Graduate students' perceptions' on a professional pathway for academic advisors

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ABSTRACT

As academic advising took hold in higher education as a regular part of the student experience, the profession struggled to support professional development for academic advisors. In the last 20 years, research has shown how academic advising can positively impact student retention, satisfaction, and success in higher education. A need has arisen for the academic advising profession to create foundational experiences for new or emerging academic advisors through professional development such as training, coursework, and graduate programs. This qualitative case study examined attitudes and beliefs of eight graduate students enrolled in a course on academic advising. Data from this study is expected to contribute to the understanding of how advisors feel about becoming academic advisors, how they view academic advisors are created, and assist the profession in preparing individuals who want to become new academic advisors. The results of this study indicated a need to build foundational knowledge and practice for new and emerging advisors so they may serve as resources and guides for students while positively impacting student success in higher education.

KEYWORDS: academic advising, student success, retention, academic advisor professional development, academic advising course, qualitative research

Introduction

The academic advising profession has situated itself as an integral part of the student experience in higher education. However, it wasn't until the later part of the 19th century to the late 20th century (approximately 100 years), the term *advisor* was even being used to describe any individual (usually a faculty member) who prescribed advice to students about topics ranging from academics to personal matters (White & Khakpour, 2006). Even still during this time advisors typically didn't occupy a separate function in higher education (Carcolini, 2017; Cate & Miller, 2015). As student developed more choices in their academic career, administrators began to recognize the need for institutional representatives to discuss those choices (Lafer, 2014; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2010; Yigit & Tatach, 2017). Also during this time faculty began shifting their focus to research and knowledge creation rather than knowledge dissemination, some began to view academic advising

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as an inappropriate use of their time (2010). During the next 30 years more research focused on academic advising as a separate and specific function within higher education, and the advent of different types of advising strategies or theories (Andrews, 2017; Cate & Miller, 2015; Frost, 1991; Wilder, et al., Wilder, 2017). From the early 2000s to the present, steps were taken to begin making academic advising a recognized profession with the recommendation of "specific categories of advising competencies that all effective advisors should be able to demonstrate" (Cate & Miller, 2015, p. 40).

Also during this time, as academic advising became institutionalized, professionalized, and recognized, research showed its importance to the success and retention of students in higher education (Campbell & Nutt, 2010; Nutt, 2003; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). DeLaRosby's study in 2017 on students' overall satisfaction with academic advising showed more contact with advisors equaled more satisfaction with academic advising and the overall student experience. More recently, this has included demonstrating a positive and significant impact on the retention of special populations including female, commuter and first-generation students (Braxton, et al., 2014; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013; Museus & Ravello, 2010). As the advising practice developed, matured, and demonstrated positive effects on students, the professional support also developed via organizations like the National Academic Advising Association known as NACADA in 1979. NACADA attempted to shape and define academic advising based on scholarship and research into the profession.

The Operationalization and Literature on Academic Advising

Defining academic advising has largely focused on what type of institution an advisor works at and how they reflect an institutions' unique characteristics, qualities, resources, and identity (Cate & Miller, 2015). Other areas such as online vs. residential, Carnegie classification, for-profit vs. non-profit, and types of degrees awarded also factor into this definition. Types and roles of individuals on a campus also influence this definition (Carlstrom & Miller, 2011). For example, according to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) national survey of academic advising, 81.6% surveyed were full-time professional advisors and 78.2% surveyed were full-time faculty advisors (2011). From this work, NACADA developed three documents that serve as its Pillars of Academic Advising.

- The NACADA Concept of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2006)
- The NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2005) and
- The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) for Academic Advising Programs (Miller, 2012).

In the same NACADA national survey, researchers considered how advisors received training, were prepared to become advisors, and how they continued professional development as advisors. When looking at what types of *internal* structured training and development professional advisors receive, 45% indicated regularly scheduled meetings; 43% reported needs based individualized development; and 40% received pre-service training (N=603) (Givans Voller, 2011). In comparison from the same survey, 15% of respondents indicated they had attended a one-day single workshop; 9% indicated they attended a multi-day single workshop; and just 0.2% indicated they had attended a certificate program. By contrast, when reviewing *external* professional development activities supported for professional advisors, 61% indicated attending a State, Regional or National Conference; 57% indicated participating in a webinar; and 43% indicated a publication (N=603) And 20% of survey respondents reported attending some kind of institute,

and 7% had not had any external professional development activities supported for professional advisors (Givans Voller, 2011).

As academic advising developed and matured into a professional field, newly formed advisors struggled to find opportunities for training and professional development either internally or externally. In addition, even as scholars began to study and advocate institutionalizing and professionalizing academic advising including professional development, on campus administrators struggled to define the role of academic advisors at their institutions. Schulenberg and Lindhorst argue the field (academic advising) continues to lack a distinctive identity (2010). The NACADA 2011 national survey of academic advising also surveyed administrators at participating institutions. 33% reported assisting with course enrollment was the academic advisors primary role, while 31% indicated facilitating student development was the primary role of academic advisors (N=609) (Smith, 2011). Only 20% stated teach and facilitate student learning as the primary role, while 10% didn't know the role of academic advisors on their campuses. Bridgen's study on understanding the identify of academic advising at a large public university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, cited a perception by faculty, students, staff and administrators that the campus community misunderstood the "purposes and functions of academic advising" (2017, p. 13). Confusion about academic advisor roles on campus further complicates the support for creating straightforward pathways into becoming an academic advisor.

Even as NACADA's national survey data indicates a difference in ideas about professional preparation to become an academic advisor or how administrators on campus view their role, when envisioning the future of academic advising, some researchers advocate pathways for advising to become a high status career choice (Lowenstein, 2013). Drake suggests a 'co-equal' role on campus for advisors and faculty. This includes more opportunities for promotion in rank and tenure (2011). This also includes opportunities for advisors to come together on campus to exchange ideas, and through research inform national policy on best practices in higher education (2011). In addition, Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008) suggest academic advisors view their service as "analogous to how a doctor, lawyer, or minister serves patients, clients, or congregants" (p. 44). They suggest the field (of academic advising) "struggles to articulate its unique role in higher education because advisors lack the language needed to describe both the practice of academic advising and its scholarly identity…" (2008, p. 44). Alvarez and Towne's study of academic advisors as first-year experience instructors also cited the need for continuing professional education (CPE) including "up-to-date training in industry applicable resources, current institutional policies, procedures and program information, and techniques for personal assessment, reflection and growth" (2016, p.3).

NACADA has also realized the need to support the future of academic advising and advisors roles in the future of higher education. In doing so, NACADA partnered with Kansas State University to create clearer pathways to becoming an academic advisor, and in 2013 Kansas State University began offering both a fully online graduate certificate in academic advising and a Master's degree in Academic Advising. Since that time, several other fully online graduate level certifications in academic advising have started. All of these programs are designed for individuals wishing to become an academic advisor or enhance their professional practice in academic advising. Interestingly, all of these programs are fully online. While the practice of advising is becoming more and more virtual to meet the needs of 21st century learners, the actual preparation to become an academic advisor lends itself to a more face-to-face format.

In this context, the purpose of this study was to examine attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of graduate students taking a newly designed and offered course on academic advising, and how

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providing a foundation for academic advising through a graduate course might influence these beliefs. As academic advising has advanced as a profession, many individuals often find themselves as advisors with no specific foundational or theoretical knowledge or training about advising or approaches to advising. Consequently, the research questions addressed from this case study are the following:

1. What pathways exist for individuals to become new academic advisors?
2. What types of professional development opportunities exist to build foundational theoretical knowledge and skills for new and emerging academic advisors?
3. How do emerging academic advisors feel about the field of academic advising, and about how individuals become academic advisors?

Methodology and Data Sources

In this study, a qualitative case study approach was used for this inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). The case study approach was used for this research because it lends itself to detailed analysis and descriptors, in this case of a single environment, with the opportunity for rich and in-depth discussion in a real-life context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This case study was conducted in a newly created graduate course on academic advising offered by a small college of education at a four-year mid-level institution in Florida. It was conducted over the course of one term in a hybrid delivery method focusing on creating a foundation of advising theory and practice. The study group was selected with purposeful sampling, using only the eight students enrolled in the course during one specific semester. Participants included seven Master's level students and one Doctoral student in the fall 2017 term, only one of which was a current full-time advisor (> 1 year). Data collected involved responses to open ended questions, informal focus groups, and personal reflections. Discussion questions were posted online with supplemental questions and reflections for more objective results. Content analysis was used to gather and report results (Kohlbacher, 2006). No human subjects permissions were obtained as this study was conducted as part of evaluating the course as it was a new course offered by the Educational Leadership graduate program.

Additionally, the instructor has worked in academic advising since beginning his career in the late 1990s, at six different higher education institutions. The graduate assistant has been an academic advisor at the institution where the case study was conducted for seven years, and worked in higher education for nearly 20 years. Both researchers view this study has an important examination into the thoughts and beliefs of current and future academic advisors, and how they might be better prepared as academic advisors. The results are intended to be disseminated at the institution where the case study was conducted in a current climate of major institutional initiatives involving the examination of student success including student satisfaction, retention and graduate rates.

As stated above, seven Master's level students and one Doctoral level student who enrolled in the course during the fall 2017 term were used as the sample in the study. These participants were chosen as part of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was used because all of the students were already in the advising course as an elective, it's less time consuming to gather data for the case study, and the course is taught over the span of four months which allows for ample time to continue gathering data with the ability to refine questions (Stake, 2005). Six were current graduate students in the Educational Leadership program in the College of Education at the time of the course, and two students were not admitted to a graduate program but were both taking

elective graduate courses for future admission into an education graduate program. This was a special topics course being offered for the first time so all of the students selected this course as an elective in their graduate program. Only one of the students was a current (new) advisor at the University, the other six participants were all working in higher education (five at the University where the course was offered, and one at another nearby state college). Of the students who were not already advisors, five indicated an interest in exploring becoming an academic advisor as a future career path. Finally, of the eight students, seven were female and one was male, and all were Caucasian. All students gave written permission for use of the data to study the need, benefit, and structure of the course as this course would be offered in future terms.

This study employed the method of data collecting using triangulation. Using triangulation as a data collection method allows the researcher to create validity in the study with the utilization of multiple data sources (Hussein, 2009). The course on academic advising was taught primarily online but had three pre-scheduled in-class face-to-face meetings throughout the term. During these three in-class meetings, all the students were asked both structured and un-structured questions in a focus group setting. These questions dealt with topics such as becoming an academic advisor, individual advising philosophy, opinions about the field of academic advising as a profession and at the University, and rating their preparedness as advisors at the beginning of the course and at the end.

Throughout the term, questions were posted online that were designed to expand on the responses given by students either during an in-class meeting or to questions posted by the researcher. The students were asked to reflect on some questions asked during the in-class meetings and also to new questions posed by the researcher based on responses to previous online postings.

Students were asked to share their expected outcomes from the course as it related to becoming an academic advisor in the future or strengthening their practice as a current advisor throughout their on-line and in-class coursework. Students used a required advising text titled "The New Advisor Guidebook: Mastering the Art of Advising" (Folsom, Yoder, & Joslin, 2015) during the entire course. This text was the primary source for the course. In addition, a supplemental suggested text was used called "The Appreciative Advising Revolution" (Bloom, Huston, & Ye, 2008). This text is a suggested theory of academic advising, popularized in the mid-2000s. During the second of three in-class meetings, the students had the opportunity to ask questions via Skype of one of the primary creators of Appreciative Advising, Dr. Jennifer Bloom. Students were asked to develop questions about the academic advising theory and about academic advising in general for the virtual question/answer sessions. Finally, each student was asked to prepare two final papers for the end of the course. The first paper was a reflection on the evolution of their thinking and in some cases practice with academic advising. The second paper dealt with creating a professional advising philosophy they would use in any future practice as an academic advisor.

At the end of the course, all students were sent a Student Perception of Instruction (SPOI) course evaluation. This general evaluation is voluntary for students in a course. Each instructor has the ability to add up to five additional and specific questions to this survey instrument. Five questions were added to the end of the SPOI related to this research study. No IRB was sought as the instructor was asking the students to evaluate the course while trying to understand the needs of new and emerging academic advisors through the delivery of the course. Again, all students gave written permission for use of the data for this case study as this course would be offered in future terms.

In reviewing data, all responses to in-class questions and review of final reflection paper and advising philosophy were hand-written and/or reviewed after submission. Responses to online discussion questions and to the SPOI questions were also reviewed after each submission. Using a content analysis approach, the researcher is able to systematically categorize textual and conversational data in order to make sense of it (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). In addition, using unstructured interview questions during the three in-class sessions allowed the researcher to ask questions with further inquiry based on real-time responses. The use of content analysis allowed the researcher to review online responses and probe further with additional questions which allowed each student to reflect and respond at their own pace.

In this study, the in-class focus groups and responses were the preferred method of inquiry. This data combined with document analysis of the online responses to posted questions including the SPOI, and the evaluation of posted course assignments (reflection paper and advising philosophy), increased study validity through the use of data triangulation (Hussein, 2009). After the course was completed, focus group responses, online responses, final papers, and course evaluation questions were all analyzed for specific thematic using content analysis. The entire set of data produced individual participant and study themes which were then analyzed for relevancy and presented in this case study.

In this study, the role of the researcher was as the instructor for the course where participants were enrolled, and one graduate assistant who assisted with course design. Focus group responses, online questions, responses, course papers, and evaluation questions were all written and analyzed by the primary researcher. The primary researcher attempts to present the findings and discussion as it is reported and coded without the interjection of his own views. Any personal opinions and other findings outside of the coded information are presented in the discussion section.

To ensure validity and reliability of the study, the researcher utilized the following procedures:

a) Data triangulation-All findings have been presented based on in-class focus groups, online discussion questions and responses, course assignments, and final course evaluation questions. After each in-class session, students were able to review questions and responses online and provide feedback individually to the researcher or as a posted online discussion question/response. This allowed students to amend any comments or provide further clarification for the researcher and for fellow students in the course. This was a 15- week course which allowed for multiple and deep interaction with some participants, and repeated attempts at clarification of data.

b) Direct quotations have been used where necessary and appropriate when presenting the findings. All data was reviewed for the reporting phase to reach common conclusions on findings, and possible codes and themes where then determined.

Findings

Analysis of the focus group responses, online discussion, evaluation results, and final papers shows participants all see the importance of academic advising at the University and in general for students. Participants were at difference stages of their practice and knowledge of advising but all agreed they saw a lack of foundational theoretical information about advising as a weaknesses or barrier in either understanding what it means to be an advisor, in the exploration of becoming a new advisor, or being a new advisor already in practice. The most identified themes or ideas about

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academic advising and becoming an advising were: viewing the advisor as a resource and guide, the negative view students and the University community have about advising, and how a course about academic advising could aid in not only the development of new advising, but also help build important knowledge necessary for a new or any advisor.

Not surprisingly based on the nature of academic advising, themes one and three, academic advisors as a resource or guide, and how a course on academic advising could help build important foundational knowledge, were the most frequent discussion topics among participants. Participants were enrolled in a course on academic advising, designed to assist new or emerging advisor in gaining foundational knowledge and professional development. Unclear pathways to becoming an academic advisor or not providing adequate professional development for new advisors is supported by the literature (Brown, 2008; Ackerman, R., & Schibrowsky, J. 2008; Givans Voller, 2011; Wallace, 2011; Walter & Seyedian, 2016; Bridgen, 2017). While this course focused primarily on the professional development of new or emerging advisors, the participants were not immune to hearing or experiencing student dissatisfaction with academic advising on campus. This was a frequent part of the discussions for theme two, dealing with the negative views and attitudes the University community had about academic advising. The research demonstrates how negative views on academic advising can impact student satisfaction, success, and retention (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2008; Campbell & Nutt, 2010; Styron, 2010; Drake, 2011; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Many participants discussed on they wanted their own current or future practice to counteract the negativity associated with academic advising on campus. These three themes are unpacked and discussed in more detail throughout the next sections.

Theme One: Resource and Guide

During the first course meeting when participants were asked a set of questions in a focus group setting, students responded to a question about how they view academic advising and the role of an academic advisor. In answering these questions, most participants used the word *guide* or *resource* to describe how advisors are viewed either in their own practice or from experience as undergraduate students. This included one participant who thought advisors were viewed as important on the University campus and on her own campus (she worked at a different institution), signifying that a basis of 'trust' must be developed between student and advisor. McGill describes this as an approach to advising that views the advisor as the teacher or guide using various resources to develop different parts of the student (2016). Another participant, who was a new advisor to her unit and had served as a faculty advisor without any formal training, used what she described as a *holistic* approach to her role as an advisor. She described asking questions that covered a range of topics from academics to social and into wellness, frequently directing students to campus resources outside of her department. This type of approach is often employed by advisors, who frequently serve as a connection for students who are often uncertain of how to navigate the array of resources found on a campus (Lowenstein, 2013; McGill, 2016; Michou et al., 2016; Vianden, 2016). A third student described the multiple roles advisors serve in their practice including as a resource and at times as a guide but understanding they employ multiple roles because it *might be different for each student.* By the end of the course when revisiting the same questions about how they view advising and the role of an advisor, the responses were similar yet more in-depth. Themes of trust, feeling that advising was *a vital aspect of the college life and the student experience;* and serving as a resource for students were present. However, some new

ideas elicited went beyond the purely prescriptive and centered on encouraging students to reach their *potential*, and being better prepared to serve as an advisor and guide, able to employ different advising theories and approaches. Lowenstien encourages academic advisors to work with students in using academic advising to assist students in taking full advantage of all the opportunities available to them during college (2013).

By the end of the course, students described a more developed and thorough idea about the role of advising and being an advisor. Some participants saw their role as advisors expanding to also guiding students through changes in their major, discussions about potential career paths, and helping students to not just *go through the motions and completing homework,* but rather becoming engaged in their college experience. One participant went as far to say they thought their role as an advisor could now include trying to *empower students to think critically about their college experience…*(Brown, 2008; Alvarez & Town, 2016; McGill, 2016) all described similar ideas about academic advising as a time of student empowerment, and academic advisors as teachers or guides. These responses by participants were much more developed and thought provoking compared to a similar question asked in the first focus group of the course. At that time, participants used much simpler and less developed ideas to describe where they expected their advising practice to be at the end of the course. *Better than now,* understanding student needs or providing necessary support were examples of what participants discussed. This demonstrated an evolution in student thought about the role of advisors on campus and how advising could be important to the success of students beyond academics.

Theme Two: Building of Knowledge

At the first in-class focus group, students were asked if they had a current philosophy of advising, and if they did, to define it. Only one participant could articulate their own definition about their current advising philosophy. This participant was the only student in the course who, at that time, was a current academic advisor on campus and had served as a faculty advisor before taking on her current position. This is not a surprising response rate, as the other students in the course were not current academic advisors but were thinking about future positions in academic advising, which five of the six students enrolled in the course reported this as their main motivation for enrolling in the course. When asked about what defines advising, this same participant, who is also a current advisor, used the words *counselor, resource, mentor,* and *teacher* to define advising. Again, no other students provided any responses during the focus group discussion surrounding the definition of advising. In describing their own advising style now, the only current advisor in the course, talked about using a developmental advising strategy when working with students. Developmental advising is described as a "systematic process based on close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources." (Winston, Ender, & Miller, 1982). McGill described developmental advising as an advising approach that focuses on the "whole student" or holistic, one that challenges students to develop in multiple areas in their life, including academic, career, and personal (2016). This supports earlier discussions in theme one about being a resource and guide for how students see advisors as individuals who ultimately provide a wide-range of supports to students depending on their needs at any given time.

In the final evaluation at the end of the course, students were asked two questions relating to where their advising practice and knowledge was at the end of the course, and on their own individual advising style. Again, not surprisingly, every student who answered the two questions

had more developed responses than in the first focus groups and online discussions. Participants described an expectation in their development of their own practice and knowledge of academic advising by the end of the course to be *foundational, moving forward, and expecting to have more understanding of advising.* One participant described an expectation that the course would serve as *a great foundation on which to build an advising practice or enhance one's current practice.* Another cited her own experience and expectation in the course as *definitely better than in the beginning. I think I took a big step forward.* A feeling of being better prepared to build on their current knowledge of academic advising was also shared. One participant said they expected to have a *greater understanding of the advising role and processes.* A similar sentiment was shared by another participant expecting to gain the *knowledge and skillset to practice academic advising.* Finally, one participant admitted they expected to learn a little more than they already knew but instead *learned a whole lot more!* While none of the participant responses are surprising given that all but one of the students were not currently serving as an academic advisor, it does support the idea that even with a medium to high expectation of what the course could provide, most students did in fact report strong increases in their own foundational knowledge and practice of academic advising. Research suggests focused and continual professional development for academic advisors increases levels of professional competency, and feelings of adequacy (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Givans Voller, 2011).

The course was designed to introduce students to particular foundational advising theories and knowledge. This foundation was built throughout the course culminating with an opportunity to practice what they learned and discussed in advising role playing scenarios with seasoned academic advising professionals from around the campus. Their final experience asked students to reflect on their evolution in the course while also crafting their own advising philosophy to be utilized in individual professional advising practice. One of the students' final papers in the course asked students to articulate their own advising philosophy. In addition, a question posted in their final course evaluation asked each participant to describe their advising style at the end of the course. In cases of students who were not currently academic advisors, it asked to describe their advising style if they were to become an academic advisor. An important note to consider for the course. A particular advising theory called Appreciative Advising, started in the early 2000s, was a recommended text for the course, and one of the co-creators of the theory, Dr. Jennifer Bloom visited the University to conduct a training in June 2017. (Bloom, Hutson, & Ye, 2008). Dr. Bloom was also an invited guest speaker (virtually) mid-way during the course. This is mentioned to give context to the responses that follow where participants often cited Appreciative Advising as a piece of their advising style at the end of the course.

Most participants took a more theoretical approach in describing their advising style at the end of the course. Citing specific advising theories such as developmental, appreciative, and strengths-based advising approaches. Strengths-based advising focuses on six areas that accentuate the positive traits of a student, and highlights student potential in the student-advisor experience (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). One student took a more broad view of their advising style describing a desire to *build a welcoming environment* for her advisees and getting to know them as people while sharing her own *personal experiences in order to help them.* A final question in the end-of-course evaluation asked students to describe how the course allowed them to reflect on their own, and perhaps even change their own personal philosophy of advising. Most participants commented how the course allowed them to either create or in one case, refine their own advising philosophy. One participant commented about how the different assignments and discussions allowed them to integrate particular parts of advising theories into their practice, while the

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discussions allowed them to view what others were thinking and they might be changing during the course. Two participants commented they didn't realize how much of an impact the advising community (on campus) was and how much of *an impact an advisor can have on a student.* Finally, participants cited the course as a way to help them change their view of advising in positive ways. For the students who worked on campus (six of the eight), this was an important consideration because academic advising and advisors had been negatively portrayed by local media and in student surveys over the past few years. So much so, that during the summer of 2016, an effort was launched to increase student satisfaction with academic advising at the University.

Theme Three: Dissatisfaction with Academic Advising

Vianden and Barlow's (2015) study of 1,207 undergraduate students at three institutions measuring the perceived quality of academic advising and its impact on student loyalty to their specific institution showed over 400 students who attended their first or second-tier institution of choice perceived their academic advising to be of low quality. Different research has examined how poor academic advising or negative attitudes about academic advising impact retention at universities and increase the number of students leaving before graduating (Styron, 2010; Drake, 2011; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). As recent as 2016 at the institution where this course on academic advising was taught, there has been concern expressed over the quality of academic advising and its impact on the four-year graduation rate and retention (Bland, 2016). Students in the advising course also discussed how a dissatisfaction in academic advising at the University and beyond was important in how they viewed the course. Beginning in fall 2017, the President of the University created a task force focusing on enrollment management. Of the many recommendations that came from this task force, several dealt with the status of academic advising, its impact on student success, and pay and promotion equity among academic advisors at the University. This included continued student dissatisfaction with academic advising and concern over the very high attrition rate of students in their sophomore year. In addition, every fall and spring term, the University publishes results of a student satisfaction survey on academic advising. The most recent results from the fall 2017 survey indicated an almost 20% either very unsatisfied or unsatisfied rating with their academic advising/advisor across five colleges throughout the entire University (2017). The response rate for the survey was 4.4% (N=623 responses from 13,915 students surveyed).

This course was offered before the enrollment management task force released their recommendations in early spring 2018. However, as students in the advising course reflected on how academic advising can impact student persistence, it often included comments about how academic advising is viewed at the University and how it impacts student retention. While students in the course all shared positive comments on the impact advisors can have on student success, several participants during the focus groups commented on how they believe students at the University have a negative view of academic advising. One participant in the course who is also an international student, thought students at the University were *not impressed* with academic advising. Another participant thought while many students had a negative view of academic advising, it was influenced by individuals outside of the University. When asked to clarify, the participant cited hearing from former students and faculty who blamed academic advising for slowing student progression towards graduation. This participant was also a former faculty advisor at the University. When asked why students view academic advising negatively, participants offered several perspectives on why this might exist.

Even with the perceived negative view of academic advising at the University discussed by participants, several cited reasons for why this might occur. One participant shared that they believed academic advisors at the University were *overworked.* Other participants agreed and cited national data from NACADA's 2011 National Survey of Academic Advising that may be influencing this negative view. The survey reported a median individual advisor case load of 333 students per one advisor for medium sized institutions (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). However, while citing those numbers as important data about advising case load, Robbins also believes it was hard to apply this as an "ideal or recommended case load for advisors because the level of work for each case is relative" (2013, p.1). Robbins continued by saying there is "no objective recommended case load for advisors because of the factors" (p.1) such as type of institution, student population, campus climate, politics, institutional mission and goals, and geographical area as examples (2013). Despite this information, more than one participant believed advisors met with too many students and this directly impacted student satisfaction with academic advising.

Advisors at the University hold faculty rank at the institution, in such that they benefit from faculty collective bargaining and the benefits and protections that come from this agreement. While this arrangement is not unique to this University, it does create a different dynamic on how some academic advisors view their roles. One of the benefits of the faculty rank is the ability to teach and earn extra compensation for teaching, while also enjoying the positive impact teaching has on promotion at the University. Citing this issue, one participant offered a different explanation for the possible cause of student dissatisfaction with academic advising. This participant believed faculty including advisors should specialize in their discipline, and that in general, an *advisor is distracted with teaching.* When asked to unpack this belief, the participant cited some course specific research education doctoral students (this participant was the lone doctoral student in the course) which pointed to confusion and often mistakes made by faculty advisors in how program information was relayed to students. As this information was part of a specific graduate course, it was not available for independent verification and review for this case study.

Generally, while all participants had positive experiences with advising in their own personal academic journeys, most believed students had a negative view of academic advising at the University. According to participants, this was the result of different factors ranging from high advisor case load to distracted advisors. Additionally, the University is also concerned with the quality of academic advising as it relates to student satisfaction and retention, and has formed an enrollment management task force charged with reviewing academic advising among other issues at the University that impact student attrition.

Discussion and Conclusion

When this course on academic advising began, every student was taking the course as a special topics elective graduate course within either their graduate course of study in higher education administration or as a non-degree seeking graduate student. Only one of the students was currently a new academic advisor but other students expressed an interest in becoming an academic advisor in their future professional careers. Becoming an academic advisor is often not a direct career path and not until the late 20th century was academic advising thought of as an actual essential position in higher education (Folsom, Yoder, & Joslin, 2015). In the early 2000s, some higher education institutions began offering certificates or even an entire graduate program in academic advising. Yet even in 2018, academic advisors in higher education are thought of less as being made or created from specific graduate courses or programs but rather having the function of advising

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added to a current professional role or a change in status all together. The literature supports providing specific professional training and development for new advisors grounded in foundational theory and practice (Bridgen, 2017; Vianden, 2016; Walters & Seyedian, 2016; Givans Voller, 2011). However, there is a lack of specific research in the literature on how this is best accomplished. With this is in mind, this case study and the analysis of its findings strengthen the support for an increased need of new advisor professional development. Additionally, the study supports how the success of building a solid professional foundation for new or emerging academic advisors is critical to their professional development and to student success, satisfaction and retention.

Pascarella and Terenzini, have studied and written over more than three decades about how the experience students have in college impacts their success. In their work they cited academic advising and the work of academic advisors as one important factor in positively impacting student retention and satisfaction while in college (2005). Specific studies on academic advising and retention support the idea that poor or negative impression of academic advising impact student retention, and in particular with minority students (Carothers & Parfitt, 2017; De La Rosby, 2017; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Drake studied the role academic advising has in student retention and persistence over nearly four decades. She stated, "good academic advising also provides perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in the institution who cares about them" (2011, p. 10). In this case study, participants discussed how the role of academic advisors as a resource and guide can often work with students on multiple levels impacting different parts of their lives not just academically. Participants also discussed building trust with students and directing students to appropriate campus resources, all of which impacts student success and retention. The Chronicle of Higher Education reported colleges are "over-hauling" their academic advising to increase retention of students in the wake of increased use of student outcomes tied to appropriations (Doubleday, 2013). As a result, many colleges are taking a more deliberate approach to academic advising and advisors (2013).

Because the course also allowed participants to build on their foundational knowledge and experience with academic advising, many participants cited a building of knowledge, skills, and confidence at the conclusion of the course. Givans Voller, (2011) cited the need for this type of professional knowledge and skill building for academic advisors to continue professionalizing academic advising. Givans Voller reported the number of institutions providing comprehensive training and development programs (including coursework) for advisors is low (2011). Moreover, she advocates new and veteran advisors take responsibility for contributing to positive change in their professional development, and determine the impact of professional development programs (such as coursework) on advising practice. Vianden believes all professional and faculty advisors need to be "meticulously trained and tested…" (2016, p.26). He continues, "advisors should receive the training and professional development" necessary to act as "agents of student relationship management (SRM)" (2016, p. 27). SRM is a term coined by Ackerman and Schibrowsky, defined as Student Relationship Management, and used in relation to the idea of relationship management but within higher education (2008). Walters and Seyedian's study on improving academic advising showed positive correlation between job qualifications of an advisor and training. They posit, if advising is part of an individual's job responsibilities, there would necessarily be some training for the role (2016). Students in the course were not only changing their view of advising (in a positive way) but also getting the chance to understand their role in impacting student success and retention. For students in the advising course, the study would suggest participants are doing just that, taking responsibility for their individual professional

development through the building of theoretical and practical foundational concepts as new or emerging academic advisors, and being asked to practice and reflect throughout the course.

While institutions understand the value and importance of not only strong academic advising but also academic advising that impacts retention, participants in this case study cited beliefs that in general, students held negative views of academic advising in overall student satisfaction and in their progression towards graduating in a timely manner. In addition, academic advisors hold a unique role at this University in that while they primarily perform an administrative function in advising students, they also hold faculty rank which includes the option of teaching and sometimes functioning more like faculty as it relates to academic advising. The NACADA National Survey on Academic Advising also asked specific questions about faculty who also serve as academic advisors. Wallace found, as in previous data related to professional development opportunities for non-faculty academic advisors, "little progress in crucial areas related to the advancement of quality faculty advising-professional development, recognition, and reward systems for faculty advisors" (2011, p.1). Brown also documented the importance of quality advisor-development programs (2008). However, with teaching loads and pressure to publish scholarly work, advisors who hold faculty rank may also find even less time to add another necessary, yet unsupported, professional development opportunity such as a course on academic advising. Walters and Seyedian report more colleges see effective advising as a criteria for faculty employment and promotion; as a result, in some cases, additional resources are being created specifically for faculty training (2016). However, in Bridgen's study on understanding the identity of academic advising, faculty advisors, administrators, and non-advising staff were not trained in advising practices or literature (2017). Bridgen attributed this lack of training to a "dearth of formal training about the theory and philosophy of advising" (2017, p. 16). He concluded that all individuals associated with advising must be "educated about the theory and philosophy of advising so they can understand the critical purposes of advising" (Bridgen, 2017, p. 18). Study participants were sensitive to the issue of academic advisors having too little training before beginning to advise students, and dealing with issues like high case-loads, restricting the amount of time with students which in turn could also impact the view students hold about academic advising as it relates to satisfaction, retention, and timely graduation.

An area not covered by this case study but still relevant to the academic advising profession is how academic advisors in other countries utilize professional development and training. Academic advising is still relatively new in many international universities (Abdykhalykova, 2013; Cheung, Siu, & Shek, 2017) which impacts how students are served by academic advisors. Additional barriers to effective academic advising at international universities include: cultural differences in relation to positions of power, expectations of students in their advisor knowing them personally, and feelings of weakness or inadequacy on the part of students who visit an academic advisor (Cheung, Siu, & Shek, 2017; Omar, Mahone, Ngobia, & FitzSimons, 2016). Some research suggests the relationship international students build with their faculty advisor, may help bridge the gap in understanding the formal roles and responsibilities, and the advising philosophy of their advisors (Omar, Mahone, Ngobia, & FitzSimons, 2016). The experience of international students studying in the United States then returning to their home international institution may also help strengthen the need for increasing numbers of professionally trained advisors at international universities. Zhang studied international students at an institution in Texas and determined while many differences exist in advising international students, institutions should make professional development opportunities accessible for academic advisors (2017). This includes having academic advisors improve their intercultural communication competence to

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promote international student academic success in the United State and back in their home countries (Zhang, 2017).

Ultimately, for an institution to positively impact student satisfaction, success, and retention through high touch services such as academic advising, it requires a commitment to provide new and ongoing professional development opportunities. As the professional field of academic advising does not entirely agree on how and when to provide professional training and development for advisors, institutions will also struggle with how best to accomplish this. As the academic advising profession continues to mature in the United States higher education system, Opportunities such as this advising course provide a theoretical and practical foundation for new or emerging academic advisors who have the opportunity to learn and build on new and existing practices. Without this kind of professional development, new and emerging academic advisors risk not only poor practice and professional frustration, but also the decrease of student satisfaction and possible contribution to departure from the institution.

As this is a small case study at a medium sized public institution, a limitation of the study is in the size of the sample. While the data from this case study detailing a need for professional development and training for academic advisors is supported by the literature (Bridgen, 2017; Vianden, 2016; Walters & Seyedian, 2016; Givans Voller, 2011), the need can't be generalized because the number, role and scope of academic advisors differs by institution, and each institution provides different means of professional development and training for individuals. Additionally, despite the call for more professional development and training for advisors, institutions are not consistent in how they recognize and reward these achievements (Brown, 2008; Wallace, 2011; Walters & Seyedian, 2016).

A second limitation of the case study is its application to colleges and universities outside of the United States. While international institutions of higher education have started to understand the benefit of using academic advising, and providing adequate training for academic advisors (Lee, & Metcalfe, 2017; Cheung, Siu, & Shek, 2017; Al-Ansari, El Tantawi, AbelSalam, & Al-Harbi, 2014; Abdykhalykova, 2013), experience with academic advising in areas such as Asia and the Middle East remains limited (Abdykhalykova, 2013; Cheung, Siu, & Shek, 2017). In the Middle East for example, universities are still struggling to explain the definition of academic advising and the need to establish it as a regular part of the student experience (Cheung, Siu, & Shek, 2017). Nevertheless, some international universities are beginning to understand the need for advisors to be knowledgeable about their profession, alternatives to degree, and possess the necessary 'soft skills' including mental health skills to work with students to help promote academic success (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017; Cheung, Siu, & Shek, 2017).

Implications

There are several implications for current and future practice in developing academic advisors. First, for any institution hiring or promoting individuals as new academic advisors, there must be deliberate, systematic and ongoing professional development provided. This can be in terms of a specific course on academic advising, similar to the one reflected in this case study, or ongoing workshops provided on campus or at conferences. This could also be in the form of job shadowing, or specific on-the-job training. The profession of academic advising needs to advocate for this professional development to occur both through specific degree or certification programs, and at its national, regional and local conferences. The profession needs to ensure this is a priority at all levels in higher education for all emerging, new and veteran academic advisors.

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A second implication, and a more concerning one for higher education in general is how to increase the level of student satisfaction with academic advising, and concurrently targeting students who are at risk for leaving an institution, due in part to a perception of poor academic advising. With more robust and on-going professional development for emerging, new and veteran academic advisors, and a focus on how academic advising can contribute to student success, institutions can benefit from not only engaged students but also higher student satisfaction and retention rates.

Finally, the academic advising community in the United States should focus on contributing to the knowledge and development of academic advising in international universities. With this focus, academic advising and the practice of preparing academic advisors can benefit from more international research on increasing importance of academic advising globally, and preparing our international advising colleagues in the best practices and foundational knowledge necessary in becoming an affective academic advisor.

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Appendix A: Interview/Focus Group Questions*
1. How do you view advising as new (newish) advisors?
2. Describe your role as an advisor.
3. Where did you expect your advising practice/knowledge/philosophy to be at the end of this course?
4. How would you describe your advising style at the end of the course? (if currently not an advisor). How would you describe your advising style if you were to become an advisor?
5. How did this course allow you to reflect, and perhaps change your philosophy and/or practice of advising?
6. How do you view advising as new (newish) advisors at the end of the course?
7. Describe your role as an advisor now that you have completed the course.
8. Do you have a philosophy of advising? If so, please define it.
9. What three of four things define advising for you?
10. Where do you expect your advising practice/knowledge to be at the end of this course?
11. How has your philosophy of advising changed from the beginning of the course?
12. What is the most important thing(s) advisors do in their role? What should be the most important thing advisors do in their role?
13. How would you describe your advising style now?
14. How do you think the advising role is viewed at FGCU?
15. How do you think students view the role of advisors?
16. How has your advising philosophy and/or practice changed after examining theorists?
17. How do you see the role of advisors changing as they learn more about the philosophy of advising?
18. How is advising practice influenced by university/major mission, policy and degree requirements?
19. How has this course (so far) allowed you to reflect, and perhaps change your philosophy and/or practice of advising?
*Some questions were repeated based on the progression of the course.