UNIVERSITY PEER ADVISORS PURSUING CAREERS IN EDUCATIONAL ADVISING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF LIVED-EXPERIENCES ON VOCATIONAL PURPOSE

Laurie L. Simpson
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University
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ABSTRACT

Many studies have considered the impact college peer advising programs have on advisees, however, formal literature examining the lived-experience peer advising placements have on student advisors is limited. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, this study seeks to examine the lived-experiences of former peer advisors in an advising center at a four-year university in Massachusetts. The goal of the research is to determine whether there are common themes in the lived-experiences of participant peer advisors. Additionally, employing Chickering’s psychosocial theory of student development, this researcher seeks to discover how those lived-experiences may have contributed to participants’ development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose? Participants for this study are former university graduates who served as peer advisors during their academic career and who are pursuing careers in educational advising.

Keywords: Chickering’s psychosocial developmental theory, epiphanic moment, higher education, lived-experience, peer advising, peer education, peer mentoring, vocational purpose
Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my family whose love and support has encouraged me to make it to the finish line. I am blessed, as well, to have adopted a new canine family during this process, Presley, Melody and Benny, your unconditional love has made my life so much sweeter.
Acknowledgment

I would like to give honor and glory to the Lord for His comfort and support during this dissertation process. I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Barbara Boothe, for her timely and valuable feedback – you are a blessing to me! Thank you, as well, to Dr. Elizabeth Sites and Dr. Kim Tobin for your reviews and suggestions. I so appreciate the time and encouragement you offered me through this process. I would like to thank my friend Pamela Hutto for her guidance, suggestions and emotional support. To Luanne Miles, thanks for being the greatest friend and encouraging me when I felt like giving up. You are a dear friend and I am grateful to God for you. Thank you Carlton Pickron for the many years of inspiration that led to my enrolling in this doctoral program. Thank you, Marsha Marotta, for always listening and for offering valuable feedback. To Azanda and Monique, thanks for being my surrogate cohort, your words surely lifted my spirits so many times. And finally to my four study participants, thank you for your sacrifice of time, for sharing your lives, and for making this research study possible. I could not have done this without your participation and I appreciate you so very much.
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Great Northeastern University (pseudonym) (GNU)
Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA)
National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)
Peer Assisted Learning Sessions (PALS)
University of Southern Maine (USM)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Before I can tell my life what to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life. (Palmer, 2000, p. 4)

A great deal of research has been conducted on the college student (Astin, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; Kuh, 2005; Pascarella &Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993), however, more attention needs to be directed at how specific college work experiences influence the development of vocational purpose. Colleges can and should play a role in guiding students through a journey of self-examination by asking them, “What can we do to assist you in discovering your vocational purpose?” The current study seeks to examine the lived-experiences of former peer advisors at a four-year university in Massachusetts, henceforth identified as Great Northeastern University (GNU), who are pursuing careers in educational advising. Additionally, this study seeks to discover how those experiences may have contributed to participants’ development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

Serving as a peer advisor in a university advising center, students experience training in leadership development through which arise opportunities for self-reflection. In the course of various student interactions, peer advisors may begin to question their vocational purpose. Koring and Campbell (2005) submit that peer advisors from institutions like University of Southern Maine (USM) and others are continuing graduate work in higher education as a result of their peer advising experience, however, no formal research has been conducted affirming those claims.
This study seeks to describe the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who are pursuing careers in academic advising; and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. The expression “lived-experience” originates from phenomenology and human science through German philosophers Kant and Hegel (van Manen, 1990).

Additionally, this study seeks to discover how those lived-experiences may have contributed to participants’ development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

For the purposes of this study, epiphanic moments will be defined as the “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (Denzin, 1989, p. 15), and vocational purpose as “... an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans and to persist despite obstacles...” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 209).

Background

Higher education in Massachusetts, as well as most other states, has been deeply affected by the country’s economic crisis. The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA, 2012) asserted that when adjusted for inflation, the Massachusetts state appropriation for public higher education has declined by over $680 million – 42% – since reaching a high point in FY01. Additionally, the MTA claims that in 2010, Massachusetts ranked 48th among states in state and local fiscal support for public higher education.

During times of fiscal constraint, universities seek fiscally prudent means to implement programs that will strengthen students both academically and socially. One way they do this is through university peer advising programs. These programs provide student advisees the
opportunity to interact with well-trained, experienced peer advisors, thereby offering them a greater sense of community, more social integration, and a larger network of resources. For these reasons and more, formal peer advising programs for undergraduates are being implemented increasingly in higher education (Koring & Campbell, 2005). Habley (2004) claims the use of undergraduate students as paraprofessionals has increased nationwide, according to ACT surveys. The use of undergraduate students as paraprofessionals has been identified in more than 75% of all higher education institutions (Brack, Millard, & Shah, 2008; Ender, Newton, & Gardner, 2010).

Ender et al. (2010) suggest:

Peer educators are valuable for an academic institution because they are experienced with the campus, they are economical to the budget, they can relate to the situations of fellow students, and they are effective. The student serving as a peer educator also benefits; the peer educator learns new skills, gains relevant practice experience, and contributes to the community. For some, it will last a year or two, and for others, it will initiate new career objectives and lifelong personal change. (p. 3)

Direct relevance to the current study is the notion that peer advising programs provide opportunities for leadership and professional growth that prepare students for roles on campus and society in general (Couchman, 2009; Gordon, Habley, Grites, & National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2008; Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggest that what a student does during college will generally have a greater impact on his or her subsequent career attainment than where he or she attends college. Kuh (2005) agrees, stating, “What students do during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to college” (p. 1). Researchers claim that
mentoring, when done correctly, has the potential to enhance the career development and psychosocial development of both individuals (Kram, 1985; Retallick & Pate, 2009).

This study seeks to examine the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising, and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. Additionally, this study seeks to discover how those experiences may have contributed to student development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

**Situation to Self**

As a non-traditional student, I completed a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice at age 33. Someone suggested pursuing a master’s degree in psychology to complement the bachelor’s degree. I applied for a graduate assistantship in the advising center at GNU in order to finance my degree. My two-year experience in the GNU advising center changed my life’s direction completely. While I do not remember the exact timing, my own epiphanic moment occurred during that two year period. At the conclusion of my assistantship, I knew that I wanted to work with students to assist them in determining their life’s vocational direction. Shortly thereafter, I was hired as an academic advisor with the GNU advising center.

In 2005, after eight years in the advising center, with the assistance of a student intern, the peer advising program was created. Today, after nearly eight years of the program’s existence, more than 150 students have completed internship, work-study, or trust fund experiences with the advising center.

Through various communications, I discovered that four former peer advisors are currently employed in educational advising settings. As undergraduates, two of these students were psychology majors with hopes of becoming guidance counselors. The first is currently a
middle school guidance counselor, the second an academic advisor at a university in eastern Massachusetts. The third student, a business major, who wanted to work in sales management, is now working as an academic counselor with at-risk high school students. The fourth student, a communication major with an eye toward library science, is now an academic advisor at a four year university in northeastern Connecticut. Two other former peer advisors, not a part of this study, are academic counselors within the advising center that houses the peer advising program under study; one an undergraduate psychology major – the other a business major with a focus on management. These students’ stories are different and yet, seemingly the same. Their vocational purpose changed at some point leading them to their current positions. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

**Problem Statement**

The problem involves the need to understand more clearly the experience of former university peer advisors who chose to pursue careers in educational advising and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. Additionally, this study seeks to discover how those experiences may have contributed to the development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

Chickering and Reisser (1993) submit that the majority of college students believe that college is intended to prepare them for a good job so that they can live comfortably. They do not necessarily view it as preparation for the “real world.” Students enrolling in the peer advising program at GNU, may not realize how the experience may help them grow developmentally. They may consider the experience a good way to earn credits, trust fund money, or work study. Ender et al. (2010) state that for some, the peer advising experience, “will last a year or two, and
for others, it will initiate new career objectives and lifelong personal change” (p.3). The issue of interest is to examine the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who are pursuing careers in academic advising, and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. Additionally, this study seeks to discover how those lived-experiences may have contributed to the development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising, and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. Additionally, this study seeks to discover how those experiences may have contributed to the development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

**Significance of the Study**

The study is significant for the following reasons: While a good deal of research addresses the positive impact peer interactions have on student outcomes (Astin, 1993; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), research is limited in the area of understanding the peer advising experience from the perspective of the peer advisor. Astin (1993) concludes that “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398). Research suggests that peers contribute to peer growth and development; this study seeks to understand the peer advising experience and the significance student-to-student interactions may have on the peer advisor’s vocational development.
Research suggests that programs like peer advising contribute to overall student retention rates. Kuh (2005) submits that colleges and universities with supportive campus surroundings are a result of high-quality student relationships with other students. Tinto (1993) asserts that student’s perception of his/her experiences within an institution plays a role on a decision to stay or depart from that institution. Branch, Taylor, and Douglas (2003) point out that peer advisors’ satisfaction, retention, and academic success can increase because of their sense that they matter to their institution (Koring & Campbell, 2005). Implementing programs that utilize students who are connected to the institution in a positive way will assist new students as they make their own positive transition to the campus.

**Research Questions**

In qualitative studies, research questions are open-ended and evolving. These questions are broad in nature, addressing the essence of the phenomenon under study. Creswell (2009) suggests beginning a phenomenological study by first determining the broadest question that can be asked. In that the purpose of this study sets to examine the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who chose to pursue careers in educational advising, the following question will guide this study: What specific lived-experiences influence vocational purpose from the perspective of former peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising? Additional sub-questions will be:

1. What specific educational experiences, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
2. What specific experiences with friends, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
3. What specific experiences with family, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?

Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest that people discover their vocation by discovering what they love to do, what energizes them and fulfills them, what uses their talents and challenges them to develop new ones, and what actualizes all their potentials for excellence. Creswell (2013) says that in order to develop a deeper understanding of the features of a phenomenon, the researcher must understand the commonalities or shared experiences of research participants. Therefore, it is important to understand how peer advisors perceive the influence their lived experiences had on their decision to pursue careers in educational advising.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations imposed by the researcher to narrow the focus of this study include:

1. This phenomenological study confines itself to gathering data from former peer advisors at one university in Massachusetts.

2. This researcher chose to focus solely on former peer advisors who are pursuing careers in academic advising.

Limitations of this study are:

1. That the data, data analysis and implications of the data are based solely on the participants’ perceptions of their experiences;

2. That it is not possible to demonstrate that the findings of this study are applicable to other populations (Shenton, 2004).

**Research Plan**

In order to understand participants’ life experiences and how those experiences may have contributed to the development of vocational purpose, a phenomenological qualitative design is
the preferred methodology. In phenomenological studies, participants are asked two broad, general questions related to: 1) what they have experienced in terms of the phenomenon and 2) what events or situations influenced their experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Through in-depth interviews, participants in this study had the opportunity to articulate life experiences from primary through post-secondary schooling; thereby providing the researcher with a clearer understanding of how those experiences may have clarified their vocational purpose. Additionally, this study sought to discover how those experiences may have contributed to their development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

Data was collected by interviewing former peer advisors, who are now employed as educational advisors. Participants were asked to reconstruct their life experiences in detail, beginning in childhood, up to and including their peer advising experience. They were be asked to reflect on the significance of life experiences in their education, their social circle (friends), and their families as they related to their decision to enter the field of educational advising.

Once all of the interviews were conducted, the researcher completed a thorough review of the transcripts. The researcher identified themes that emerge by synthesizing significant information discovered in the review.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are to be assumed:

**Peer advisors** – Undergraduate students trained to advise students in understanding options for majors, minors, common core, online registration procedures, and tutoring services—if needed.
Lived-experiences (life-world) – A combination of feelings, thoughts, and self-awareness experienced by an individual at any given moment in time (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Epiphanic moments – “Interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (Denzin, 1989, p. 15).

Vocational purpose – “. . . an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans and to persist despite obstacles . . .” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.209).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

College students are in search of purpose and meaning in their lives. They ask big questions: Who am I? What is my purpose in this world? What will I become? How will I find my way? Sanford and Adelson (1965) stated:

How a student turns out at the end of his college experience—the degree of his success from his own point of view, or that of the college—depends both on what he was like at the time of admission and upon the influences of college. (p. 42)

Palmer, Zajone, and Scribner (2010) suggested that colleges and universities need to encourage, foster, and assist our students, faculty, and administrators to find a way by which meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action. Parks (2011) submitted, “. . . all who serve the life of the academy—have distinctive opportunities to meet emerging adults as they seek place and purpose in a world that needs them” (p.222). Chickering and Reisser (1993) hypothesized a theory that linked students’ college experiences to their psychosocial development.

A good deal of research has been conducted evaluating the effectiveness of peer advising programs for the students they serve (Frisz & Lane, 1987; NACADA, 2013; Russel & Skinkle, 1990; Shook & Keup, 2012). However, research is limited as to the benefits of peer advising. How does the peer advising experience contribute to the psychosocial development of peer advisors? Utilizing Chickering’s theory, paying particular attention to the second element of vector six—vocational purpose—this study has sought to fill the gap in the literature relating to that question.
Peer Advising Programs

An influential body of research and literature has demonstrated the effectiveness of collaboration between the university administration and students—specifically in learning communities (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, & Wilss, 2008; Jones & Brown, 2011; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011). In this study, the role that peer advisors played not only in creating supportive networks, but also in improving learning and personal development was explored. The most important generalization to be derived from the many studies about peer advisors and peer mentoring is that peer mentors and peer advisors remain a single source of influence on students as regards their educational and personal development (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997; Chester, Burton, Xenos, & Elgar, 2013; Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009; Dennison, 2010; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Smith, 2008). A large impact of college on an individual’s life is also determined by the interactions of students within their community, especially with the major agents of their socialization circle: members of the faculty, other students, and peer advisors (Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010; Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007).

Peers greatly influence the decisions of their peers especially about behavior, opinions, and passions (Colvin, 2007). Peers also lead to positive learning and to the individual development of the learner (Colvin, 2007). It is well documented that peers can be used in order to enforce the educational aims of an institution (Couchman, 2009; Darwin & Palme, 2009; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). The use of peer advisors represents a significant tool for student achievement and student adjustment (Allen et al., 1997; Chester et al., 2013; Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). This has been widely demonstrated and established in learning communities, specifically
in big state universities (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010). However, an effective peer mentor program necessitates committed members of the faculty and professional peer advisors (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). These two groups will bring together their knowledge and expertise to produce an effective peer-mentoring program (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011).

**A Description of Peer Advisors**

Mentoring or advising is promoted as a key strategy for supporting targeted students, especially new students in the academic setting (Chester et al., 2013; Dennison, 2010; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Jones & Brown, 2011). However, mentoring or advising is a complex process that requires the development of meaningful relationships strengthened by knowledge, experiences, and opportunities for contemplation (Chester et al., 2013; Jones & Brown, 2011). In this section, a description of peer advisors and peer mentors (henceforth, “peer advisors”) is presented.

Peer advisors are integral part of a university’s or college’s pre-major advising program specifically for first year students (Chester et al., 2013; Couchman, 2009; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). The peer advisors provide perspective based on their knowledge and experience as upper class students and assist first-year students in their transition period from high school to the college or university life (Jones & Brown, 2011). Some roles enacted by the peer advisors are “peer leader, learning coach, student advocate, and trusted friend” (Colvin & Ashman, 2010, p. 132).

Peer advisors are a group of responsible and knowledgeable students from upper classes (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). They are recruited by the professional advising staff or faculty of a college or university (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schabmann, Spiel, & Carbon, 2011). The peer advisors are trained to establish connections with freshmen in order to
help them adjust and succeed during their stay in the university or college (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Leidenfrost et al., 2011). Peer advisors usually contact freshmen students during the registration period or during the summer before the school year starts and they remain accessible to the freshmen students throughout the summer and first semester, and sometimes even after the first semester (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011).

The existence of peer advisors at colleges and universities is nearly as old as higher education itself (Chester et al., 2013; Colvin, 2007; Darwin & Palme, 2009). Usually, peer advisors are residence-based in the college and universities such as the position of the traditional resident assistant (Chester et al., 2013; Colvin, 2007; Darwin & Palme, 2009). Peer advisors serve as a way for students to adjust successfully to college life (Chester et al., 2013; Couchman, 2009; Heirdsfield et al., Wilssa, 2008). Both unintentionally and intentionally, peer advisors have provided support for academic success and interpersonal development of first-year students (Chester et al., 2013; Couchman, 2009; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). Peer advisors sometimes provide simple tutoring sessions with the first-year students or look for possible tutors for their peers (Chester et al., 2013; Couchman, 2009; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). These more experienced student peers have also effectively used resources that can be found in the university, which can help first-year students with their academics, especially when faculty-student ratios do not permit an intensive faculty involvement. It is common practice for peer advisors to be graduate students, but it is now increasingly becoming a role for undergraduate students as well (Chester et al., 2013; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). The titles and responsibilities of a peer advisor vary across universities. However, the role of a peer advisor is based on having a more experienced peers interact with the target students to share their knowledge and expertise to assist target students’ in better understanding certain topics or subjects (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011).
Intentional augmentations to the role tend to increase its effectiveness. The more that the target students can identify with the peer advisor, the more receptive the target students will be to the suggestions of the peer advisor (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Leidenfrost et al., 2011). Several studies have suggested that whenever possible peer advisors should share some relevant traits with the target group (Chester et al., 2013; Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009). In this way, the target group will “see themselves” in the peer advisor, thereby establishing a baseline with the target group (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). For example, a transfer student (from the previous school year) would perhaps be the most effective peer advisor for a group of new transfer students for the school year (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011).

It is advantageous to create as many chances as possible to integrate the lives of the peer advisor and the lives of the targeted group of students (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Specifically, since frequent contact establishes a bond between the peer advisor and the target students that would lead to a more beneficial learning experience (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). In fact, it has been established by several studies that if the peer advisor interact with the target students in all kinds of environment (classrooms, student organizations, field trips, and residential houses) then there would be more opportunities for a deeper relationship between the two (Chester et al., 2013; Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009). As peer advisors are developed for the objective of making the transition period seamless, then the integration and interaction among different types of environment should be emphasized (Chester et al., 2013; Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009). One study tested whether the attitudes of the teen mentors would have an effect on the outcomes of peer advising program (Karcher, Davidson, Rhodes, & Herrrad, 2010). Mentees who were academically disconnected were paired with peer advisors who had a positive attitude towards
youth (Karcher et al., 2010). The program produced meaningful and significant relationships between the peer advisors and peer advisees (Karcher et al., 2010).

**Functions of Peer Advisors**

Peer advising in higher education is considered an effective intervention to ensure the academic success and retention of at-risk students and new students (Chester et al., 2013; Dickson et al., 2014). As such, many universities and colleges have implemented some form of peer advising program as part of their student support services. Previous studies have supported the utilization of peer advisors to improve the academic performance of students and to increase student retention. Only a few studies have determined the functions of peer advisors and what types of peer advisors would be best suited for the roles (Chester et al., 2013; Heirdsfield et al., 2008; Karcher, 2010). Peer advisors have several different functions that help the other students, the faculty members, and the institution itself (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

**Connection to the social world.** The peer advisors are the first connection of the first-year students to the social world of their college (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). In most universities, it is the task of the peer-advising program to coordinate activities for students to get to know other students (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Peer advisors are also influential in creating lasting interpersonal bonds with other students. Activities initiated by the peer advising programs help promote a sense of community within the students.

**Guide.** Peer advisors help students to be familiarized with the different students of the university, faculty members, and the accessible resources in the university (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The peer advisors help students to make sense of what can be perceived as an overwhelming system, specifically at huge institutions (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).
**Mentor.** Peer advisors are also called peer mentors because they not only guide the students in their college life but share their knowledge and experience, sometimes even outside the scope of the college life (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Peer advisors are also meant to challenge the target students to go outside of their comfort zones. For the institution, peer advisors also help other students better understand the aims of higher education (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

**Advisor.** The basic task of peer advisors is to advise students primarily in academics (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). For example, they can advise students on which professors would be the best for them to take in a particular subject. Peer advising programs provide basic training for students to become peer advisors (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

**Manager.** Peer advisors function like managers because they are “in charge” of the students (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). This function is especially true in a residential environment. The peer advisors communicate the importance of following residential housing policies and institutional policies as well regarding course requirements (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). However, there must also be clear guidelines on the conduct of a peer advisor (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

**Leader.** Peer advisors have the primary function of organizing events that will help students adjust to college life (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Leadership is not only a function of the role but it may also be a skill that the peer advisor can develop in the student (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

**Role Model.** Since the upper-class students provide many roles for students, the role of a peer advisor also serves as a perfect example of a committed member of the learning community (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The students will look up to peer advisors, especially if they have much in common with the target students (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).
Lived Experiences of Peer Advisors

Even though there is considerable research supporting the use of peer advising programs to improve academic success and decrease student attrition, few studies have examined the lived experiences of peer advisors. The motivation of peer advisors is the focus of Terrion and Leonard’s (2010) study. The authors utilized semi-structured interviews to explore the motivations of peer advisors at the University of Ottawa, Canada. The findings suggested that peer advisors were motivated by self-oriented reasons such as being able to learn who they are, being fulfilled by what they are doing, and being happy with helping younger people.

Student retention is one of the aims of peer advising programs. Shotton et al. (2007) explored the lived experiences of American Indian students who participated in the peer-mentoring program. The findings revealed that the American Indian peer advisors helped in the academic success, student integration, and student retention of American Indian students (Shotton et al., 2007).

Colvin (2007) explored the social dynamics involved in peer advising programs from the perspective of the peer advisors. The author focused on how peer advisors and students interacted with one another in higher education classrooms. The results indicated that the interaction between peer advisors and students do not always go smoothly and most of the time peer advisors spent a lot of time trying to impress students (Colvin, 2007).

Heirdsfield et al. (2008) explored the experiences of peer advisors. Their goal was to understand the experiences of the peer advisors in order to be able to make recommendations for the success of peer advising programs. The findings of the study provided a relational model of peer advising. Peer advisors were said to have a more meaningful experience when they feel that
they can relate to peer advisees and when they also feel that their peer advisees can relate to them (Heirdsfield et al., 2008).

Amaral and Vala (2009) explored a peer-advising program that was added to an introductory chemistry course at a large university. Peer advisors were recruited from previous introductory chemistry courses. This study also focused on the experiences of the peer advisors. The peer advisors who participated in the program earned higher grades and took more chemistry courses that their peers who were not part of the program. The authors concluded that peer-advising programs are a “worthwhile endeavor” (Amaral & Vala, 2009, p. 635).

Couchman (2009) explored the lived experiences of one cohort of academic peer advisors at a small Australian university. There were 11 undergraduate peer advisors who were part of the PALS (Peer Assisted Learning Sessions) program at the University. The peer advisors were asked to submit narratives of their experiences as peer advisors. The narratives provided an autobiographical view of their practices as advisors. Three themes emerged from this study. The first theme was about the experiences of the peer advisors. The peer advisors were able to develop their leadership and empathy skills. The second theme was about their task of writing narratives, which enabled them to reflect on what they had done as a peer advisor for the day. In relation to this theme, the reflective practice translated to reflected action, which was defined in the study as “flexibility and the ability to improvise when things aren’t going exactly as planned” (Couchman, 2009, p. 97). The third theme was about how the peer advisors and peer advisees benefited from the program. One of the peer advisors mentioned, “Not only do I get a chance to improve myself, I am also able to help other students improve themselves” (Couchman, 2009, p. 100). Another of the students also praised the program, saying “As well as making me feel good about it being a successful PAL session, I think the students felt good by working out the
problems because it’s more rewarding if you figure stuff out for yourself rather than being told the answers” (Couchman, 2009, p. 101). The PALS program based on the lived experiences of the peer advisors is an effective, peer advising program (Couchman, 2009; Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010).

**Benefits of Peer Advising Programs for Students**

Studies have shown that the success of many college freshmen depends on the establishment of relationships with faculty members, administration, and other students during their first few weeks of school. Colleges and universities have acknowledged that students feel anxious about entering college. Peer advising programs help the first-year students to deal with their anxieties (Karcher, 2010). Peer advising programs aim to support the transition from the high school setting to the university setting easier (Gilmour, Kopeikin, & Douché, 2007; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). Moreover, peer-advising programs in higher education are seen as an effective intervention to ensure not only the success but also the retention of first-year students (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Hall and Jaugietis (2011) concluded that participants in the program stated that they had experienced benefits from the program.

Allen et al. (1997) investigated the factors related to the protégés’ satisfaction with a formal peer-mentoring program. The results showed that the degree of psychosocial functions and career function of the peer advisor was strongly associated with the protégés’ satisfaction with their peer advisors. Furthermore, the willingness of the protégés to enter the peer advising programs depended on their satisfaction with their current experiences with the program. In a similar study, Dickson et al. (2014) also sought to understand the relationships between the various types of protégé-reported mentoring functions, such as psychosocial and career support and role modeling. The results indicated that the role modeling aspect was the strongest predictor
for the expected outcomes of the program. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2000) examined the effects of graduate students as peer advisors and concluded that peer mentoring provided the student with increased levels of instrumental and psychosocial support.

Chester et al. (2013) examined the effectiveness of a peer mentoring program for first-year psychology students. Third-year students worked with small groups of first-year students. The program was developed to enhance the five aspects associated with student success: capability, connectedness, resourcefulness, purpose, and culture. There was significant positive change in three of the five aspects, namely, connectedness, culture, and resourcefulness.

Peer advising is a potential solution to challenges in nursing education, which includes increasing student enrollees, an increasing number of requirements, financial difficulties, and reduction of chances in clinical placement. Gilmour et al. (2007) reported the findings of their study involving a short peer-mentoring program with second-year nursing students as mentors and first-year students as mentees. From the perspective of the first-year mentees, the program was helpful, but it required “considerable organisational investment and ongoing commitment in educational and clinical settings” (Gilmour et al., 2007, p. 39).

Christiansen and Bell (2010) explored the effect of a peer advising program developed to promote supportive learning relationships between student nurses. The findings of the study suggested that because of the program, the students experienced reduced feelings of social isolation in clinical settings and that the program had helped them deal more effectively with difficulties in their academics. In addition to that, peer learning relationships created a heightened readiness for professional practice. In another study, Dennison (2010) found out that if peer advisors provided a student-centered service, then the students would have more positive feedback about the program (Dennison, 2010).
Benefits of Peer Advising Programs to Peer Advisors

More than providing support and guidance, there are many ways that peer advisors produce additional benefits that are not directly related to the college life of the targeted students. These additional benefits include a different learning experience for the peer advisors as well as helping hands for the school administration, the faculty members, and the institution itself.

Peer advisors are commonly the most talented students in an institution and represent the “ideal” student. Peer advisors show how the institution can help a first-year student to actualize their potentials. Being a peer advisor would serve as a valuable educational experience (Dennison, 2010). Most students who served as peer advisors described their experiences as one of the powerful and most memorable experiences in their undergraduate years (Lennox Terrion, & Leonard, 2010). Because of their experiences, some of the peer advisors in the study even became educational advisors once they graduated.

Peer advisor is not just a position in a student’s college life. Most of the time, peer advisors realize that they may want to pursue this field. Most peer advisors turn the experience into a career goal such as becoming an educational advisor or even entering academe (Steele, Fisman, & Davidson, 2013). In this way, peer-advising programs serve as recruitment programs for both academe as well as student support departments. Thus, peer advisors not only benefit the students and faculty, but the institution as well.

The opportunity to become a peer advisor is a useful tool to shape the future of students not only their years as peer advisors but also after their graduation (Steele et al., 2013). Peer advising programs help in recruiting desirable students. Moreover, peer-advising programs provide leadership development that is unlike any other leadership experiences in college life.
Studies have shown the benefits of the experience of peer advising in both the personal and professional development of the peer advisor (Huizing, 2012).

**Benefits of Peer Advising Programs to Faculty and Academic Institution**

Academic programs have also benefited from the peer advisors. Peer advisors serve as an important medium between faculty members and targeted students (Files, Blair, Mayer, & Ko, 2008). Depending on the assigned role of a peer advisor in each university, peer advisors are usually provided with orientation by some faculty members regarding course syllabi. The faculty members present the intended outcomes of each course and the peer advisor will keep that in mind for each of the students. Peer advisors also provide feedback to the faculty members, especially if most of the students have found a specific course assignment to be difficult or to be in conflict with other course assignments.

Even though successful peer mentoring is considered to be a useful program in higher education, there is a need for peer advisors, faculty members, and students to understand their roles in the program (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The need to create an effective mentoring program is crucial. However, formal advising relationships build over time as the advisors and the advisees adjust to one another (Weinberg & Lankau, 2011).

**Challenges and the Future of Peer Advising Programs**

Studies have provided a strong case that peer advisors are helpful in learning institutions (Chester et al., 2013; Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Heirdsfield et al., 2008). However, there are also some challenges in the creation and implementation of peer advising programs. A successful peer-advising program in college or university settings is the result of meaningful relationships among students, mentors, staff, and faculty members (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). Peer advising programs should have a structure. However, this structure must also provide
flexibility and adaptability to ensure that the program meets the needs of new students every year (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). In addition, faculty and student affairs personnel have different perspectives (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). Thus, it is important to develop a common understanding of the desired qualities of a peer advisor (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

The first step would be in the recruitment process of the peer advising programs (Smith, 2008). In order to ensure the quality of peer advisors, the standards should adhere to the basic needs of the target students (Karcher et al., 2010). If the standards should include high academic standing then the peer advisor might only meet the needs of students who have high academic standing.

The influence of peer advisors is evident as supported by existing studies (Couchman, 2009; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Shotton et al., 2007). However, these kinds of programs need of the support of the faculty members and the administration in order to provide continuous training, apt guidance, responsible supervision, and constant evaluation (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). Even though it is usually a good strategy to consider the best practices of the peer advising programs, individuals should challenge themselves to innovate the program according to the needs of the new set of students each year (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). Leidenfrost et al. (2011) explored different mentoring styles and examined their contributions to the academic success of students. There were three distinct mentoring styles identified: motivating master mentoring, informatory standard mentoring, and negative minimalist mentoring. Motivating master mentoring was considered to have a positive impact especially when the students had failed preliminary examinations.
Heirdsfield et al. (2008) examined how it is important to understand the experiences of the mentors. The successes and challenges that the peer advisors experienced in the program can contribute to planning an effective program that would help in the transition of the targeted group of students. Heirdsfield et al. (2008) emphasized the need to understand the experiences of the peer advisors, which they concluded had a direct effect in the recruitment process and training of the peer advisors.

Faculty and the institution should also spend time and money to ensure the effectiveness of the program (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). Peer advising programs need funding for the training of the peer advisors while peer advisors need funding for the events that they will organize (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). Some programs charge a certain fee for these events, but this disheartens targeted students and limits participation (Darwin & Palme, 2009). There should also be collaboration between the peer advisors, faculty members, and the student affairs personnel (Darwin & Palme, 2009). There should be constant evaluation of the program’s effectiveness (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011).

**Theoretical Framework**

Psychosocial development during the college years has as much if not more to do with success in college and in later life than what is learned solely in the classroom (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Hughey, Nelson, Damminger, McCalla-Wriggins, & Assoc. (2009) suggested that developmentally, students make career decisions while working through various aspects of their lives. They specifically noted that career development is inextricably bound up with development of purpose, values, relationships, and identity.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) said that the development of vocational purpose requires students to clarify what they want to do, or at least decide what their next step would be, perhaps
graduate school. They suggest that institutions should place a high priority in assisting students with goal clarification. While admitting that “identifying a life purpose or a sense of one’s personal mission may take years of experience and reflection” (p. 225), many students develop clarity of purpose as they move through their college years. Damon describes purpose as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self . . . a purpose is the reason behind the immediate goals and motives that drive most of our daily behavior” (2008, p. 33-34). Pattengale (2010) agreed stating, “Satisfaction and success are achieved through action and effort, action and effort are spurred by motivation, motivation is driven by purpose, and a sense of purpose is encouraged and developed by discussing and giving serious thought to dreams, life goals and purpose itself” (p 159).

Leider (2010) saw uncovering one’s life’s purpose as a process of self-discovery and self-acceptance. Frankl (1985) claimed that each situation in people’s lives has its own meaning and that it is up to individuals themselves us to search for their own purpose. Frankl suggested that people find meaning in three ways: (a) by creating something or doing something of personal significance while, in school, work, or other activities; (b) by experiencing or encountering someone or something; and/or (c) by finding a way to cope with and overcome suffering. Palmer (1983) defining purpose stated, “Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path of authentic service in the world” (p. 16).

Definitions may differ; yet they are similar—noting that purpose, and specifically vocational purpose—is found through discovery and discovery comes through searching life’s
experiences. Nash and Murray (2010) said that what makes our purposes worthwhile depends on the meaning we attach to them, and this is what drives our behavior.

Chickering and Reisser’s Theory of Student Development

Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory of student development was used to frame this study, with a specific focus on development of vocational purpose in participants’ lives. This theory has guided student affairs personnel for more than 40 years in areas of program development and student success initiatives. Their theory of student development evolved out of the work of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) in the area of identity development. Chickering’s work provided early and significant psychosocial developmental theories. He advanced the notion that students progress through seven vectors (paths) of development during their college years. In his initial theory, these vectors linked student college experiences to their personal development (Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, & Barnes, 2005). Chickering specifically identified these vectors as “major highways for journeying toward individuation” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.35).

Chickering’s theory could well be defined as one of “emerging adulthood.” Arnett (2013) coined this term as “that period from roughly ages 18 to 25 in industrialized countries during which young people become more independent from parents and explore various life possibilities before making enduring commitments” (p.10). Arnett and Tanner (2006) considered emerging adulthood to be the age of identity exploration when students explore life’s possibilities, especially in the area of love and work, in an attempt to firm up their future life’s foundation. Erik Erikson believed that identity was shaped by how one organizes experiences within the environment (context) that revolved around oneself (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). It was his belief that individuals moved through a series of eight stages within each, and that a “crisis”
must be resolved in order to successfully move on to the next stage. Erikson believed that development is governed in part by the epigenetic principle, a combination of genetic and environmental influences that governs the direction and timing of development (Torres et al., 2009).

The Erikson stage of development that aligns itself with Chickering’s theory is that of “identity versus role confusion.” During this stage, college students attempt to build their identities and to understand who they are and who they will become. They are looking to make meaning of their lives and determine where they belong. The relevance of this is based on the idea that a career is not just fitting a personality to a work environment. People must examine who they are and what their purpose is, discover what is meaningful, and understand their strengths and skills to be truly satisfied in a career (Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008).

The major difference between Erikson and Chickering was that the latter did not necessarily believe his developmental stages progressed sequentially as did Erikson. In their updated theory, Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested the vectors be seen as a guide to determine a student’s stage of development and where they are heading, and that earlier vectors may, in fact, be the foundation for later vectors.

Marcia (1966) conducted a study examining the way students can establish a reciprocal relationship with society while maintaining continuity within themselves. Similar to this current study, Marcia conducted interviews with young people. He asked whether the participants in his study (a) had established a commitment to an occupation and ideology and (b) had experienced, or were presently experiencing, a decision-making period (adolescent identity crisis). While Marcia’s work has been criticized by some, the Marcia framework is helpful for understanding the journey toward identity in many young people (Hettich & Landrum, 2013).
The seven vectors that can be extracted from Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised theory are now presented.

**Developing competence.** Competence is broken into three areas: Intellectual (ability to acquire knowledge and skills relative to a specific subject area), physical and manual skills (athletic and recreational activities, attentive to wellness, and artistic ventures), and interpersonal competence (communication, leadership, and ability to work with others).

**Managing emotions.** In this second vector, students develop the ability to recognize emotions and learn to express and control them. Students in this vector learn to respond to emotions appropriately.

**Moving through autonomy toward independence.** Emotional independence is essential as one seeks to become autonomous. Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined it as “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (p. 117). However, the student understands the need for interdependence, realizing and appreciating their interconnection with others.

**Developing mature interpersonal relationships.** Students develop a tolerance both interculturally and interpersonally in this vector. Reisser (1995) suggested that both of these tasks “involve the ability to accept individuals for who they are, to respect differences, and to appreciate commonalities” (p. 509).

**Establishing identity.** Identity includes self-perception of gender and sexual orientation, social and cultural heritage, self-concept, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. Students feel a sense of stability and self-confidence in light of others’ perceptions of them.

**Developing purpose.** In this vector, students develop direction about vocational aspirations, commit to personal interests and activities, and establish strong interpersonal
connections with others. Ultimately, the student makes decisions that fit with the vocational calling to which they are drawn.

**Developing integrity.** Chickering and Reisser (1993) included in this vector, “three sequential but overlapping stages” (p. 51). Students develop a humanized value system. They hold to their core values but consider also the interests of others. They develop a personalized value system yet acknowledge and respect others’ opinions. Ultimately, there is a congruence of thoughts and actions as the students stand by their beliefs and act accordingly because their thoughts, actions, and feelings are all synchronized. Figure 2.1 illustrates the seven vectors as they relate to the establishment of identity.
1. Developing Competences.

*From low level of competence (intellectual, physical, interpersonal)
*From lack of confidence in one’s abilities

*To high level of competence in each area
*To a strong sense of competence


*From little control over disruptive emotions (fear and anxiety, anger leading to aggression, depression, guilt, and shame, and dysfunctional sexual or romantic attraction)
*From little awareness of feelings
*From inability to integrate feelings with actions

*To flexible control and appropriate expression
*To increasing awareness and acceptance of emotions
*Ability to integrate feelings with responsible action


*From emotional dependence
*From poor self-direction or ability to solve problems; little freedom or confidence to be mobile
*Independence

*To freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance
*To instrumental independence (inner direction, persistence, and mobility)
*Recognition and acceptance of the importance of interdependence


*From lack of awareness of differences; intolerance of differences
*From nonexistent, short-term, or unhealthy intimate relationships

*To tolerance and appreciation of differences
*To capacity for intimacy which is enduring and nurturing
5. Establishing Identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From discomfort with body and appearance</th>
<th>To comfort with body and appearance</th>
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<tr>
<td>From discomfort with gender and sexual orientation</td>
<td>To comfort with gender and sexual orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>From lack of clarity about heritage and social/culture roots of identity</td>
<td>To sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From confusion about “who I am” and experimentation with roles and lifestyles</td>
<td>To clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From lack of clarity about others’ evaluation</td>
<td>To sense of self in response to feedback from valued others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From dissatisfaction with self</td>
<td>To self-acceptance and self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From unstable, fragmented personality</td>
<td>To personal stability and integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Developing Purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From unclear vocations goals</th>
<th>To clear vocation goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From shallow, scattered personal interests</td>
<td>To more sustained, focused, rewarding activities</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>To strong interpersonal and family commitments</td>
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7. Developing Integrity.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>From dualistic thinking and rigid beliefs</th>
<th>To humanizing values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From unclear or untested personal values and beliefs</td>
<td>To personalizing (clarifying and affirming) values while respecting others’ beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From self-interest</td>
<td>To social responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From discrepancies between values and actions</td>
<td>To congruence and authenticity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From discomfort with body and appearance
*From discomfort with gender and sexual orientation
*From lack of clarity about heritage and social/culture roots of identity
*From confusion about “who I am” and experimentation with roles and lifestyles
*From lack of clarity about others’ evaluation
*From dissatisfaction with self
*From unstable, fragmented personality

*To comfort with body and appearance
*To comfort with gender and sexual orientation
*To sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context
*To clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyle
*To sense of self in response to feedback from valued others
*To self-acceptance and self-esteem
*To personal stability and integration

*From unclear vocations goals
*From shallow, scattered personal interests

*To clear vocation goals
*To more sustained, focused, rewarding activities
*To strong interpersonal and family commitments

*From dualistic thinking and rigid beliefs
*From unclear or untested personal values and beliefs
*From self-interest
*From discrepancies between values and actions

*To humanizing values
*To personalizing (clarifying and affirming) values while respecting others’ beliefs
*To social responsibility
*To congruence and authenticity

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**Figure 2.1.** Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Student Development; General Developmental Directions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

**Vocational Purpose**

While there are three major components that comprise the sixth vector, this study focuses specifically on the element of vocational purpose. For the purposes of this study, vocational
purpose will be defined as the developmental process through which students discover their vocational calling. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest, “We discover our vocation by discovering what we love to do, what energizes us and fulfills us, what uses our talents and challenges us to develop new ones, and what actualizes all our potentials for excellence” (p. 50). Nash and Murray (2010) claimed, “Purpose has to do with pursuing certain goals, reaching resolutions, seeking results, and realizing particular objectives” (p. xx) and, “Vocation is the confluence of natural talents, learned skills, and deep passion that creates a unique contribution to a community or a profession” (p. 194).

College plays a significant role in students’ career development. During college years, students participate in a variety of experiences in course work and in various employment opportunities (Gore & Metz, 2008; Sung, Turner, & Kaewchina, 2013). Through these experiences, students come to know more about themselves and quite possibly their future career direction. In an effort to understand the development of vocational purpose in former peer advisors more clearly, it is important to look within the context of academic advising. **Academic Advising**

Advising is essential to student development—academically, vocationally, and emotionally. Light (2001) reflected, “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81). Nutt (2003), executive director for NACADA, has been noted for his stance on academic advising. He said:

Academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. For this reason, academic advising . . . should be viewed as the ‘hub of the wheel’ and not just one of the various isolated services provided for students . . .
academic advisors offer students the personal connection to the institution that the research indicates is vital to student retention and student success. (Nutt, 2003, n.p.)

In 2006, Noel-Levitz, conducted a nationwide survey of student satisfaction and found that, next to quality of instruction, academic advising “is consistently the next-most-important area of the college experience to students . . . ahead of registration, campus safety, and support services, to name just a few” (p. 3). They found that while 73.7% of respondents were satisfied with their academic advisor’s knowledge of degree requirements, only 67.2% were satisfied with their advisor’s concern about their success as individuals and only 59.9% were satisfied with the degree to which their advisor helped them to set goals. Interestingly, a Noel-Levitz survey (2011) placed academic advising as a higher student priority than the quality of instruction.

In order to understand the advising environment of peer advisors, it is important to identify the organizational structure in which such programs reside. Gordon and Habley’s (2000) study identified organizational structures for academic advising, including decentralized, centralized, or shared models (advising units found within academic and sub-units). Decentralized models were broken down into faculty-only models and satellite models. Centralized models put the responsibility for all academic advising—from first year through graduation—with a single advising office. Shared models are broken down into supplementary (faculty advise all students), split (advising is split between an advising office and faculty advisors), dual (faculty advise major requirements and advising office general education requirements and policies), and total intake (one office responsible for initial advising after which, students are assigned to other faculty or academic subunits).
Split Advising Model

For the purposes of the current study, the split advising model (Figure 2.2) will be reviewed. GNU’s advising model is split; a centralized advising office advises all undeclared students, while declared majors are assigned faculty advisors within their respective departments.

Figure 2.2. Split model, from Habley (1983).

Habley and Morales (1998) suggested, “The key factors in the success or lack thereof, of an advising model resides in the degree to which there is a fit between the model and the institutional culture” (p. 39). In the split model of advising, the responsibilities are split between the center of professional advisers and the faculty in the students’ department (Pardee, 2004). GNU’s advising center has a defined role with undergraduate students, namely, providing information on institutional policies and procedures, registration requirements, graduation information, and preliminary career guidance. Students who are undeclared, are in-transition between majors, or are seeking additional information utilize the advising center’s services.

Allen and Smith (2008) conducted a study on academic advising from a faculty perspective, noting, “Apparently for faculty, holistic advising emphasizes what Frost and Brown-Wheeler (2003) call ‘the big questions’ (p. 234) concerning academic, career, and life goals, as well as the connection of options within the major to those goals over aspects of the educational experience that faculty consider more peripheral” (p. 407). A good advising model will assist
students developmentally in addition to providing information necessary for degree completion. In the split model, faculty and professional staff must work in concert to provide the student with consistent, accurate, and timely information.

**Peer Advising**

“The best answer to the question of what is the most effective method of teaching is that it depends on the goal, the student, the content, and the teachers. But the next best answer is students teaching other students” (McKeachie, Pintrich, Lin, & Smith, 1986, p. 63).

Ganser and Kennedy (2012) noted that the emergence of undergraduates serving as peer leaders began in the 1950s with residential life and orientation positions. Today, diminishing budgets have forced higher education institutions to utilize students creatively in other areas as well. Students are now used as paraprofessionals in both academic and student affairs to include areas like judicial affairs, student activities, career centers, religious centers, counseling centers, advising programs, and crisis intervention (Cuseo, 2010). Although the goal of these programs is ultimately to serve and support fellow students, Shook and Keup (2012) suggested the power and potential of peer programs lie in their mutual benefit to those students serving in these roles. They noted that the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2011) has identified “integrative and applied learning” as one of four essential learning outcomes of college for the 21st century. Data from the 2009 Peer Leadership Survey administered by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition found that of the students who participated in a peer leader position while in college, 98% would recommend the experience to fellow students (Shook & Keup, 2012).

Harmon (2006) suggested that while students who served as peer mentors seem to experience significant growth and development, there is little research associated with what they
learn as a result of their experience. His conversations with students who formerly served as peer mentors left him with the impression that “the experience of being a peer mentor profoundly affected their personal and professional lives” (p. 54). Harmon’s study examined the type of learning students who served as peer mentors experienced during the mentoring process. Peer mentors in this program modeled behavior on how to adjust to and manage various issues in college life.

For the purposes of this study, peer advising within an academic advising center was the specific peer leadership program reviewed. Koring and Campbell (2005) discussed four common types of peer advising programs: friendly-contact programs; programs that pair peer advisors and faculty or professional staff advisors; peer advisors as paraprofessionals within a centralized advising center; and peer advisors as paraprofessionals within residence halls. Peer advisors who receive training and supervision can greatly enhance the work done by professional and faculty advisors (Gordon et al., 2008).

McGillin and Hayes (2005) claimed that four-year public institutions had embraced peer advising most aggressively based on survey data they completed. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) attribute the success of students to involvement in academic-based, college-sponsored organizations that develop reciprocity and cooperation among students as well as skill development and competencies they will use after graduation. During the course of a peer-advising placement, students learn professional conduct, communication skills, and an understanding of working with students from various backgrounds.

Peer advisors working within a split model of advising, like those at GNU, are generally housed within a centralized advising center and provide walk-in assistance for undergraduate students seeking help. These peer advisors will face greater challenges than their counterparts in
other advising models because they are responding to questions from an ever-changing population of students who have declared all possible majors or come in for help in any class year (McGillan & Hayes, 2005).

**Epiphanic Moments**

Denzin (1989) defined epiphanies as “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (p.70). He said, “To understand a life, the epiphanies and the personal-experience and self-stories that represent and shape that life, one must penetrate and understand these larger structures” (Denzin, p. 73).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that some epiphanies are dramatic and sudden, but most occur gradually and incrementally. They submit that it may take years to understand how our experiences “started a chain reaction that transformed some aspect of ourselves” (p. 43).

**Summary**

The review of the literature has included an overview of material relative to the peer advising experience in higher education. Much of the research has centered on the experience of student advisees who take advantage of peer advising services, the benefits of their participation in such programs, and the value that a peer-advising program adds for the benefit of the faculty, staff, and institution as a whole (Frisz & Lane, 1987; Russel & Skinkle, 1990; NACADA, 2013; Shook & Keup, 2012). Very few studies have been undertaken that look at the lived-experience of peer participants who serve as advisors, mentors, educators, and even fewer studies have employed in-depth phenomenological interviewing as a methodology. Harmon (2006) interviewed students who worked as peer mentors with first-year students in learning communities. He ultimately wanted to know what they learned from their experiences and how that learning influenced their personal and professional development.
The goal of the current research is to offer the researcher insights into participant experiences, and to determine whether those experiences contributed to participants developing vocational purpose—specifically their decisions to begin a career in educational advising. The literature reveals the importance of experiential learning in college. Through various college work experiences, students acquire valuable skills in organization, communication, career, leadership, listening, and mentoring. Will this research offer insight that will be translatable to other college student experiences? Could the information discovered benefit undergraduate students as they seek to discover their vocational purpose? This researcher hopes to discover information that will not only be useful to advising programs but to all programs utilizing students as paraprofessionals.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising, and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. Additionally, this study sought to discover how those experiences may have contributed to the development of vocational purpose. Was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to their determining their vocational purpose?

Design

Creswell (2013) identifies a phenomenological study as one that describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived-experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) suggests that phenomenology is a “grasp of the very nature of a thing” (p. 177). The researcher in a phenomenological study collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals studied (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) defines the description as “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it.

Phenomenology has strong philosophical underpinnings, drawing heavily on the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and those who expanded on his work, specifically Heidegger, Sartre, and others. Husserl believed that all judgments about what is real should be suspended until they are confirmed. This suspension, called “epoche” is defined by Christensen and Brumfield (2010) as, “a process involved in blocking biases and assumptions in order to explain a phenomenon in terms of its own inherent system of meaning” (p. 137). Bracketing is identified by Christensen and Brumfield as, “the process of epoche, where researchers attempt to “set
aside” their own biases in order to examine how the phenomenon presents itself in the world of the participant.

In addition to understanding the experience of participants, researchers search for commonality of experiences. The commonality of experience is known as the essence of the phenomenon (Newsome, Hays, & Christensen, 2008). The researcher must enter the participant’s life experience at a deep level in order to truly understand that lived-experience from the participant’s point of view.

**Research Questions**

In qualitative studies, research questions are open-ended and evolving. These questions are broad in nature, addressing the essence of the phenomenon under study. Creswell (2009) suggests beginning a phenomenological study by first determining the broadest question that can be asked.

In that the purpose of this study was to examine the lived-experiences of former university peer advisors who chose to pursue careers in educational advising, the following question guided this study: What specific lived-experiences influence vocational purpose from the perspective of former peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising? Additional sub-questions were:

1. What specific educational experiences, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
2. What specific experiences with friends, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
3. What specific experiences with family, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest that people discover their vocation by discovering what they love to do, what energizes them and fulfills them, what uses their talents and challenges them to develop new ones, and what actualizes all their potentials for excellence. Creswell (2013) says that in order to develop a deeper understanding of the features of a phenomenon, the researcher must understand the commonalities or shared experiences of research participants. Therefore, it is important to understand how peer advisors perceive the influence their lived experiences had on their decision to pursue careers in educational advising.

**Participants**

This study used a purposive sample to select participants who had experience with a specific phenomenon under investigation and who could provide personal reflection and detailed information that would allow the researcher to learn about the phenomenon (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, Creswell, 2009, 2013). Students, who participated as peer advisors at GNU, who are currently employed in the field of educational advising were specifically selected to participate in this study. This researcher selected these participants in an effort to discover what experiences may have influenced their decision to move into the field of educational advising.

The phenomenon under study was the development of vocational purpose in former peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising. What about their primary, secondary, and post-secondary experiences may have influenced their decision to pursue educational advising as a vocation? Was there an epiphanic moment at some point that redirected or confirmed their vocational purpose? Did their experience as peer advisors influence their decision? This researcher sought to discover, understand, and gain insight into those experiences as they related to the development of vocational purpose.
Smaller sample sizes are common in phenomenological studies due to the depth and detail of the data to be collected (Creswell, 2013). Four participants were interviewed for this study. The four participants selected were the only former GNU peer advisors who met the qualifications to participate in this study (pursuing educational advising careers). Two other former GNU peer advisors are currently professional academic advisors within the GNU advising center. These advisors are direct reports to this researcher and so, could not be included in this study.

Wertz (2005) noted that between one and six participants may be sufficient when conducting phenomenological research. Giorgi (2009) recommends that a phenomenological researcher uses at least three participants. Dukes (1984) recommends studying three to 10 subjects. Creswell (2007) says that he has seen the number of participants range from one to 325. He suggests, “The intent in qualitative research is not to generalize the information . . . but to elucidate the particular, the specific” (p. 126). This proposal aligns itself with the guiding principle for participant selection in phenomenology that “all participants must have experienced the phenomenon under study and must be able to articulate what it is like to have lived that experience” (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 309).

Qualitative research seeks to derive meaning rather than generalizable hypotheses. Hypotheses in this study emerged from the interviews, observations, and data review. Once the study was complete, new hypotheses emerged that prompted further observations in the future.

One of the goals of qualitative data gathering, however, is to achieve saturation. Straus and Corbin (1998) define saturation as the point when, “no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (p. 136). Throughout the course of this study, data obtained
from interviews with the four participants was analyzed. In that the number of participants
needed to be included at the onset of the proposal, and in order to thoroughly immerse myself in
the data collection and analysis within a practical time frame, a smaller number of participants
was selected.

Mason (2010) conducted a study looking at sample size and saturation in doctoral studies
using qualitative interviews. He suggests that there is a point of diminishing return to a
qualitative sample—as the study goes on—he says that more data doesn’t necessarily mean more
information.

The participants were contacted via both electronic mail and telephone. The researcher
identified herself, explained the focus of the study, and asked the participant if he/she would be
interested in participating in the study. When agreeing to be a participant, he/she was sent an
informed-consent form (Appendix A) to be signed and returned to the researcher in a self-
addressed envelope, as well as a letter explaining the purpose of the study (Appendix B)

Setting

This study originated with the peer advising program, housed within the advising center
at GNU and is based on the experiences of former peer advisors who worked with the advising
center during their time as undergraduate students at the university. The peer advising program
was developed by the advising center to assist first-year students in the advising and registration
processes of the university; peer advising complements the already established practices within
the academic departments.

GNU is a public institution of higher education, founded in 1838 and is located in south
western Massachusetts. The total undergraduate enrollment exceeds 5,000 students on a campus
of 256 acres set in a suburban area of western Massachusetts.
Procedures

Pilot Interviews

The researcher piloted interview questions (Appendix C) that were used in this study, prior to the actual research, in an effort to identify any issues of clarity or understanding. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007), two or three participants are sufficient for a pilot study in a qualitative research study. The pilot interviews followed the same protocol as the main research interview including audio recording, transcription and participant review. Pilot interview participants were afforded the same level of confidentiality as the main research interviewees. Information gathered from the pilot interviews is secured in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher with only the researcher having access.

Research Interviews

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted a series of in-depth phenomenological interviews with former GNU peer advisors who are currently working in educational advising settings. The in-depth phenomenological interview procedure used for this study was developed by Irving Seidman (1985), who adapted from the work of Schuman (1982). Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series is as follows,

The first interview establishes the context of the participant’s experience; the second allows participants to reconstruct details of their experience within the context in which it occurs; and the third encourages participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (p. 21)

There were three, in-person, 90 minute interviews conducted with each participant over the course of a three-week period. In the first interview, participants were asked to reconstruct their life experiences in primary school to include educational, social (friendships) and familial
experiences. The interviewer focused on the participants’ experiences in hopes of having them reconstruct and narrate events during their primary school years that may have influenced their current vocational purpose.

In the second interview, participants were asked to reconstruct their life experiences in secondary school to include educational, social (friendships), and familial experiences. The interviewer focused on the participants’ experiences in hopes of having them reconstruct and narrate events during their secondary school years that may have influenced their current vocational purpose.

In the third interview, participants were asked to reconstruct their life experiences in post-secondary years to include educational, social (friendships), and familial experiences. The interviewer focused on the participants’ experiences in hopes of having them reconstruct and narrate events during their college school years that may have influenced their current vocational purpose.

Questions were asked that addressed the intellectual and emotional connection of their lived-experiences as they relate to where they are now in their lives. This interviewer sought to have participants look at factors in their lives that they interpreted as meaningful to where they are now.

All three interviews saw the participants trying to make meaning of their life’s experiences to this point. “When we ask participants to reconstruct details of their experience, they are selecting events from their past and in so doing imparting meaning to them” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Seidman also cites the importance of adhering to the three-interview structure. Each interview serves a purpose and so, it is imperative that the interviewer maintain specific focus during each, keeping the participant on the task of each interview. McCracken (1988) addresses
the delicate balance between keeping the interview open and keeping the focus of the topic. When participants veer off topic they must be “gently returned to the topic of interest . . . doing so with only as much obtrusiveness as is absolutely necessary” (p. 40). While each interview had a purpose and focus, the interview questions were open-ended.

Approval for this research was secured through both the Great Northwestern and Liberty University Institutional Review Boards (IRB, see Appendix D). In that participants were GNU graduates/former student employees, the sample did involve GNU. After agreeing to participate, they were telephoned during which an explanation of the study, the time commitment, confidentiality, and process was explained. Liberty and GNU Informed Consent forms (See Appendix A) were sent for signature as well as a follow-up written letter (See Appendix B). Informed-consent forms were copied and filed in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office. Audio of the interviews were labeled and locked in the same cabinet. Each participant has a file containing all relevant information which is locked in a home office file cabinet with access allowed only to the primary researcher. Organization of all information relative to this study followed a file management similar to that suggested by Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland (2006).

One way to examine experiences is to better understand the meaning participants place on those experiences. This study did not focus on finding answers or examining the experience scientifically, it is simply meant to explore experiences that may have had an influence on the participants’ development of life purpose.

**Personal Biography**

Participants in this study were former peer advisors who worked in the GNU advising center. This researcher is the director of the advising center, responsible for training and
supervision of all personnel in the advising center to include peer advisors. As a result, this researcher brought personal knowledge to this study based on experiences as peer advising supervisor, and, as well as personal experience gained through my own experience in the advising center as a graduate assistant in the 1990s.

Additionally, interest for this study was sparked through various conversations with advising colleagues across the country. Having just returned from the Northeast Regional Conference of NACADA, I posed a question to members of a peer advising electronic mailing list. I asked a general question of peer advising program coordinators: Have any of your former peer advisors moved into careers in educational advising? All responses received confirmed that many former peer advisors had moved into some area of educational advising. Though anecdotal, these e-mail responses aligned with the topic of this study.

**Data Collection**

The phenomenon focused on was the lived-experience of former GNU peer advisors. It was essential for this researcher to allow the data to emerge from the actual study. The actual research questions presented to participants were: What specific lived-experiences influenced vocational purpose from the perspective of former peer advisors who are pursuing careers in educational advising? Additional sub-questions were,

1. What specific educational experiences, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influenced vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?

2. What specific experiences with friends, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influenced vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
3. What specific experiences with family, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influenced vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?

It is important to keep in mind that this researcher was not looking for answers, but to have a better understanding of the experiences of peer advising participants and how those experiences may have influenced their decision to pursue careers in educational advising. The interviews were semi-structured and were “directed to the participants’ experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196).

Participants were interviewed three times for 90 minutes; total interview time for each participant during the study was four and one-half hours. Each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim in order to maintain the accuracy of the information discussed. The transcripts, in a completed, unedited form, were the primary source of data analysis. The data is presented in two ways: as profiles of former peer advisors currently working in educational advising settings and their life experiences in their own words; and as themes that emerged among participant experiences.

**Interviews**

In-depth interviewing was the dominant strategy for data collection in this study. Descriptive data was gathered in participants own words in order for this researcher to develop insights on how participants view the development of their vocational purpose to date. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participant’s permission. Seidman (2013) believes that in-depth interviews should be recorded in order to work reliably with the words of participants. The researcher must be able to study the transcripts of the interviews. When reviewing the written words, the researcher is better able to grasp the meaning behind the words.
Yow (2005) states that, “The in-depth interview enables the researcher to give the subject leeway to answer as he or she chooses, to attribute meanings to the experiences under discussion and to interject topics. In this way new hypotheses may be generated” (p. 5). Giorgi (2009) claims that there is no prescriptive quality to a good interview, however there is one main criterion, which is, according to Giorgi: “What one seeks from a research interview in phenomenological research is as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through” (p. 122).

The interview itself was semi-structured; this interviewer referred to a prepared interview guide that included a number of questions (See Appendix E). The questions were open-ended; after each question was posed to the participant, this interviewer followed up with probes seeking further detail about what had been said. Roulston (2010) indicates that although the interview guide will provide the same starting point for participants, given a common set of topics, each interview will vary according to what is said by individual participants. This researcher was keenly aware of what was being said so as to determine whether research topics were being addressed.

**Open-ended Interview Questions**

Interview One: The purpose of this interview was to gather in-depth information about participants’ educational, social (friendships), and familial experiences during primary school.

Interview Two: The purpose of this interview was to gather in-depth information about participants’ educational, social (friendships), and familial experiences during secondary school.

Interview Three: The purpose of this interview was to gather in-depth information about participants’ educational, social (friendships), and familial experiences during post-secondary years.
Within each of the interviews the participants were afforded the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of those life-experiences and how they viewed those experiences as influencing their vocational purpose.

After receiving approval from both Great Northeastern and Liberty University IRB’s, this researcher conducted a pilot study with a small sample of students in order to ensure clarity of the questions and the wording of same.

**Data Analysis**

Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher studied the material using the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994). The data was refined through a process called horizontalization whereby every statement was viewed as having equal value or significance. From the horizontal statements, meaning or meaning units were listed. These units were then clustered into common categories or themes—statements that were overlapping or repetitive were removed. The clustered themes and meanings were used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience. “From these textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structure into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon will be constructed” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 119).

The steps used in gathering and analyzing the data were the following:

1. List data and preliminary grouping of data by having interviews transcribed verbatim. No statements or words from the transcripts were omitted. All statements equally relevant to the experience. This process is known as horizontalization whereby each statement was viewed as having equal value.

2. Data was then reduced and eliminated by reading each transcript repeatedly and eliminating statements that did not address the research question. Overlapping, repetitive
and vague statements were eliminated as well. The statements remaining were defined by Moustakas (1994) as invariant constituents (meaning units or horizons) of the experience and describe the phenomenon in exact descriptive terms.

3. Clustered and labeled invariant constituents and define the “core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

4. Checked and validated the invariant constituents and the themes against each participant’s transcript.

5. Created an Individual Textural Description (what the participant experienced) for each participant with verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.

6. Created an Individual Structural Description (how the experience occurred) by integrating the Individual Textural Description (what the participant experienced).

7. Created an individual Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience using “acts of thinking, judging, imagining and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79).

This researcher also documented interviews with field notes which provided information on the participants (physical appearance, dress, mannerisms, style of talking and acting). In addition, a description of the physical setting of the interview was noted. This researcher made every attempt to record feelings, problems, hunches, and impressions that arose within herself during the course of the interviews. It was important for this researcher to recognize the importance of her role as data collector, and to be aware of her relationship to the setting, the design, and the analysis.

The following procedures were employed—all of which are consistently documented throughout phenomenological research literature:
Data Review

The researcher had the interviews transcribed by a professional transcriber. NVivo© qualitative software was used to assist in coding, identifying, and establishing emergent meaningful themes, linkages, distinctions, and relationships based upon common attributes (Richards, 1999; Richards, 2002). NVivo© was used to code each participant’s transcribed semi-structured interview (Denardo & Levers, 2002). This computer software program helped the researcher in organizing and arranging uploaded written data. It provided the researcher with an easy method for identifying words and phrases that were essential in the coding process.

In Moustakas (1994) method, NVivo© has the capability to list the key words and phrases emerging from the transcripts of the participants. In this study, the grouped codes served as the basis for determining the themes. These themes were refined from the coded text to reflect the themes critical to the central question. The advantage of using this software was that analysis came with source identification, which matched the code with the participants’ verbatim responses.

With the aid of NVivo©, the preliminary grouping in the study were coded on the following three-stages life dimensions: (a) life experiences in primary school to include educational, social (friendships) and familial experiences; (b) life experiences in secondary school to include educational, social (friendships) and familial experiences; and (c) life experiences in post-secondary years to include educational, social (friendships) and familial experiences. These life dimensions were used to group the codes used to identify the themes. The themes were then re-grouped to form the thematic labels of the study.
Extraction of Meaning Units (Horizontalization)

Following the recommendations of Moustakas (1994), this researcher looked for overlapping or redundant significant statements (narrow units of analysis) and then looked for meaning units (invariant constituents). The researcher then summarized those two elements to determine, “what” the participants experienced and “how” they experienced it.

Identification of Themes

After invariant constituents were compiled, the researcher looked for themes from those constituents and developed a description of those themes and ultimately the essence of the experience. Johnson & Christensen (2004) stated that the goal of theme identification is to determine the essence for the entire group of participants.

Data Displays

Once themes were identified, data was presented in data displays. These are visual representations of the themes and data analysis systematically (Christensen & Brumfield, 2010).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Utilizing well-established qualitative data gathering and analysis methods in studying a concept is important. This researcher utilized a qualitative interviewing procedure developed by Seidman (1985) that had been used in numerous phenomenological studies. Data review and analysis for this study followed methods and procedures of Moustakas (1994), who provides a step-by-step guide to phenomenology as well as a defined process for data analysis. Finally, NVivo© software was used to ensure accuracy in coding, identifying, and establishing emergent meaningful themes from the transcribed interviews.
Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that if you have one—you have the other. The nature of phenomenology, however, is ever-changing so the ability to replicate a study looking at the essence of something may change over time. It is important to note, Groenewald (2004) suggests that phenomenologists believe that the researcher cannot be detached from her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise. It is important for the researcher to detail processes used in this study to set the prototype for future studies. This allows future researchers to replicate the study; though possibly not obtaining similar results. Shenton (2004) suggests this can be done through a thorough description of what was planned and executed on a strategic level; the operational detail of the data gathering; and the reflective appraisal of the project—and the effectiveness of the inquiry process.

Transferability

Transferability in this research was difficult, based on the small number of participants. Shenton (2004) claims that because findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of individuals, it is not possible to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other populations. If the researcher, however, provides the reader with a detailed description of the phenomenon of interest and the step-by-step methodology used to conduct the study, it may be possible for others to compare to their own situations and find similar results.

Confirmability

Limiting observer bias is the goal in all research; Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that all researchers are affected by observers’ bias. What was important was for the researcher to make every attempt to control personal biases. While it was impossible for this researcher to
completely separate past experiences, beliefs, and values from the current study, they were acknowledged through notes and conscious reflection. Being mindful of observer bias, this researcher consciously allowed the research experience to be informed by the data obtained from the participants.

**Triangulation**

While triangulation is the recommended method to convey project validity, Bodgen and Bilken (2007) advise against using this term—suggesting there are so many different definitions, the actual definition has become imprecise and abstract. Seidman (2013) states that on occasion, doctoral candidates are too mechanical when trying to establish triangulation. He says that formulaic approaches to achieving validity are not needed—rather an understanding of and respect for validity in the study is the key. Thus, this researcher preferred to describe specifically the process by which data was obtained. Data was collected from four participants through audio-recorded in-depth interviews. The researcher additionally recorded observations in a reflective journal. The purpose of this journal was to record this researcher’s thoughts and reactions to the research process and participant responses, as well as to document participants’ nonverbal communication (Christensen & Brumfield, 2010).

**Member Checking**

Participants in this study were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews to verify that the information was indeed accurate (See Appendix F). While the written content of the final report was left to this researcher, participants had the opportunity to share anything in the report that may have been of concern to them. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose sharing this information with participants will add to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report.
External Audit

The data is presented in two ways: as profiles of former peer advisors and their life experiences in their own words; and as themes that emerged among participant experiences. An independent outside reviewer read the entire transcript as well as completed profiles to verify researcher’s reported data. That same person reviewed for clarification purposes any unclear passages in the transcript and suggested revisions or omissions. The final version was reviewed and completed by the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

All data obtained from this study was placed in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office. All computers in the researcher’s home are password protected for confidentiality of electronic files. In an effort to maintain confidentiality of participants’ interviews and transcript, each participant was assigned a pseudonym of their own choosing. Additionally, the name of the university housing the peer advising program in this study was changed to further ensure participant anonymity. Throughout the research process, the researcher continuously reviewed her reflective journals in order to prevent biases from interfering with the data analysis (Glense, 1999).
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study using a modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994) with semi-structured, recorded, and transcribed interviews was to explore the phenomenon of university peer advising through the lived experiences of former GNU peer advisors who chose to pursue careers in educational advising. Moustakas argued, “Phenomena are the building block of human science and the basis for all knowledge” (1994, p. 26). Marshall and Rossman (2010) posited that phenomenology enables the study of experiences to understand the development of worldviews. The specific intent of the research was to analyze emergent themes related to the educational advising experiences of former university peer advisors. The focus of the research study was to identify key components and themes that relate to the experiences of former peer advisors in academic advising and how these experiences may have contributed to development of their vocational purpose.

Chapter Four presents the detailed steps of modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994) and the emerging descriptions of the participants’ experiences. The other steps and processes found in the van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994) were included to further support the strength of the study in order to determine the existence and contribution of epiphanic moment(s) to the vocational purpose of the participants. NVivo® software was used to code each participant’s transcribed semi-structured interview (DeNardo & Levers, 2002).

This qualitative research explored how life experiences and exposure to a university advising program led to epiphanic moments that contributed to participant decisions to venture into the educational advising profession. Data for analysis came from individual interviews conducted with four purposive sample participants who had experience with the specific
phenomenon under investigation and could provide personal reflection and detailed information on peer advisors. The purposive sample of four former university advisors provided salient characteristics, behaviors, and attributes of educational advising and the epiphany of their experiences concerning their decisions to pursue their current vocational purpose while providing thematic saturation (Ganzach, Kluger, & Klayman, 2000). Phenomenological studies rely on researching participants who lived the experiences to illuminate the meaning and inform a contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). The research design explored attributes identified by former GNU advisors (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Scott, 2003). The semi-structured interviews based upon open-ended questions were recorded using compact disc recording technology, with the results professionally transcribed (Chapman & Rowe, 2001; Conway & Peneno, 1999). The recordings facilitated an iterative analysis process to achieve accuracy, meaning, and understanding of participant responses (Dixon, Wang, Calvin, Dineen, & Tomlinson, 2002; Silvester & Anderson, 2003).

**Researcher Epoché**

Epoché is the process of removing the researcher’s bias from the research process. The purpose of removing researcher bias is to reduce and eliminate any undue personal perspectives that influence the results of the research study (Leedy & Omrod, 2001). The objective is “to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experiences and professional studies” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Moustakas (1994) maintains that epoché is, “The first step in being inclined to see thing as they really are, free of prejudgment and preconception” (p. 90).

In removing the biases of the researcher, I prepared personal written narratives that articulate my beliefs and personal knowledge concerning the interview questions. In these
narratives, my preconceived ideas and prejudgment of educational advising are documented. The narratives guided me in identifying personal issues and judgments that should be asked to the participants when conducting the interviews. In phenomenology, the process of documenting my personal judgment in the area of educational advising is called bracketing (Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995). My personal judgment on the phenomenon will only be acknowledged after processing the data from the participants. This process is called phenomenological reduction where I, as the researcher, need to reflect my personal meaning and experiences in order to understand the thoughts and experiences shared by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Data Collection**

Data collection during the phenomenological study was achieved through two distinct phases. The first phase involved preparation and data collection. The second phase involved organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the data into clusters and themes emerging from the data collection. In preparation for data collection, a pilot study was conducted with two former university peer advisors from GNU. The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the clarity of the questions, the ease of comprehension, and establish potential time frames for answering all the questions.

Upon completion of the pilot study, four invited participants provided time and consent to participating in the data collection phase. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the participants. Each participant volunteered to be part of the research. The following process was used in the data collection process.

**Scheduling of Interviews**

Four potential candidates were mailed a letter of request to participate in a doctoral study. The letter described the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the
procedures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Enclosed with the letter of request for participation mailed to each potential participant were an informed consent release form enclosed in a self-addressed stamped envelope. The four individuals responded indicating a desire to participate (Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant #1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Academic Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Academic Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Academic Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Academic Counselor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the positive responses on the returned informed consent form indicated a desire to participate, provided a potential time and date to schedule an interview, and personal contact information including phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses. Using information provided by the prospective participants, initial contact to establish the time and date for each interview was accomplished with a confirmation of the scheduling through email. The interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks with transcription taking an additional three weeks.

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data collected in seven steps as per the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994). This was done in order to validate the reliability and preciseness of the results of the overall study. The modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994) was followed in a step-by-step manner in order to gather and analyze the data.
from the interviews. The steps of the expanded method by Moustakas (1994) used in this research are as follows:

1. Data and preliminary grouping of data was completed by having interviews transcribed verbatim. No statements or words from the transcripts were omitted. All statements were equally relevant to the experience. This process is known as horizonalization whereby each statement is viewed as having equal value.

2. Data was then reduced and eliminated by reading each transcript repeatedly and eliminating statements that did not address the research question. Overlapping, repetitive and vague statements were eliminated as well. The statements that remained are defined by Moustakas (1994) as invariant constituents (meaning units or horizons) of the experience and describe the phenomenon in exact descriptive terms.

3. Clustered and labeled the invariant constituents and defined the “core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

4. Checked and validated the invariant constituents and the themes against each participant’s transcript.

5. Created an Individual Textural Description (what the participant experienced) for each participant with verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.

6. Created an Individual Structural Description (how the experience occurred) by integrating the Individual Textural Description (what the participant experienced).

7. Created an individual Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience using “acts of thinking, judging, imagining, and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79).

Using these steps in conjunction with the NVivo® software, the participants were
interviewed, textual datum collected, and analyzed to discern themes that developed from the data. Additionally, a descriptive analysis was conducted regarding the differences between the participants’ responses. The analysis compared the invariant constituents reported within the main themes. This section follows the textural-structural descriptions of the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994).

**Listing and Preliminary Grouping**

The coding process utilized the NVivo© software, which has the capability to list the key words and phrases emerging from the transcripts of the participants. For instance, key words identified in interview question one include: (a) assistance, (b) close-knit, and (c) development. This list of words and phrases guides the researcher in identifying and describing specific codes which were then re-uploaded in NVivo© for code grouping. For instance, the key word “assistance” was identified as “parental assistance.” The grouped codes served as the basis for determining the themes. These themes were refined from the coded text to reflect the themes critical to the central question. The advantage of using NVivo© is that analysis comes with source identification, which matched the code with the participants’ verbatim responses.

The preliminary grouping in the study were coded on the following three-stages life dimensions, (a) life experiences in primary school to include educational, social (friendships) and familial experiences; (b) life experiences in secondary school to include educational, social (friendships) and familial experiences; and (c) life experiences in post-secondary years to include educational, social (friendships) and familial experiences. These life dimensions were used to group the codes used to identify the meaning units or invariant constituents. The meaning units or invariant constituents were then re-grouped to form the thematic label of the study.
Reductions and Elimination

Coded datum was reviewed to ensure accurate representation and understanding of the phenomenon. Themes were also assessed to ensure that each moment of the experience or lived experience was a necessary and sufficient constituent in understanding the phenomenon. Finally, vague participant descriptions were condensed and presented in more descriptive terms.

Clustering and Thematizing

The invariant constituents of the experiences were clustered to form thematic labels. Specific themes emerged from the thematic labels based upon the invariant constituents. The listing and preliminary grouping code report was used to generate the four thematic labels critical to the central question, (a) indicators of positive childhood and adolescent experiences, (b) childhood qualities of academic advisors, (c) factors influencing the current vocational purpose, and (d) reflections influencing an individual to pursue a vocation in educational advising. The number of participants offering the experience assists in reveals the meaning, horizons, and the essence of the lived experience.

Thematic Label One: Educational advisors experience a positive childhood environment. The first thematic label, indicators of positive childhood and adolescent experiences, was determined from the five themes or invariant constituents (Table 2). This theme answers sub-research question two. Only the invariant constituents that received more than two responses are noted in the text. The invariant constituents central to the theme are as follows: (a) familial support and care, (b) fun memories with family, friends, and school educators, (c) set role models, (d) mingle with friends in home and school activities, and (e) parental involvement in academic activities.

The most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the collection of
invariant constituents illustrates that former peer advisors have been brought up in an enabling environment that supports and cares about their interests in fun learning, activities with their friends, classmates, and school educators. These childhood experiences exposed the former peer advisors to qualities that could shape their interest in pursuing an educational advising career.

Participant #2 described her experienced in the familial support as,

But aside from them, with each other, my parents, both of them were always there for me, would do anything that I asked. My dad was always coaching our sports teams, always bringing us to whatever we needed to go to. My mom was the same way. My mom was at everything. They would always be there for rides and anything, always talkative with my friends. Everything was there for us if we needed it. They would do anything for their kids.

Participant #4 shared her memories about a friend contribute to her positive disposition,

…we were sleeping in bunk beds and she was in the top bunk and she fell off of the top bunk and she was not awake but she was sleep talking and was asking all sorts of crazy questions and talking about kangaroos and all these strange things. And my mother got up and put her back in the bed. So there were lots of stories like that other times or very similar with her sleep talking and walking that made for . . .

Participant #3 relates that her great grandmother had been influential to her decisions, and life career,

Definitely my great-grandmother, who, let’s see, lived to be 95. When I was younger, she was probably in her late 70s, maybe early 80s, I’m not sure, I’m not good with the math right now. But she was a schoolteacher her whole life. She just instilled in us a value of education. Like, and how important education was, and she’s probably the
reason my older sister is a teacher, and the reason that I’m so passionate about education, but in a different way, I think. But she just embodied lifelong learning.

Table 2

*Indicators of Positive Childhood and Adolescent Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invariant Constituents</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familial support and care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun memories with family, friends, and school educators</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set role models</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mingle with friends in home and school activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement in academic activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thematic Label Two: Educational advisors developed qualities that match the requirement of the educational advising vocation.** The second thematic label, *childhood qualities of educational advisors* was determined from nine invariant constituents (Table 3). This theme answers research sub-question three. Only the invariant constituents that received more than two responses are noted in the text. The invariant constituents emerged in the analysis include: (a) friendly, (b) supportive to friends, (c) considered learning as fun, (d) has a good relationship with family, (e) deep interest in academic activities (e.g., focused), (f) highly motivated, (g) sets family members and teachers as role model, (h) fun to be with, and (i) experienced discipline from father.
The most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the aggregation of the invariant constituents illustrates that eight qualities emerged be relevant in determining future likability of an individual to pursue the educational advising profession. Participant #4 described herself as friendly,

Kindergarten through about second grade I would say I had one really . . . through third grade I had one really close best friend and in third grade she moved away. But also in second grade was when I met my best friend that stayed my best friend through high school. So I . . . and I still am but mostly I was a person that just had a few close friends; was friendly with many people but very few close friends.

Participant #2 offered descriptions of being a supportive buddy and a studious student.

He became a peer advisor with me. So we became . . . We were friends . . . I was a very good student. I always wanted . . . I always wanted to go to school. I never wanted to skip school or call or tell my mom I was sick when I wasn’t or anything like that. I always wanted to go to school because I loved school. I thought school was very fun. I definitely enjoyed it.

Participant #3 described his good relationship with his family by offering this statement.

. . . they were definitely very supportive of that decision. Like, I remember talking about it with them, and they were very I think proud of me for I think having that experience, or doing something new, or . . . Yeah, I think more . . . I don’t know that they impacted . . . I think they were just more supportive of that. It was something we talked about. We, I mean, we talked all the time, so I’m sure it’s something that . . .
Table 3

Childhood Qualities of Educational Advisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invariant Constituents</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive to friends</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered learning as fun</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has good relationship with family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep interest in academic activities (e.g., focused)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly motivated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets family members and teachers as role model</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun to be with (outgoing)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced discipline from father</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thematic Label Three: Educational advising careers are offered to individuals with vocational purpose. The third thematic label, factors influencing the current vocational purpose, was determined from six invariant constituents (Table 4). This theme answers the three sub-questions. Only the invariant constituents that received more than two responses are noted in the text. The invariant constituents central to the themes include (a) innate qualities of an individual, (b) experiences with former college advisor, (c) recommendation and motivation from friends, (d) familial support in pursuing educational advising, (e) childhood experiences with educational role models, and (f) pursuing familial profession.

The most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the collection of the invariant constituents is that vocational purpose is determined by the innate qualities of an
individual that are shaped by his or her childhood and adolescent experiences with family, friends, and school teachers.

Participant #1 described himself as: “Quiet, smart, funny, yeah and charismatic.” He said that his vocation is something that he had experienced in college. He said, 

So it was something that I felt I had experience in I guess. Then once I got my foot in the door it was like . . . this is what you’re doing. Before Alain, I used to go to the Academic Advising Center to get help on my schedule when I didn’t get into my business courses, or what not. I would go in there.

Participant #2 shared that her friends motivated her to pursue the vocation. She said, 

I think that my relationship with my friends, I always took it seriously and it was always a relationship where I was, you know a very active listener with my friends and took their friendship seriously and I think that having serious friendships and having kind of ups and downs it enabled me to appreciate the interpersonal communication and in the listening and the empathy and appreciating that for . . . and wanting to do that for a job.
Table 4

Factors Influencing Current Vocational Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invariant Constituents</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innate qualities of an individual.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with former college advisor.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation and motivation from friends.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial support in pursuing college advising.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood experiences with educational role models.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing familial profession.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thematic Label Four: Epiphany of the former peer advisor. The fourth thematic label, reflections influencing an individual to pursue educational advising vocation, was determined from six invariant constituents (Table 5). This theme answers the three sub-questions. Only the invariant constituents that received more than two responses are noted in the text. The constituents that received two or fewer responses are left for the table and Appendix G. The invariant constituents central to the theme are as follows: (a) experienced independence from parents and siblings, (b) experienced fun in providing students’ assistance, (c) valued interaction, (d) pursuance of parents’ profession, (e) emulate support system provided by parents, and (f) intend to share academic commitment.

The most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the collection of the invariant constituents illustrates that former peer advisors exercised interest and independence in
pursuing their commitment to providing students’ assistance and that made this realization essential in their decision to pursuing a career in educational advising.

Participant #1 shared,

My dad definitely became more flexible; kind of acknowledge my independency I guess. The same with my mom. But still they reminded me that education is everything. Ultimately their concern was that I graduated college. They made that goal known at all times.

Participant #3 shared,

I think that all the experiences, definitely the TA, but especially the peer advising just made me realize that education . . . being in education, but specifically educational counseling, academic support, that’s really where I wanted to be. I felt like . . . I guess for me, it just feels like the right fit, in terms of my psych major, I don’t know, it’s probably my own like, selfish need to be able to fix things, but I knew I never would be able to work like, maybe in mental health, like the idea of you know, maybe not being able to solve someone’s anxiety or something like that, I think in education I selfishly feel like I can make a difference.
Table 5

**Reflections Influencing an Individual to Pursue Educational Advisorship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invariant Constituents</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced independence from parents and siblings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced fun in providing students’ assistance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued interaction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuance of parents’ profession</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emulate support system provided by parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend to share academic commitment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final Identification of Invariant Constituents**

Each participant’s interview was reviewed for validation and analysis. The review was conducted to verify that each theme or invariant constituent was explicitly expressed and coded. The research was then validated through the listing and primary grouping code report.

**Individual textural descriptions.** In this area, the individual textural descriptions “describe the lived experiences of each interview participant wherein they capture the feelings, thoughts, impressions, and concerns” based on the interviews (Farquharson, 2009, p. 92). In this particular case, verbatim proofs and examples were presented in order to provide a more precise perspective of the participant’s experiences (Farquharson, 2009). The descriptions present literal examples of each participant’s perceptions and feelings regarding the invariant constituents or themes discussed above.

**Individual textural description for Participant #1:** Participant #1 was born in Ghana and has been educated in a private school for his elementary education. He described that said
school exposed him to an environment where development of critical thinking skills mattered. As early as a child, Participant #1 described himself as curious, studious, and passionate to excel. Participant #1 said,

Fifth and sixth I was a very curious extremely curious student. I wanted to know how things worked just why things are the way they are because my father was strict I guess I was very straight forward kind of kid, good shoulders on my head, good head on my shoulders, very focused in school just because of culture. You have to be like I said it was very rigorous. There was no sort of room for failure. If you were seen as a failure you were practically out of the family type thing. So, it was very strict. The school was very strict. A lot of the teachers knew your families so they were like neighbors. But as far as that I was very, the one word that comes to mind is, I had that curious mind to know how things worked.

Participant #1 indicated that he cannot remember any favorite teacher. However, he said that he remembered a teacher who instilled discipline in the classroom. He claimed,

This person is not so much my favorite teacher but the only reason why I remember him and I think this was my math class. I don’t remember his name. He’s not my favorite teacher but the reason I remember him is because I ended up showing up to class late after recess. And I ended up getting lashes on my butt. Lashes they used to use a cane. And you got five lashes on your butt. And it was in front of the whole class. And I will never forget it. It was actually me and my neighbor who was from Holland and she happened to come in with me late. And she got lashes in front of the whole class.

Participant #1 shared that he intended to pursue a similar profession to that of his father. He said, “I definitely knew what my dad was doing back then he was in sort of in he was like in
architecture. So back then I wanted to basically be that just because I saw him with his architectural designs and what not.”

Like all ordinary kids, Participant #1 was funny and loved to mingle in friends with similar characteristics and values. By the time he reached middle and high school, he still hung out with friends who were mostly from his neighborhood. Participant #1 described himself as focused and committed to his studies. He liked subjects that were handled by effective teachers particularly those teachers who taught the practical side of the theories. He said,

In college, mostly my business courses with Mr. Y (not the real name) were my favorite, almost all the business management courses were my favorite. But mainly it was because of Professor J (not the real name). It was mainly because of him. He actually reminded me of Mr. T (not the real name) and Mr. Z (not the real name) sort of how he taught. He didn’t lecture. He taught from real experiences it wasn’t by the book.

Participant #1 shared that peer advising had been mentioned by his friend. Eventually, this experience led his decision in venturing in the vocation purpose of educational advising.

And I thought about it. I was kind of nervous in the beginning but the way my friend explained it, I guess, and I think I mentioned this in our second interview, it reminded me a lot of ADC the study, me becoming a tutor during high school, it reminded me a lot of that. So I felt comfortable doing something around that sort of sit down with the students, peers more or the peer to peer interaction.

*Individual textural description for Participant #2:* Participant #2 attended a public school where she walked with friends during school days. Participant #2 considered herself a good student. She claimed,

I always wanted . . . I always wanted to go to school. I never wanted to skip school or
call or tell my mom I was sick when I wasn’t or anything like that. I always wanted to go to school because I loved school. I thought school was very fun. I definitely enjoyed it. So I would say that when my favorite times were probably when I was in like first, second and third grade when we had these things called workshops and you would . . . there would be different things about numbers and letters and different kinds of workshops and there was always a card you had and once you completed a workshop you would get a sticker and I was always trying to be the first one to finish my workshop sticker up and everything, so we kind of would have contests.

When asked about her favorite teacher, Participant #2 shared that teachers with effective teaching styles and a sense humor were her model teachers. She said, “. . . it was a new experience for me and he just had a different style of teaching and he had a really good sense of humor.”

The middle and high school experiences exposed her to a school where she had to integrate herself in the public. She won new friends and realized that interpersonal communication skills and interaction with the community was essential in winning friends and consequently in helping people. It was in the secondary school that Participant #2 experienced assisting students. She said,

We basically had to start kind of choosing things, choosing different types of our schedule, so if I was for instance, like elective classes or anything like that, so I started to kind of appreciate having the choice with the schedule and not just getting handed a schedule. So I thought that was really interesting. I’d started to go to see a career center type of thing and you took this little test to show your values and your strengths and your weaknesses. And I mean everything was pretty much, you definitely should work with
people; you value relationships and that kind of thing. So I mean it was pretty set at that point that I was going to be in a helping field of some sort.

Other than her exposure with the academic advising center, Participant #2 shared that her decision to pursue a career could be associated to the profession of her mother, who has devoted her career years to academic advising. Participant #2 said,

. . . so when my mom worked in the Academic Achievement Center in advising, I used to go in and I used to talk with the advisors who were there and it really was interesting because it taught me a lot about the whole process and I really liked how you had so much choice.

**Individual textural description for Participant #3:** Participant #3 had been brought up by a close-knit community who described herself as an ambitious student. Participant #3 said, “I was definitely an ambitious student. I definitely liked school. I think that I was always a student . . . I was in the advanced reading group very early on, but I was also a very nervous student. I liked school.” Participant #3 appreciated teachers who were engaging and passionate at teaching students. Based on her observed qualities, she considered secretarial work an ideal work for her. She dealt with friends who shared similar interest with her and with their respective parents.

Participant #3 had been described as quiet yet funny kid who would join kids in fun activities at home and in school. Participant #3 shared that her school counselor was the first person that shed light on her decision to pursue a career in providing help to students. She said,

He used to have lunch groups, and it was the cool thing to be able to have lunch with him. And I remember just liking the idea of there being this person that people could go to, you know, I never had issues, but you know what I mean, but I remember thinking like, it was really great that there was this person that people could go to.
Participant #3 indicated that her aunt as well as her guidance counselor in school have been influential to her in terms of school and career choices. While she hangs with friends who shared similar value and characteristics with her, she claimed that pursuing a vocation in educational advising had been a familial profession. She said, “I definitely think that there was . . . I mean, there was no pressure or obligation, but there was definitely a family history of, like I said, my mom and my aunt went there in the ‘70s, and then my older sister went there.”

**Individual textural description for Participant #4:** Like all other participants, Participant #4 has two siblings. As the youngest, she was born to be funny and creative. Participant #4 shared that the person who had become her role model was her step-father.

Well this certainly was the time in my life where my step-father came into my life. And that would have a great impact because he works at a college so that one almost seems obvious. But I guess it doesn’t necessarily work that way for everyone. My mother was always interested in her education but didn’t have access to it for a long time financially. Participant #4 reported that she had a good relationship with her family and that all members are very supportive to her academic endeavors. Participant #4 reported that while family was influential in her decisions in school and career, she said it would always be her decisions that were implemented. Participant #4 said,

My parents had a huge influence on that but it was very clear that it was my decision. Because my dad worked there they wanted to be very clear that if that’s my choice that’s totally okay but to know that that would be my choice; that they didn’t want me to go there just because he worked there.

**Individual structural descriptions.** The summarized individual textural descriptions were used to develop the individual structural descriptions and imaginative variation (reducing
the phenomenon into its necessary essences). Individual structural descriptions provide the fundamental depiction of each participant’s perceptions and feelings regarding the themes surrounding educational advising as a vocational purpose.

**Structural description for Participant #1**: Participant #1 was brought up by a disciplinarian father and a supportive mother who provided care and a positive environment for him. Participant #1 was highly focused, committed, diligent, and smart student who intended to pursue a similar career as his father. However, across years of interacting with students and friends as well as his school teachers, Participant #1 realized that he wanted to provide help to students lost with their academics.

As Participant #1 experienced leniency from his parents during the college days, he was more open to recommendations of his friends. One of the things he entertained in college was becoming a peer advisor. Participant #1 said, “... think the way I interact with them they can see why I’m in that profession just because they knew what I did at GNU as a peer advisor.”

**Structural description for Participant #2**: Participant #2 loved to interact with people. She enjoyed the company of her friends and loves to participate in a class with teachers who have different yet effective teaching style. Participant #2 shared that her interest in pursuing the vocation started with her qualities. She shared, “I think that my relationship with, starting with my immediate family that I was somebody who wanted to solve problems constantly.” Participant #2 also believed that she was effective in interacting with people. This quality had been helpful in understanding her interest in pursuing the vocation.

**Structural description for Participant #3**: Participant #3 had been fully supported by a social worker mother and hard-working father who have been influential people in her life. Participant #3 described her parents,
My mom, she worked, but she was always there for me, like it was very important for her . . . She was just, she was always there. My dad did all the sports stuff. Yeah, just involved parents. I think supportive. They never blatantly said, ‘Do this,’ or, ‘Be an excellent team player.’ It just sort of happened.

Participant #3 further shared that her interest in educational advising is supported by her family.

**Structural description for Participant #4:** Participant #4 grew up in a community that offered discipline as well as knowledge and motivation to pursue the achievement of high academic remarks. Participant #4 shared her experience in educational advising and the event that she realized her inclination in the vocation. Participant #4 said that the opportunity to assist students overwhelmed her. She said,

Accomplishment, yes, but more so that there are skills that I can help a student navigate a process, that I can help teach a student skills . . . I think just being able to empower a student, or to help a student through a certain experience and give them the tools they need to be successful, and to know that that information, or that process is something that won’t just help them for that moment, but also like as they go through their educational journey.

**Composite descriptions.** According to Moustakas (1994), individual composite descriptions characterize the themes of the study in general at the individual level (Farquharson, 2009). The composite descriptions depict the themes of the study as a whole (Moustakas, 1994) and clarify how participants described the themes relating to the educational advising vocation of the former peer advisors. The researcher derived the composite descriptions from the individual textural and structural descriptions. The textural composite descriptions are presented by themes followed by the structural composite descriptions.
**Indicators of positive childhood and adolescent experiences.** This theme summarized the enabling environment that could potentially support being tapped to pursue the educational advising vocation. The invariant constituents emerged in the analysis include the support and care of the family, the activities of a child that promotes fun learning, setting role models, their abilities to mingle with friends, and the active participation of parents in the academic activities of the child. These positive experiences offered the children a positive outlook concerning the importance of helping others.

**Childhood qualities of academic advisors.** Positive experiences offered to children will generate positive qualities that are essential in effective educational advisors. The qualities that emerged in the analysis include being friendly, supportive, high regard for fun in learning, good relationship with the family, focused on academic requirements, sets role models, fun, interactive and highly disciplined child.

**Factors influencing the current vocational purpose.** Basic education prepares students in their decisions to pursue a career. In school and home, educators and family members shape the qualities of an individual that is effective in determining a specific career direction. The factors that influence an individual’s pursuit of their current vocation include the qualities of an individual, the experiences he or she had with college advisor, recommendation and motivation of friends, support of the family, experiences with their role models, and pursuing a family profession.

**Reflections influencing an individual to pursue an educational advising vocation.**

The former GNU university peer advisors were not certain whether they intended to pursue the educational advising vocation. However, with the amount of independence, lesser expectations of the family, experienced interaction, pursuing parents’ profession, willingness to support others
as their family supported them, and their intention to share the academic commitment, former peer advisors found these are valid reflections that validate their intention to further their vocation.

**Structural-Textural Composite Descriptions**

Composite structural-textural descriptions were constructed from the individual structural descriptions to represent and describe how the participants perceived the essence of their lived experiences. The structural-textural descriptions comprise the final step of the Moustakas, (1994) method. Structural-textural synthesis provides a combined analysis of the meanings and essences of the former advisors’ perceptions, thoughts, and feelings regarding the epiphany of educational advising vocation of former peer advisors.

In the transcripts reviewed, all participants shared similar characteristics and experiences. Note that four of the participants have two siblings that are supportive in their interest. These (4, 100%) participants shared positive experiences with their family and school environments across the basic and college education. As a result, qualities that are ideal to become an educational advisor emerged in the analysis (Table 4).

The qualities developed during the participants’ childhood years were among the essential factors that influence an individual to pursue the educational advising profession. Family and positive experiences with advising were also essential in identifying peer advisors who can further their interest in educational advising after college.

**Answers to Research Question/Sub-Questions**

**Central Question**

The thematic labels and themes of the study answered the central question: What specific lived-experiences influence vocational purpose from the perspective of former peer advisors who
are pursuing careers in educational advising? The researcher of the study found that positive experiences of former peer advisors from their family and friends during elementary, secondary and post-secondary influenced their decisions to become an educational advisor. As shown in Table 4, the specific lived experiences of the participants that influenced in their decisions include: (a) innate qualities of an individual, (b) experiences with former college advisor, (c) recommendation and motivation from friends, (d) familial support in pursuing educational advising, (e) childhood experiences with educational role models, and (f) pursuing familial profession. However, the most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the collection of the invariant constituents is that vocational purpose is determined by the innate qualities of an individual that are shaped by his or her childhood and adolescent experiences with family, friends, and school teachers.

Sub-Questions

Additional sub-questions were also addressed in the analysis of the data. Following the thematic labels and themes, the answers to the sub-questions are presented below.

What specific educational experiences, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors? The participants in this study related that their educational experiences are similarly challenging and fun across their elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. The participants reported that the most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the collection of invariant constituents illustrates that former peer advisors have been brought up in an enabling environment that supports and cares about their interests in fun learning, activities with their friends, classmates, and school educators. These childhood experiences exposed the former peer advisors to qualities that could shape their interest in pursuing an educational advising career.
These personal qualities influenced their advising activities even during the secondary and post-secondary schools.

The second thematic label, *childhood qualities of educational advisors*, also supports the development of the peer advisors' competence and interest in their current vocational purpose. The results of the study suggest that educational advisors are: (a) friendly, (b) supportive to friends, (c) considered learning as fun, (d) has a good relationship with family, (e) deep interest in academic activities (e.g., focused), (f) highly motivated, (g) sets family members and teachers as role model, (h) fun to be with, and (i) experienced discipline from father.

**What specific experiences with friends, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?** In terms of the experiences of the participants with friends, the researcher of the study found that the former peer advisors are naturally friendly and that they are supportive to friends. The participants of this study claimed that they retain the friendship they had during their childhood until their post-secondary schools. Because of their friendly attitude, the participants are able to win other friends who, in one way or the other, recommended the vocation as educational advisors. As shown in Table 5, four of the participants claimed that *recommendation and motivation from friends* influenced their current vocational purpose.

**What specific experiences with family, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?** The influence of the family in the vocational decision of the participants is evident in the lives of the former peer advisors as indicated in the thematic labels and themes emerging from the analysis. Thematic label one shows three themes that relate to the influence of family to the lives of the participants: (a) familial support and care, (b) fun memories with family, and (c) parental
involvement in academic activities. Thematic label two shows three themes: (a) has a good relationship with family, (b) sets family members and teachers as role model, and (c) experienced discipline from father. Thematic label three shows two themes: (a) familial support in pursuing educational advising, and (b) pursuing familial profession. In the light of these themes, it could be postulated that the positive experiences the participants had with their family influence their decision to pursue the vocational purpose.

Summary

Chapter Four presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews of a purposive sample of four former peer advisors of GNU. The interviews explored the behaviors, attributes, and phenomenological essence of educational advising as a profession. Chapter Four articulated the data collection process, provided the demographics of the study participants, displayed the interview findings, and described the modified van Kaam phenomenological and NVivo© software methods employed to analyze the datum. The interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed through a process of the modified van Kaam phenomenological method to identify the thematic label and invariant constituents that emerged from the transcripts of the participants. NVivo© software aided in the coding of the recorded and transcribed interviews to establish invariant constituents. By analyzing the invariant constituents, resulting from the coded text of each transcribed interview, four highly relevant and significant themes emerged from the rich textured descriptions. Each theme was analyzed for phenomenological essence substantiated by the lived experiences of the former peer advisors.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed and used to create summarized individual textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences of the research participants. Composite structural descriptions were created to describe how the participants perceived their
experiences. The final step of the Moustakas (1994) method was the creation of a textural-structural synthesis. The textural-structural synthesis provided a combined analysis of the meaning and essences of the experiences of the former peer advisors concerning peer advising. The themes found to be essential include (a) indicators of positive childhood and adolescent experiences, (b) childhood qualities of academic advisors, (c) factors influencing the current vocational purpose, and (d) reflections influencing an individual to pursue educational advisorship vocation. Chapter Five provides the research conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Colleges can and should play a role in guiding students through a journey of self-discovery and development of vocational purpose. However, in current times of economic crisis (MTA, 2012), universities must seek fiscally prudent means to implement programs that will strengthen students both academically and socially. Noel-Levitz (2006; 2011) stresses the importance of academic advising and finds that in recent nationwide surveys, it is consistently the top, if not, the second priority of a student’s college experience. One increasing popular way of strengthening students’ developmental experiences is through university peer advising programs (Koring & Campbell, 2005). These economical and effective programs (Ender et al., 2010) serve as an opportunity for students to interact with well-trained and experienced advisors, and offer advisees a greater sense of community, more social integration, a larger network of resources, as well as leadership and professional growth (Gordon et al., 2008; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011). For the peer advisor, a number of benefits may be derived as well: new skills, relevant practical experience, and contribution to the university community (Ender et al., 2010). Both parties involved develop reciprocity and cooperation as well as the development of professional conduct, communication skills, and social development from working with students of various backgrounds (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1993) further establishes its relevance, stating how “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398).

While a substantial amount of research addresses the positive impact peer interactions have on student outcomes (Astin, 1993; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Ender et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011), research is limited in the area of understanding the peer advising experience from the perspective of the peer advisor, and even fewer studies
employed in-depth phenomenological interviewing. The current study examined the lived-experiences of former peer advisors at Great Northeastern University (GNU) in Massachusetts, who were pursuing careers in academic advising and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. This study examines how life experiences and participation as a peer advisor contributed to the participants’ development of vocational purpose. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether there was there an epiphanic moment(s) that contributed to participants’ determining their vocational purpose?

This study employed a phenomenological approach in order to best describe and understand the attitudes and experiences of the participants in this study. In particular, the researcher sought to explore the commonality of experience from the participants’ perspective. Given that this study examined lived experiences, open-ended questions were used to guide the research. The main question asked was, what specific lived-experiences influence vocational purpose from the perspective of former peer advisors who are pursuing careers in academic advising? Additional sub-questions were:

1. What specific educational experiences, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
2. What specific experiences with friends, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?
3. What specific experiences with family, during elementary, secondary and post-secondary school, influence vocational purpose as described by former peer advisors?

In qualitative research, the goal is not necessarily to produce generalizable hypotheses, but rather, to derive meaning in the findings. Hypotheses in this study emerged from the
interviews, observations, and data review. Additionally, new hypotheses emerged that could prompt further observations in the future.

This chapter discusses the interpretation of the results presented in Chapter Four. It also includes recommendations for action, recommendations for future research, implications for social change, and concludes with a summary.

**Summary of Findings**

Four participants were interviewed using a modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). This number has been shown to be adequate for a phenomenological study, given the high amount of data derived (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984; Giorgi, 2009; Wertz, 2005). Textual datum was collected and analyzed using the seven-step modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) to discern themes that developed from the data in conjunction with the NVivo© software. Four themes emerged from the data analysis. A summary of the pertinent findings will be presented in the succeeding paragraphs.

The first theme suggests that academic advisors experience a positive childhood environment. Specifically, the invariant constituents central to the theme are as follows: (a) familial support and care, (b) fun memories with family, friends, and school educators, (c) set role models, (d) mingle with friends in home and school activities, and (e) parental involvement in academic activities.

The second emerging theme was that academic advisors developed qualities that matched the requirement of the career advising vocation. The analysis found eight qualities that were relevant in possibly determining future likelihood of an individual to pursue the academic advising profession. The qualities were: friendly, supportive to friends, considered learning as fun, has a good relationship with family, deep interest in academic activities (e.g., focused),
The third theme that emerged was that the academic advising career is a good fit for individuals who have realized their vocational purpose. Specifically, the themes that emerged include (a) innate qualities of an individual, (b) experiences with former college advisor, (c) recommendation and motivation from friends, (d) familial support in pursuing college advising, (e) childhood experiences with educational role models, and (f) pursuing familial profession.

Lastly, the fourth theme was how participants experienced their epiphanic moment(s). Specific themes, which received two or more responses, are as follows: (a) experienced independence from parents and siblings, (b) experienced fun in providing students’ assistance, (c) valued interaction, (d) pursuance of parents’ profession, (e) emulate support system provided by parents, and (f) intend to share academic commitment. This illustrates that former peer advisors exercised their interest and independence in pursuing their commitment and interest in providing student assistance, and that made this realization integral to their decision in pursuing a career in academic advising.

Expounding on the first theme, the significant influence of positive childhood environment to advisors’ decision to choose the vocation can be attributed to the “abundance of agency” posited by Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, and Rand (2002). Snyder et al. (2002) posited that abundance of agency such as family, friends, school teachers contribute to more positive life outcomes, thus, a greater tendency to realize vocational purpose. Moreover, Miller (2012) asserted that one way to effectively explore the vocation of students is the service-learning method. Miller (2012) examined perceptions of physical education students about their
vocational callings. The results of the study of Miller (2012) suggested that participants agreed that opportunities given to them influenced their vocational calling. Miller (2012) added the feeling of inclusion in a particular program affects student’s determination of personal calling. Relating this to the first theme, it can be incurred at environmental factors such as an abundance of resources and feeling of inclusion affects the decision of students to choose a vocation. Thus, as supported by Snyder et al. (2002) and Miller (2012), it can be concluded that a positive childhood environment influenced participants’ decisions to choose the advising vocation.

However, not all of the development of the participants is attributed to social factors; much of their development lies within themselves. Arnett and Tanner (2006) note that self-development can be attributed to “emerging adulthood,” a phenomenon where individuals try to develop an identity for themselves by going through experiences of self-discovery, which will help them identify their strengths and limitations in different aspects of their life. Erikson also believed that identity is shaped by how one organizes experiences within the environment that revolves around oneself, and how each stage of life is characterized by a crisis that must be resolved (Torres et al., 2009). For college students, it is the “identity versus role confusion” crisis that needs to be overcome (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Torres et al., 2009). It is in this stage where individuals seek to make meaning in their lives and determine where they belong, based on their strengths and perceived purpose (Kosine et al., 2008). In Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) revised developmental theory, they add that establishing identity includes: (a) being comfortable with one’s appearance, gender and sexual orientation; (b) the establishment of a sense in a social, historical and cultural heritage; (c) the clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyle; (d) self-perception based on feedback from others; (e) self-acceptance and development of self-esteem; and lastly, (f) personal stability and integration into the community.
Alternatively, Straus, Johnson, Marquez, and Feldman (2013) determined several factors that constitute an effective academic mentor. Straus et al. (2013) examined faculty members using a qualitative method, conducting individual interviews. As reflected in the findings, the study of Straus et al. (2013) revealed that an effective academic mentor has the following characteristics: altruistic, honest, trustworthy, active listener, well-experienced, and possessing interpersonal characteristics. In relation to the findings of the current study, it was revealed that the participants agreed about the influence of interpersonal characteristics to participants’ decisions of choosing an advising vocation. Participants of the study believed that choosing academic advising as a vocation requires interpersonal characteristics.

Moreover, the third theme constitutes a combination of both environmental and intrinsic factors in choosing the advising vocation. Academic advisors pursuing the vocation have discovered their vocational purpose. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), vocational purpose is developed by a process of discovering one’s identity, purpose, values, and relationships, as well as developing one’s own abilities and talents in the pursuit of excellence. In the experiences of the participants, the social factor of friends and family plays a large role in their vocational purpose; their development into peer advisors was heavily influenced by their experiences growing up, as well as the direct suggestion for them to pursue the vocation. The responses of the participants show that some of their process of self-development lies with the encouragement and support of social constituents such as friends and family. This finding was particularly unexpected, since much of the literature reviewed did not mention the influence of social constituents into the shaping of a peer advisor’s experience and decision to pursue a career in academic advising. No such data has been found with regards to the existing pool of literature regarding peer advising.
The results show that the overall experience of the individual contributed to the development of the participants over the course of their development from youth to adulthood. As hypothesized, epiphanic moments experienced by the participants were strong influences on their decided vocations. These epiphanic moments were the result of self-realizations and parental influences. Each participant noted that their life experiences growing up either (a) laid the groundwork for them to want to pursue the educational advising career, or (b) led them to a turning point in their experiences that made them choose to be so. The common theme was that the participants all developed the skills to become advisors, and that these epiphanic moments helped them realize their strengths and pertinent characteristics. In their experience as peer advisors, they realized that it was something purposeful and played to their strengths. These experiences and realizations prompted the participants to continue and fulfill their sense of purpose, as well as further develop their skills by pursuing a career that allowed them to do so.

The reports in this study add to Harmon’s (2006) findings in his interviews with former peer mentors. While his research confirmed that peer mentors experience significant growth and development, this study also showed specific instances on how being a peer mentor “profoundly affected their personal and professional lives” (p.54). Additionally, these findings, particularly, experienced fun in providing students’ assistance, valued interaction, and intend to share academic commitment, support findings from previous quantitative studies (Ender et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The findings also follow the same trend reported by Koring and Campbell (2005) regarding peer advisors’ pursuit of graduate work in higher education.

The findings suggest that life experiences, particularly being a peer advisor, led to the discovery of vocational purpose. It may be possible that the participants were able to hone their talents and skills, as well as nurture a deep passion for helping others through the task of peer
advising. It is a confluence of these talents, skills, and passion that makes up a vocation (Nash & Murray, 2010). Chickering and Reisser (1993) also add that in the development of purpose, strong interpersonal and family commitments are a manifestation of this development.

As such, with these findings, existing programs may be strengthened through further encouragement of students to participate in peer advising programs. Besides talking about current issues in these programs, these programs may integrate finding a sense of vocational purpose through talking about relevant past experiences. Through this, they will be able to further undergo self-discovery through analysis of not just their current issues but of their past experiences as well. In this self-discovery, they may be able to find their vocational purpose and realize their potentials. To encourage more students to become peer advisors, the role must be marketed and implemented in such a way that it creates a sense of purpose and meaning for the student.

In summary, the current study revealed four themes from the lived experiences of former peer advisers: (a) academic advisors experienced a positive childhood environment that nurtured their self-development; (b) they developed qualities that matched those required of the career advising vocation, (c) the academic advising career was offered to individuals who had discovered their vocational purpose; and (d) they experienced an epiphanic moment(s) which punctuated their decision to become academic advisors. These findings supported and added to the knowledge on previous literature regarding peer advisors. The information has important implications for theory as well as future research; this will be discussed in the next section.

**Implications for Social Change**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of former peer advisors who are currently pursuing careers in academic advising. Much of the previous literature done
was quantitative studies assessing the positive impacts of peer advising. This study is unique in such a way that it provides an in-depth and more personal understanding of how peer advising can lead to pursuing a vocation in academic advising.

Given how academic advising is one of the top priorities of a student’s college experience (Noel-Levitz, 2006, 2011), programs to influence students to pursue careers in academic advising may be of great contribution to collegiate education. The study has explored possible factors, which may contribute to the development of more academic advisors. It also discusses the relevance of peer advising programs as an important experience in shaping their role as advisors. Additionally, it contributes to the overall understanding of how vocational purpose is formed, and how multiple life experiences shape it.

Resulting themes of the study suggest that college programs that intend to influence college students to pursue careers in academic advising may need to provide an enabling academic environment for potential college advisors. This environment should reflect the following: (a) support and care of the family, (b) fun learning, (c) availability of role models, (d) friendly environment, and (e) the active participation of parents in the academic activities of the college students. These factors offered the student a positive outlook concerning the importance of helping others in their academic challenges.

In terms of grooming college students to be potential academic advisors, it should be noted that college administrators may need to revisit the childhood and adolescent experiences of potential advisors. Revisiting their childhood and adolescent experiences will provide college administrators the empirical information concerning the essential qualities of effective educational advisors. Academic institutions may need to ensure that college students who have the potential to enter in the academic advisorship career foster the following attitude: friendly,
supportive, high regard for fun in learning, good relationship with the family, focused on academic requirements, sets role models, fun, interactive and highly disciplined. These qualities of individual may likely venture profession such as the academic advising.

As these measures provide students with an avenue to become academic advisors, it is recommended that existing programs of peer advising be strengthened in a way that reflects the result of the present study. Furthermore, academic institutions can encourage more students to apply to be peer advisors as an economical means of addressing advising, and as a way for students to get additional experience and skills needed for post-graduate work. In the same way, student advisees should also be encouraged to seek help from peer advisors in order to derive reciprocal benefits as well.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

While the current study has contributed to the body of knowledge about the influence of peer advising on pursuing a vocation in academic advising, there are certain limitations that bound the study. One limitation is the qualitative nature of the study. Since the researcher utilized a phenomenological data gathering technique, the quality of the data is greatly dependent on the skills of the researcher to elicit relevant answers. Moreover, this particular data gathering technique has higher tendency to be influenced by the researcher’s perceptions and belief about the social context, which is also known as social desirability bias. Furthermore, a researcher’s biases and idiosyncrasies may confound the results of the study thus weakening the credibility of the findings.

With regards to future research implementation, the themes found in this study may be used as hypotheses for future testing, since the study is phenomenological in nature. The main theory used in this study, namely, the Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised developmental
theory was tested in this study and provided an appropriate model for explanation. It also used concepts derived from Erik Erikson’s theory of developmental stages and James Marcia’s identity development theories (Erikson, 1968; Hettich & Landrum, 2013). Further studies may refer to the methodology and questions in the current study in order to examine the lived experiences of peer advisors using different samples.

Another limitation of the current study is the sample population. The population of the study is consisted of former peer advisors at a single university in Massachusetts. With this limitation, the generalizations made through the exploration of the phenomenon will be weak. For instance, the results can be solely applied to the sample population and not with other cohorts.

With these limitations, this researcher recommends further research to develop a greater understanding in this particular area. Future studies are recommended to focus on this line of study in order to contribute to the body of knowledge about the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of university peer advisors. Specifically, the following recommendations for future research are suggested:

1. It is recommended that more qualitative studies using different samples may be purposeful in examining the lived experiences of peer advisors. As there is a lack of such studies in existing literature, further research should be made into the factors influencing vocational purpose in other universities across the nation or within various ethnic/cultural minorities in order to identify if the specific themes that may be consistent throughout those various groups. It is possible that there may also be more undiscovered themes, which may emerge in the findings of such studies. Future research studies may use the
current study in order to formulate questions in examining phenomenological experiences, particularly of how past experiences shape one’s vocational purpose.

2. Another possible research modification is to look into other forms of advising programs, such as peer counseling or social advising. It is possible that there may be similar themes that can emerge as to how vocational purpose is formed. Perhaps it is not just peer advising that can lead to the pursuit of academic advising careers, but experience with other forms of advising may lead to pursuing such careers as well. Programs, which utilize student’s skills to help others, may foster a sense of purpose that could lead them to pursue advising careers or other careers of the same nature.

3. A mixed method approach using quantitative data supplemented by qualitative statements may be most appropriate to assess the phenomenon under study. The findings from this study may be used to as new hypotheses for research.

**Researcher Epoché**

Prior to the implementation of this study, it was important for me to remove any personal perspectives that could influence the study results. As I began this doctoral research, I had my own epiphany. I realized that during my graduate assistantship experience in the GNU Advising Center, I discovered my vocational purpose. I knew that becoming an academic advisor would bring me fulfillment and happiness. That being said, at the onset of this study, it was my belief that the participants would also identify their experience with the GNU Advising Center as influencing their decision to enter the field of educational advising.

As I began, and throughout the course of this study, it was important for me not to allow my own personal experiences to cloud my judgment in determining the influence lived-experiences had on these participants. I wanted to know how each of these former peer advisors
came to their own self-discovery of vocational purpose. I was ever mindful of my own experience as I interviewed participants and was careful with everything I said – wanting not to lead them into saying something I wanted them to say. I listened to them and only asked questions if I needed clarification or a better understanding of what they were saying. Through this “bracketing” process, the analysis of the data reflected that of the participants and not that of this researcher. The study results revealed that the peer advising experience had minimal influence on participants’ decision to enter the field of advising. This result, while most surprising to me, adds a great deal of credibility to this study.

**Summary**

This study sought to gain an in depth understanding of the lived experiences of former peer advisers who are currently pursuing a career in academic advising. It employed a phenomenological approach using four participants from the Great Northeastern University (GNC) in Massachusetts. It was found that all participants expressed a common theme of growing up in a positive childhood environment. Subsequently, this environment contributed to the development of the participants’ qualities, which were suitable for the educational advising vocation. In the discussion, eight qualities emerged that were relevant in determining future likelihood of an individual to pursue the academic advising profession. Through social and environmental interactions, the participants, at some point in their lives, had an epiphanic moment(s) and developed a sense of vocational purpose in the direction of educational advising. These epiphanic moments were a combination of both self-realizations and parental influences.

The findings agree with previously done quantitative studies, which found positive impacts of peer interactions (Ender et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It also added to the knowledge expressed by Harmon (2006) in his interview with former peer mentors; it answered the specific experiences of how being a peer mentor “profoundly affected their
personal and professional lives” (p.54). This study also follows the trend reported by Koring and Campbell (2005) regarding peer advisors’ pursuit of graduate work in higher education. As such, this research contributed a unique and deep understanding of peer advising and its impact on students’ lives. It contributes to the body of knowledge to assist policy makers, school administrators and higher education professors, as well as parents by exploring the profound influence of peer advising and its positive effects. For further studies, it provides new hypotheses to be tested, possibly for a larger number of individuals across different states and cultures.


Massachusetts Teachers Association ([MTA], 2012). *Massachusetts public higher education funding*. Retrieved from http://massteacher.org/~/media/Files/PDFs/Advocating/HE%20Funding/key_indicators.pdf#search=%22state%20appropriation%22


Miller, M. (2012). The role of service-learning to promote early childhood physical education while examining its influence upon the vocational call to teach. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy, 17*(1), 61-77.


http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-and-Student-Retention-article.aspx

*NVivo® qualitative data analysis software*; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012


doi: 10.1002/he.20002


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Consent Form

The Lived Experience of a University Peer Advisor
Laurie L. Simpson
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study to examine the lived experiences of former peer advisors at Westfield State University and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. You were selected as a possible participant because you served as a peer advisor with the university and are currently employed in the field of educational advising. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Laurie L. Simpson, a graduate student with the Education Department at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of former peer advisors at Westfield State University and to gather data from which to gain an understanding of those experiences. The goal of the current research is to offer the researcher valuable insights into participant experiences, and to determine whether those experiences contributed to participants developing vocational purpose. As a former graduate student in the advising center, whose career path changed as a result of my experience, I have great interest in understanding your experiences that led to your career pursuit in educational advising.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
- To grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing an Ed.D. degree, including a dissertation and any other future publications.
- To allow a brief synopsis of each participant, including myself, with the following information: first name (pseudonym) and occupation, and any other pertinent information that will help the reader come to know and recall each participant. No information in the synopsis will make it possible to identify you specifically. Westfield State University will assume the pseudonym Great Northeastern University (GNU) and you will be identified through a mutually agreed upon pseudonym for purposes of any publications, to include this dissertation. Pseudonymous synopsis information will be used in this dissertation and any other future publications.
- I grant permission for the above information to be used in its pseudonymous form.
I agree to meet at the following location on ____________________________ the following date___________________ at________ for an initial interview of 1 ½ hours.
- I will be available at a mutually agreed upon time and place for two additional 1 ½ hour interviews.
- I also grant permission to audio-record the interview(s) and have them transcribed by a professional transcriber.

Pilot Interviews:
The researcher will pilot interview questions (Appendix C) to be used in this study, prior to the actual research, in an effort to identify any issues of clarity or understanding. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007), two or three participants are sufficient for a pilot study in a qualitative research study.

The pilot interviews will follow the same protocol as the main research interview including time arrival, prompts, wordings, audio recording, transcription and participant review. Pilot interview participants will be afforded the same level of confidentiality as the main research interviews. Information gathered from the pilot interviews will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher with only the researcher having access.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The study has minimal risks associated with it; no more than you would encounter on any given day through conversation. However, reconstructing your life history, providing details of your life experiences, and reflecting on their meaning may cause you to feel uncomfortable at times. If, at any time during this study, you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so. The benefit to participating is your contribution to research in student development in higher education.

Compensation:
You agree that you will receive no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, journal article, or conference presentation I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you specifically. Westfield State University will assume the pseudonym Great Northeastern University (GNU) and you will be identified through a mutually agreed upon pseudonym for purposes of any publications to include this dissertation. Research records will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researchers’ home office and only the researcher will have access to the records. Audio recordings will be erased when this dissertation has been successfully defended.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty or Westfield State Universities. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Laurie L. Simpson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me at (413)739-1909 or (413)537-9940. My advisor’s name at Liberty University is Dr. Barbara Boothe, Associate
Professor of Education and Psychology. Her phone number is (434)-546-0744. Her e-mail address is bboothe@liberty.edu.
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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

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

☐ By checking this box, I consent to having my three interviews audio-recorded.

Signature: _________________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator:___________________________ Date: ________________

**IRB Code Numbers:** (After a study is approved, the IRB code number pertaining to the study should be added here.)

**IRB Expiration Date:** (After a study is approved, the expiration date (one year from date of approval) assigned to a study at initial or continuing review should be added. Periodic checks on the current status of consent forms may occur as part of continuing review mandates from the federal regulators.)
APPENDIX B: Letter to Co-Researchers

Date:_______________

Dear_______________

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the lived-experience of a university peer advisor. I value the unique contribution that you can make to my study and I am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things we have already discussed and to secure your signature on the informed-consent form that you will find attached. Informed consent basically means that you understand the nature of the study, what your role in the study will be, what the data be used for at the conclusion of the study, and what, if any, risk may occur through your participation in the study. (Refer to the consent form for specific information relative to your participation).

The research model I am using is qualitative, through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way, I hope to illuminate or answer my question, “What is the lived-experience of a university peer advisor?”

Through your participation as a co-researcher, I hope to understand the essence of the peer advising as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall specific life episodes, situations, or events. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what life experiences were like for you, your thoughts, feelings and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience.

I value your participation and thank you for the commitment of time, energy and effort. If you have any further questions before signing the release form or if there is a problem with the date and time of our meeting, I can be reached at (413) 537-9940 or (413) 739-1909 or via e-mail at llsimpson@liberty.edu.

With warm regards,

Laurie L. Simpson
APPENDIX C: Pilot Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITY PEER ADVISORS

1. Greet the participant and thank them for participating in the interview.
2. Remind the participant the interview will last 90 minutes.
3. Remind the participant they have the right to end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question without penalty.
4. Remind the participant the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
5. Remind the participant they can refuse to have the interview recorded.
6. Remind the participants to answer the questions honestly and there are not any “right” or “wrong” answers.
7. Assure the participants their identity and responses will remain confidential.
8. Remind the participants the data will be locked in a file cabinet in the home office of the researcher with only the researcher having access for three years and then destroyed.
9. Conduct the interview by reading the questions with the same wording each time.
10. Thank the participant again for being part of the study.

Provide the participant with the contact information of the researcher and inform them that they will receive a copy of the transcribed interview for their review.

Interview Guide

Interview One:

1. Describe your educational experiences during primary school (kindergarten through 5th grade).
   Prompts:
   • Can you tell me a bit about the school you attended during primary school – was it private or public?
   • How would you describe the kind of student you were?
   • What was your favorite subject and why?
   • What was your least favorite subject and why?
   • Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
   • What did you want to be when you grew up during this time in your life?
   • Who were your or role models when you were young? Why this person(s)?

2. Describe your experience with friends during primary school.
   Prompts:
   • What were your friends like in primary school?
   • What was it that attracted you to these friends?
   • What would you and your friends to for fun?
   • How would your friends during this time describe you?
   • What friends are you still friends with from this time in your life? Why do you suppose this is?
   • Do you have any favorite “friend” stories from this time in your life?
3. Describe your familial experiences during primary school.
Prompts:
- Where did you grow up (i.e. in the city, suburbs, inner city)?
- What was it like to grow up there?
- What did your parents do for work during this time in your life?
- What were your parents/parent/caregivers like?
- How was your relationship with your parents/parent/caregivers at this time in your life?
- How many siblings do you have? What is the birth order of the children in your family?
- What were your siblings like growing up?
- How would your siblings describe you during these years?
- How might your family have influenced your choice of future vocation during this time in your life?

Interview Two:
1. Describe your educational experiences during secondary school (6th through 12th grade).
Prompts:
- Can you tell me a bit about the school you attended during secondary school – was it private or public?
- How would you describe the kind of student you were?
- What was your favorite subject and why?
- What was your least favorite subject and why?
- Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
- What did you want to be during this time in your life?
- Who were your heroes or role models at this time? Why this person(s)?
- How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your choice to become a peer advisor at GNU?
- How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your decision to enter into the field of educational advising?

2. Describe your experience with friends during secondary school.
Prompts:
- What were your friends like in secondary school?
- What was it that attracted you to these friends?
- What would you and your friends to for fun?
- How would your friends during this time describe you?
- Are you still friends with anyone from this time in your life?
- Do you have any favorite "friend" stories from this time in your life?
- How might your friends have influenced your decision to attend GNU?
- How might your relationships with friends have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
- How might your relationship with friends have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?

3. Describe your familial experiences during secondary school.
Prompts:
What did your parents/parent/caregiver do for work during this time in your life?
What were your parents/parent/caregiver like during this time in your life?
How was your relationship with your parents/parent/caregivers at this time in your life?
How were your relationships with your siblings at this time in your life?
How would your siblings describe you during this time in your life?
Looking back, how might your family have influenced your choice to attend GNU?
Looking back, how might your family have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
How might your relationship with family have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?

Interview Three:
1. Describe your educational experiences during post-secondary school (college).
   Prompts:
   - What made you choose the college you did?
   - How would you describe the kind of student you were?
   - What was your favorite subject and why?
   - What was your least favorite subject and why?
   - Who was your favorite professor(s) and why?
   - What did you want to be during this time in your life?
   - Who were your heroes or role models at this time? Why this person(s)?
   - How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your choice to become a peer advisor at GNU?
   - How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your decision to enter into the field of educational advising?

2. Describe your experience with friends during post-secondary school.
   Prompts:
   - What were your friends like in college?
   - What was it that attracted you to these friends?
   - What would you and your friends to for fun?
   - How would your friends during this time describe you?
   - Are you still friends with anyone from this time in your life?
   - Do you have any favorite “friend” stories from this time in your life?
   - How might your relationships with friends have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
   - How might your relationship with friends have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?

3. Describe your familial experiences during post-secondary school.
   Prompts:
   - What did your parents/parent/caregiver do for work during this time in your life?
   - What were your parents/parent/caregiver like during this time in your life?
   - How was your relationship with your parents/parent/caregivers at this time in your life?
• How were your relationships with your siblings at this time in your life?
• How would your siblings describe you during this time in your life?
• Looking back, how might your family have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
• How might your relationship with family have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?
November 26, 2013

Laurie L. Simmons
IRB Approval 1735.112613: The Lived Experience of University Peer Advisors

Dear Laurie,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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1971 University Blvd. Lynchburg, VA 24502 IRB@LIBERTY.EDU FAX (434) 522-0586 WWW.LIBERTY.EDU
November 15, 2013

Laurie Simpson
Advising Center
Westfield State University
577 Western Ave.
Westfield MA 01086

Dear Ms. Simpson,

This letter is to formally inform you that your request to the Westfield State University Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research titled “The Lived Experience of a University Peer Advisor” was reviewed and has been deemed exempt. You are approved to begin data collection. This approval is good for one year. If the data gathering process goes beyond one year please seek additional review from the IRB. If any changes occur with your methodology or consent forms during the research process please contact the committee for clearance to continue the study. For your records our Federal-wide Assurance number from the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office for Human Research Protections is FWA00018740.

Congratulations and good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Kersting, ACSW, PhD
Chair, WSU IRB Committee
Chair, Department of Social Work
APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITY PEER ADVISORS

1. Greet the participant and thank them for participating in the interview.
2. Remind the participant the interview will last 90 minutes.
3. Remind the participant they have the right to end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question without penalty.
4. Remind the participant the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
5. Remind the participant they can refuse to have the interview recorded.
6. Remind the participants to answer the questions honestly and there are not any “right” or “wrong” answers.
7. Assure the participants their identity and responses will remain confidential.
8. Remind the participants the data will be locked in a file cabinet in the home office of the researcher with only the researcher having access for three years and then destroyed.
9. Conduct the interview by reading the questions with the same wording each time.
10. Thank the participant again for being part of the study.

Provide the participant with the contact information of the researcher and inform them that they will receive a copy of the transcribed interview for their review.

Interview Guide

Interview One:

1. Describe your educational experiences during primary school (kindergarten through 5th grade).

Prompts:
- Can you tell me a bit about the school you attended during primary school – was it private or public?
- How would you describe the kind of student you were?
- What was your favorite subject and why?
- What was your least favorite subject and why?
- Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
- What did you want to be when you grew up during this time in your life?
- Who were your or role models when you were young? Why this person(s)?

2. Describe your experience with friends during primary school.

Prompts:
- What were your friends like in primary school?
- What was it that attracted you to these friends?
- What would you and your friends to for fun?
- How would your friends during this time describe you?
- What friends are you still friends with from this time in your life? Why do you suppose this is?
- Do you have any favorite “friend” stories from this time in your life?
3. Describe your familial experiences during primary school.
Prompts:
- Where did you grow up (i.e. in the city, suburbs, inner city)?
- What was it like to grow up there?
- What did your parents do for work during this time in your life?
- What were your parents/parent/caregivers like?
- How was your relationship with your parents/parent/caregivers at this time in your life?
- How many siblings do you have? What is the birth order of the children in your family?
- What were your siblings like growing up?
- How would your siblings describe you during these years?
- How might your family have influenced your choice of future vocation during this time in your life?

Interview Two:
1. Describe your educational experiences during secondary school (6th through 12th grade).
Prompts:
- Can you tell me a bit about the school you attended during secondary school – was it private or public?
- How would you describe the kind of student you were?
- What was your favorite subject and why?
- What was your least favorite subject and why?
- Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
- What did you want to be during this time in your life?
- Who were your heroes or role models at this time? Why this person(s)?
- How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your choice to become a peer advisor at GNU?
- How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your decision to enter into the field of educational advising?

2. Describe your experience with friends during secondary school.
Prompts:
- What were your friends like in secondary school?
- What was it that attracted you to these friends?
- What would you and your friends to for fun?
- How would your friends during this time describe you?
- Are you still friends with anyone from this time in your life?
- Do you have any favorite “friend” stories from this time in your life?
- How might your friends have influenced your decision to attend GNU?
- How might your relationships with friends have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
- How might your relationship with friends have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?

3. Describe your familial experiences during secondary school.
Prompts:
- What did your parents/parent/caregiver do for work during this time in your life?
- What were your parents/parent/caregiver like during this time in your life?
- How was your relationship with your parents/parent/caregivers at this time in your life?
- How were your relationships with your siblings at this time in your life?
- How would your siblings describe you during this time in your life?
- Looking back, how might your family have influenced your choice to attend GNU?
- Looking back, how might your family have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
- How might your relationship with family have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?

Interview Three:
1. Describe your educational experiences during post-secondary school (college).
   Prompts:
   - What made you choose the college you did?
   - How would you describe the kind of student you were?
   - What was your favorite subject and why?
   - What was your least favorite subject and why?
   - Who was your favorite professor(s) and why?
   - What did you want to be during this time in your life?
   - Who were your heroes or role models at this time? Why this person(s)?
   - How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your choice to become a peer advisor at GNU?
   - How might your secondary school experiences have contributed to your decision to enter into the field of educational advising?

2. Describe your experience with friends during post-secondary school.
   Prompts:
   - What were your friends like in college?
   - What was it that attracted you to these friends?
   - What would you and your friends do for fun?
   - How would your friends during this time describe you?
   - Are you still friends with anyone from this time in your life?
   - Do you have any favorite “friend” stories from this time in your life?
   - How might your relationships with friends have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
   - How might your relationship with friends have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?

3. Describe your familial experiences during post-secondary school.
   Prompts:
   - What did your parents/parent/caregiver do for work during this time in your life?
   - What were your parents/parent/caregiver like during this time in your life?
   - How was your relationship with your parents/parent/caregivers at this time in your life?
• How were your relationships with your siblings at this time in your life?
• How would your siblings describe you during this time in your life?
• Looking back, how might your family have influenced your decision to become a peer advisor at GNU?
• How might your relationship with family have influenced your decision to become an educational advisor?
APPENDIX F: Thank You Letter to Co-Researchers

Date:________________________

Dear:________________________

Thank you for meeting with me for three extended interviews to share your lived-experiences. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, events, and situations.

I have enclosed transcripts of your three interviews. Would you please review these documents? Be sure to ask yourself if these interviews have fully captured the lived-experiences discussed. After reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, you may realize that an important experience(s) was neglected. Please feel free to add comments, with the enclosed red pen, that would further elaborate your experience(s), or if you prefer we can arrange to meet again and tape record your additions or corrections. Please do not edit for grammatical corrections. The way you told your story is what is critical.

When you have reviewed the verbatim transcripts and have had an opportunity to make changes and additions, please return the transcript in the stamped, addressed envelope.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experience. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call me.

With warm regards,

Laurie Simpson
APPENDIX G: Invariant Constituents

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<th>Thematic Label 1: Indicators of positive childhood experiences</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A3</th>
<th>A4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familial support and care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun memories with family, friends, and school educators</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set role models</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mingled with friends in home and school activities</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental involvement in academic activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<th>Thematic Label 2: Childhood qualities of academic advisors</th>
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<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
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<th>A2</th>
<th>A3</th>
<th>A4</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive to friends</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered learning as fun</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has good relationship with family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep interest in academic activities (e.g., focused)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly motivated</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets family members and teachers as role model</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun to be with (outgoing)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced discipline from father</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Thematic Label 3: Factors influencing the current vocational purpose</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A3</th>
<th>A4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inmate qualities of an individual</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Experiences with former college advisor</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation and motivation from friends</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial support in pursuing college advising</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>Childhood experiences with educational role models</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pursuing familial profession</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Thematic Label 4: Reflections influencing an individual to pursue educational advisorship</th>
<th># of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>% of participants to offer this experience</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A3</th>
<th>A4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced independence from parents and siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced fun in providing students’ assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valued interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pursuance of parents’ profession</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emulate support system provided by parents</td>
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<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intend to share academic commitment</td>
<td>2</td>
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