advisor-Student Rapport

The advising literature indicates that the core qualities of academic advisors' students value include knowledge, availability, helpfulness, approachability, and mentorship (Springer & Tyran, 2022). Academic advisors' ability to connect with students and meet them where they are can go a long way in determining how students feel about the institution. Advisors are crucial for students as they represent their interests and provide guidance (Springer & Tyran, 2022). Zena stated, "I think my advisor should tell me how I can be successful at the community college." Terry stated, "I expect my academic advisor to tell me what classes are needed to complete my program." Academic advisors are well-versed in the college's operations and can direct students to appropriate resources. Conversations with advisors can significantly impact retention and build relationships that students look to for support during uncertain times or to share success stories (Cicco, 2021).

Frequency of Communication

Higher education institutions have paid a considerable amount of attention to students' first-year experiences in college, with interventions ranging from structured learning and advising support, learning communities, and first-year seminars to improving remediation policies for students who enter college academically underprepared (Bettinger et al., 2022). Part

of paying attention to first-year community college students is establishing frequent academic advising sessions to ensure students remain on track. However, the frequency of communication depends on the student. For example, through the interviews, students provided different academic advising sessions that are needed for them to be successful. Donald feels that he should have at least two sessions with his academic advisor. Jessica feels she should have three to four sessions with her academic advisor, and Susan feels she should meet with her advisor twice a month. Terry stated, "I should be able to meet with my academic advisor when I need to." The frequency of communication ranged from twice a month to twice a year. Therefore, communication is critical and based on the student's needs.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived academic advising experiences of first-year community college students at a rural community college in Eastern North Carolina. The lived academic advising experiences of first-year community college students resulted in a few findings. The findings resulted in three themes that correlate with the research study.

Central Research Question

What are the lived academic advising experiences of first-year community college students? Donald indicated that the academic advising session went very well. The advisor guided Donald on which classes to pick. Tom indicated it was a smooth transition, and the advisor was personable. Jessica stated, "The experience was very basic; I would have liked it to be more personable." Charlotte stated, "It was okay, but I realized that I was still missing information crucial to getting accepted into the nursing program." Students' academic advising experiences vary depending on their needs and the overall information provided by their

academic advisors.

Sub-Question One

How do first-year community college students perceive the influence of academic advising on students' comprehension of academic expectations? Ashley's view of academic advising is that the advisor takes time with each student to figure out ways to help them. Donald suggested, "Academic advising is about guiding and supporting students in their academic journey." Charlotte believes that academic advisors should provide students with resources to help them succeed. More importantly, inform students about the changes in a program. Academic advising is a combination of things based on the needs of the student.

Sub-Question Two

What do first-year community college students perceive as the most effective way to maximize the time spent with academic advisors? Steven feels he gets the most out of academic advising when he leaves the meeting with a clear-cut pathway with examples and timelines. Charlotte feels her time is maximized when all her questions have been answered, and she feels confident about relying on the resources available to her. Susan feels the most effective way to maximize the time spent with an academic advisor is to communicate at least twice a month. Jessica feels like the time spent with an academic advisor depends on how many classes she has. Students' time with their academic advisors varies based on their individual needs, so the duration of academic advising sessions may differ for each student.

Sub-Question Three

What information do students expect to receive from academic advisors? Students expect to receive information related to course requirements, degree options, support resources, career guidance, scheduling help, and graduation requirements. In addition, students would like to

receive information on anything that will help them be successful. Jessica stated, " I expect to receive better advisement and an understanding of what classes to take." Susan said, " I wanted scholarship information." Ashley wanted help with finances and programs that would help her meet her goals. Students expect academic advisors to provide information that supports their goals, such as completing program requirements, finding financial assistance, and accessing resources that promote their success.

Summary

The data collected from this research supports the themes developed from speaking with students about their lived academic advising experiences. The common themes were the need for academic advisors to provide guidance and support, make information accessible, communicate expectations, build positive relationships, and ensure students are aware of the resources available. Students feel that if provided with needed information upfront, they can make more informed decisions related to their educational journey. Research has indicated that positive experiences provided by higher education institutions are contributing factors to student retention and success.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived academic advising experiences of first-year community college students at a rural community college in Eastern North Carolina. Academic advising facilitates a shared dialogue with students that empowers them to set, act towards, and stay committed to their goals (Reimers, 2022). This chapter consists of five discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications of policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Transcendental phenomenology was utilized to examine the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students. Academic advising has been a crucial component of higher education institutions because it creates a strong foundation for first-year college students by providing a clear path for their educational goals. More importantly, academic advising is one area in which higher education institutions can enable quality exchanges between students and the academic environment (Holland et al., 2020). No one approach to academic advising supports all students, but many approaches can address the specific needs of students. For academic advising to be successful, advisors must find an academic advising approach that supports the needs of each student.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Effective communication and relationship building are key outcomes of a successful advising session. Academic advising is a collaborative process that involves both the student and the academic advisor. Students in higher education institutions expect their needs to be met and

assume that academic advising will proceed seamlessly, providing all necessary information for their success without requiring them to seek it out independently. For academic advising to be practical and successful, advisors must be well-informed about institutional resources, policies, and program details, including course requirements and student performance (Loucif et al., 2020).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications for policy and practice are based on the need to create academic advising practices and approaches that support the needs of all students. Academic advising practices should assist students in managing and navigating their college experiences, leading to success. Ensuring that there are academic advisors onboard to support students' needs is essential for student success.

Implications for Policy

As academic advising continues to be an intricate part of higher education institutions, it is essential to be intentional about relaying essential information to students. This research study reiterates the need for higher education institutions to prioritize academic advising and keep it at the forefront of how to communicate information to first-year community college students. Good academic advising can influence satisfaction with the educational environment and impact student intentions to persist and complete their educational qualifications (Holland et al., 2022). The implication is that writing a policy that requires advisors to provide quality academic advising to “all” first-year community college students will support students’ motivation to persist.

Implications for Practice

The quality of academic advising services provided by higher education institutions is

among the factors that contribute to not only the students' success but also the institution's success (Loucif et al., 2020). Ensuring academic advisors have the skills and knowledge to assist students throughout their educational journey is crucial. Academic advisors must be helpful, available, knowledgeable, and approachable when advising students. For academic advisors to be all these things to students, they need to attend and participate in professional development opportunities that enlighten, engage, and support their role in being good advisors. Supporting academic advisors and cultivating their role as advisors supports and prepares them to help students be successful while attending community college.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section addresses the theoretical and empirical implications of this study. I will compare and contrast the themes identified within the theories and literature from chapter two. The themes are guidance and support, information accessibility, relationship building, and communication.

Empirical Implications

The research study discusses the importance of academic advising and its impact on student success. The empirical findings contribute to the theoretical framework by supporting the theory that social constructivism supports the idea that people form meaning and understanding through engagement with one another and their interactions with their surroundings (Xu et al., 2023). Looking at the process of academic advising through the lens of first-year community college students provides insight into how the process of advising is understood while identifying areas of advising that need improvement. Ensuring academic advising processes are streamlined and meaningful to students can positively impact community college campuses.

Guidance and Support. Results from the research support the importance of academic

advising and its impact on student success. First-year community college students need to feel a sense of belonging. For community college students, feeling a sense of belonging assists with student success in retention and completion (Martinez & Munsch, 2019). Part of feeling a sense of belonging, the academic advisor needs to make sure students are informed about the resources available to them on campus, including program requirements and career information.

Academic advisors also provide a means for keeping students engaged in their educational experience, a factor that promotes persistence to graduation (Hawthorne et al., 2022). This aligns with the empirical research that one of the missions of academic advising is to support students and sometimes advocate on their behalf (McGill, 2021). More importantly, it supports the subthemes of individual attention and timely support. Capturing the attention of first-year community college students can decrease dropout rates and the probability of students being misinformed. The empirical implication is that more literature is needed to support and identify a timeline that provides first-year community college students with immediate advising. Students who see a path forward and understand how to navigate the landscape are more likely to persist. Providing students with clarity around their direction and a purpose to guide their decisions can drive higher retention and graduation rates (Marthers & Rosowsky, 2021).

Information Accessibility. First-year community college students require support and information that is detrimental to their college success. As an academic advisor, identifying and making that information available to students can ease the stress of feeling lost and confused. Research has demonstrated that students seeking help academic help is beneficial for student success (Bornschlegl & Caltabiano, 2022). However, those who need help choose not to ask. Therefore, academic advisors must anticipate students' need for vital information. When students have the information they need, it fosters a sense of independence and confidence in navigating

the college experience. In addition, information accessibility ensures that students are aware of on-campus resources and take advantage of them.

Relationship Building and Communication. Students emphasize the need for communication, which is essential for students to thrive while attending community college. Faculty and staff must collaborate to improve student success by setting expectations, offering academic, social, and financial support, and monitoring progress. Most importantly, strategically intervening early in the first year and providing feedback is crucial for directing student success (Martin & Clayton, 2022). Social constructivism claims that people form meaning and understanding through the engagement of one another and their interactions with their surroundings (Xu et al., 2023). Therefore, building relationships and communicating with students often encourages students to become active members of their college experience.

Theoretical Implications

As academic advising continues to evolve, the processes and procedures of academic advising will continue to change. The constructivism theory focuses on understanding behavior through observing behaviors in a social setting and learning how individuals think. The learning aspect of social constructivism is from the perspective that learning and knowing do not take place in isolation but through social interaction (Tsoetsi & Omodan, 2020). Students meeting with academic advisors supports social constructivism. Social constructivism encourages collaboration. Therefore, communicating with students is imperative. The study provided examples of how social constructivism theory is relevant in the interactions between academic advisors and students. Students need the guidance and support of academic advisors to fully take advantage of the resources and opportunities that community colleges can provide.

Limitations and Delimitations

Conducting this research study contrived both limitations and delimitations. The study's limitations included the need for more program representation from the identified programs chosen from this study. The limitation of the focus group was the constraints caused by inadequate inclusion of diverse program perspectives. The delimitation of this research study included recruiting participants to complete this study.

Limitations

A limitation of this study includes recruiting participants to complete it. Most of the community college student population takes classes online; therefore, requesting them to come to campus for a focus group was a challenge. Less than 50% of community college students take classes face-to-face, making it difficult to ask students to come to campus for a face-to-face focus group session. Outside of sending emails and using social media and flyers, I relied heavily on faculty and staff to help spread the word to first-year community students about sharing their academic advising experiences and possibly having a say on how to create a better academic advising experience for other first-year community college students.

Delimitations

This study included 10 participants who were chosen from identified programs to discuss their first-year community college academic advising experience. While there was representation from identified programs, there was little representation from the paralegal technology program. The lack of representation of paralegal technology lessens the chances of determining what type of academic advising those students are receiving. It is a program that struggles with enrollment; therefore, identifying how the community college could increase enrollment while meeting the needs of students is crucial to the program's viability. In addition, there needed to be more

student participation in the business administration program. It could have allowed the opportunity to see where improvement may be required.

Recommendations for Future Research

In future research regarding first-year community college academic advising experiences, faculty should make students describe their academic advising experiences as one of their assignments in their College Student Success class. College Student Success is an introductory course required by all students to introduce the college's physical, academic, and social environment and promote the personal development essential for student success (North Carolina Community College System, 2024). Faculty have access to a captive audience, and the responses have the potential to be authentic as they are still fresh in the students' minds. Students can also share their experiences as a discussion topic during class. Sharing academic advising experiences during class allows students to relate or not relate to other students' academic advising experiences.

Most importantly, sharing student academic advising experiences during class increases the sample size and captures a diverse range of students from various programs because the class is not program specific. This option allows the institution to identify areas that may need improvement or are working well. The college can listen to or read about academic advising experiences from the student's perspective. It is important to note that the community college population is constantly changing, so faculty and staff must be prepared to meet students where they are.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study aimed to describe the experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students at a rural community college located in Eastern North

Carolina. The theory guiding this study is Vygotsky's social constructivism. A purposeful criterion sampling of 10 first-year community college students helped complete this study. Data was gathered through individual interviews, focus groups, and written letters. The data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) approach of identifying the phenomenon being studied, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from the participants who experienced the phenomenon. The central research question for this study is: What are the lived experiences of first-year community college students? The findings revealed that first-year community college students look for guidance and support, want access to available information, and want to establish relationships and communicate. Academic advisors need the capacity to understand the importance of creating relationships and providing students with the information necessary for student success.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 15, 2024

Allisha Hicks
Justin Necessary

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1313 A Phenomenological Study of Academic Advising Through the Lens of First-Year Community College Students

Dear Allisha Hicks, Justin Necessary,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application per 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 described in your IRB 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, **which you must use to conduct your study**, can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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

Consent Form

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Academic Advising Through the Lens of First-Year Community College Students

Principal Investigator: Allisha Hicks, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study reflecting on the Academic Advising experiences of first-year community college students. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, a first-year community college student, and enrolled in one of the following programs: Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Business Administration, Accounting, Paralegal Technology and Information Technology. 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 this study is to describe the academic advising experiences of first-year community college students. This study will seek to identify common themes relating to academic advising experiences of first-year community college students.

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 an individual interview that will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete. The interview will be audio recorded.
2. Participate in a focus group. The focus group will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. The focus group will be audio recorded.
3. Describe on paper your academic advising experience and what do you think the community college and academic advisors can do to improve future students' academic advising experiences via journal prompts. Journal prompts will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include understanding the importance of academic advising and the impact it has on first-year community college students.

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.

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.

- Participants' responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and/or locked in a file cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the interviews, focus group and collection of letters, participants will receive a physical \$ 20.00 Target gift card.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not 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 via email at [REDACTED]. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Allisha Hicks. 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 chair, Dr. Justin Necessary, 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:
Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

A Phenomenological Study of Academic Advising Through the Lens of First-Year Community College Students

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Are you a first-year community college student?

Are you enrolled in one of the following programs?

- Associate in Arts
- Associate in Science
- Business Administration
- Nursing
- Paralegal Technology
- Information Technology

If you answered **yes** to all of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of academic advising for first-year community college students.

Participants will be asked to participate in-person, audio-recorded focus group, answer individual interview questions in person while being audio-recorded, and take 10-15 minutes to respond to two journal prompts on paper, describing your academic advising experience. The interviews and focus group session will take no longer than 45 minutes to complete. The session will take place in a secluded location to protect your privacy.

Benefits include improving the academic advising experience for other first-year community college students. Participants will receive a physical \$20.00 Target gift card after completing the interview questions, participating in focus group and completing the journals.

If you would like to participate in the research, please email Allisha Hicks at [REDACTED]. All information provided will be kept confidential.

A consent form will be provided in person when we meet for the interviews.

[Allisha Hicks](#), a doctoral candidate in the Education Department School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Allisha Hicks at [REDACTED] for more information.

APPENDIX D:**Writing Prompt**

1. Describe your academic advising experience as a first-year community college student.
2. What can the community college and the academic advisors can do to improve future students' academic advising experience?

APPENDIX E:
Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. What is your program of study?
3. What are your educational goals?
4. What was your academic advising experience like?
5. What is your idea of academic advising?
6. What information do you think your academic advisor should provide for you to be successful?
7. What do you consider quality academic advising?
8. How many times do you feel students should meet with academic advisors?
9. What information do you expect to receive from your academic advisor?
10. What else would you like to share about your academic advising experiences?
11. What advice would you give to other students about meeting with their academic advisor?
12. What recommendations would you give to administration about how to improve the academic advising experience of community college students?

APPENDIX F:**Focus Group Questions**

1. Who was the first point of contact when you arrived on the Community College campus?
2. What is your understanding of the advising process?
3. When were you assigned an academic advisor?
4. If not, were you provided the contact information of your assigned academic advisor or seen by another advisor?
5. What information did you receive from your academic advisor about your specific major?
6. What information were you given about the resources available on campus?
7. What do you find most helpful in the academic advising process?
8. What do you find most frustrating in the academic advising process?
9. How does your academic advisor assist you with selecting classes for the semester?
10. What questions or concerns were important for you to discuss with your academic advisor?