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Running Head: THE INFLUENCE OF MENTORSHIP

The Influence of Mentorship:

A Study on How Academic Advising can Facilitate a Positive College Student Experience

Timothy LeBel

Merrimack College Higher Education Program

Abstract

At American colleges and universities, academic advising has been traditionally utilized as a tool to aid students in course registration and making sure they are on track towards graduation. However, as the student population continues to diversify, their needs and concerns need continual adaptation to be met as well. Students need an outlet to not only discuss their academic progress, but also to converse about how to tie in their interests and passions, extracurricular involvement, social life, and career and future aspirations with their academics. This opportunity for positive mentorship can go hand in hand with academic advising. Through this qualitative mixed methods study, surveys and interviews were conducted with 98 participants amongst different academic majors (Education, Business, and Criminology) and class years, to gauge an overall perspective of how this notion of holistic advising can be incorporated into the current academic advising experience. The findings and implications suggest that utilizing academic advising in this holistic manner can aid in the facilitation of a positive college student experience. Recommendations include shifting the mentality of what academic advising can entail, students meeting more frequently with their academic advisor, for faculty advisors to attend a mandatory academic advising orientation (with supplemental materials provided), as well as better communication to students about the power of mentorship through academic advising.

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Introduction

As American higher education has evolved throughout the years, academic services and the need for academic counseling became an increasingly important tool to ensure collegiate success. Academic advising is a crucial intervention in a student's college experience that traditionally aims at ensuring their academics are in check and the student is on the path to graduation. However, the fact remains that many students view academic advising as superfluous to their overall college experience, and it does not receive the emphasis it deserves. The power of academic advising and the potential it has in facilitating college student retention and success is often overlooked; according to Drake (2011), "academic advising is more than clerical recordkeeping; it is the very human art of building relationships with students and helping them connect their personal strengths/interests with their academic and life goals" (p. 8).

Academic advising, in addition to administrative academic consultation, also provides a unique mentorship opportunity to bridge the gap between a student's academics and other aspects of college, such as their interests and passions, social and extracurricular involvements, and their future life plans and goals. This holistic approach to academic advising builds the meaningful advisor-advisee relationship, which could in fact be the closest form of mentorship that a student encounters at college. Academic advising also can improve student retention and success in relation to fostering that campus connection, and can provide overall support to the student to benefit multiple forms of their college experience. However, due to a lack of resources and institutional emphasis placed on academic advising, the great potential in benefits for the students are often left up to the discretion of the advisor (McClellan, 2007). In many occurrences, academic advisors do not receive adequate training on student learning and development, and thus cannot provide the intrusive mentorship that is appropriate for the

changing demographics of the current college student population (Kechichian, 2012). Students crave an academic advisor that is not only an advocate for their academics needs and concerns, but someone that truly cares about their holistic success in college.

In this qualitative study, I aim to answer the question of how academic advising can facilitate this positive college student experience. Students were selected from a population of undergraduate students, at a college under the pseudonym of Mountain College, throughout a few different academic majors, to cast the scope on mentorship as broadly as possible. Through purposive sampling and the implementation of surveys and brief follow-up interviews, the findings help to gain a better understanding of how academic advising's unique mentorship can positively aid in a multitude of college aspects, as well as allows me to make recommendations to current academic advisors, in hopes of holistically improving the advising structures at Mountain College. This paper will not only explore literature and research associated with the benefits of academic advising, but will also attempt to implicate that the power of academic advising extends far beyond its current use and emphasis in America's higher education.

Literature Review

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the effectiveness of academic advising, and how academic advising can facilitate student learning, personal development and mentorship. While some research speaks to the broader benefits of academic advising, both for academic and non-academic reasons, other articles and studies focus on specific aspects of academic advising, with the goal of utilizing a holistic advising approach to influence an overall positive college experience for students. Specific topics that the literature mainly addresses include: academic advising and the relation to student success, academic advising and the advisor-advisee relationship, and how to utilize academic advising for overall student support

and for comprehensive development facilitation. The following literature highlights such themes, as well as speaks to the multitude of benefits that academic advising can provide to promote a positive college student experience.

Academic Advising and Student Retention/Success

The most obvious benefit to academic advising is the promotion of academic standards, course and curriculum checks, and to maintain the student's success, both within academia and without. Academic success can be measured within the classroom, but the use of academic advising as an educational tool is a bit more complex. The developmental paradigm to academic advising, observed as fostering personal growth and development, while connecting this internal development to a student's academic experience and life goals, is a great learning outcome for advising. In an article by Lowenstein (2009), the author demonstrated that the role an advisor plays with respect to a student's entire curriculum is analogous to the role that a teacher plays with respect to the content in a class. Based on the developmental model of academic advising, the author asserts that this form is best practice due to the two-directional dialogue between the advisor and advisee, as well as engaging the student to become more proactive participant in their learning (2009). The advisor's instruction in curriculum and personal development then elevates the significance of the advisor's role in enhancing the student's education. Lowenstein goes on to mention that, "the advisor provides a service to the student that is distinct from that of anyone else on campus" (2009, p. 65). This teaching atmosphere of academic advising furthers the student's connection to education outside of the classroom, and can allow for greater retention and success if the student feels that advising is as positive of a teaching experience as classroom learning.

Lowenstein's illustration of the benefits to developmental advising in regards to student success is further explored in Strayhorn's study. If academic advising can foster more learning and developmental experiences for students, as referenced in Lowenstein's article, then components of how this teaching can be utilized in different facets of higher education can be examined. Strayhorn (2014) discussed student success, diversity and the culture of students and institutions, being highlighted as main priorities of modern higher education. Strayhorn completed a number of studies at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, finding not a single student in his years of research who does not want to be successful (2014). Based on his numerous studies, student interviews, investigations into vulnerable student populations, and studies on programs at other institutions, the author asserted that higher education is a culture in itself, which relates to student success as students need more than academic skills to be ready for college of successful at an institution. Strayhorn uses this explanation of higher education as a culture to insinuate that academic advisors must also act as "cultural navigators" to ensure students successfully traverse all aspects of college, within academia and through other aspects of the institution's culture. The article goes on to mention the importance of cultural navigators and academic advisors extending their mentorship past academics: "Cultural navigators know something about the culture - how it operates, how to get things done, how to be a part of it and feel a sense of belonging. They share that information with students, help them adjust to college life, and make themselves available as trusted to-go resources whenever possible," (Strayhorn, 2014, p. 59). A sense of belonging takes on a heightened importance through certain contexts of college experiences, as Strayhorn's (2014) research described that students who feel a positive sense of belonging earn better grades, are retained at higher rates, and adjust to college life

easier. An academic advisor's role through this cultural navigation drives home a simple message: students that belong can succeed.

With regards to student success and retention, the power of academic advising, communicating and mentoring can also positively influence student persistence. "The Role of Academic Advising in Student Retention and Persistence" further explains how academic advising is more than just academic recordkeeping; the art of academic advising lies within building relationships with students and helping them to connect their personal strengths and interests with their academic and life goals (Drake, 2011). Drake's insight, based on ten years of qualitative research with over 1,600 recent college graduates from over 90 national institutions, underscores the value of academic advising and its positive influence on student retention (2011). Student persistence, as noted in this article, is maintained by fostering positive student relationships with their faculty, administrators and collegiate environment, as well as connecting what is being learned and developed with the student's interests, passions and life goals. Out-of-classroom interactions with a faculty member or academic advisor appeared to have a powerful effect on student persistence; at the bare minimum, it demonstrates to the student that there is someone who cares whether or not they enjoy their time at the institution. Drake (2011) asserted that academic advising can provide that link between students becoming more self-aware about their interests and goals, and how to connect those developments to their present academic experience, their potential and purpose, and their future life plans. Student success should be at the core of institutional work and decision making, and both Strayhorn and Drake contend that academic advising is critical to the success of higher education. This literature not only implicates the importance of placing emphasis on the academic advising process, due to its connections with student retention and success, but also illustrates how academic advising

contributes to a core mission of institutions: to retain its students and provide them with the appropriate resources to allow them opportunities to succeed.

Academic Advising and the Advisor-Advisee Relationship

Not only is the relationship between academic advising and overall student retention and success one to be noted, but the effects of the advisor-advisee relationship also play a pivotal role in the student's positive or negative perception of institutional mentoring. Colleges and universities have become increasingly concerned about the quantity and quality of faculty-student contact, both inside and out of the classroom. Beasley-Fielstein (1986), examined the question of what type of relationship is most productive and satisfying for students. The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding of the type of relationship that students prefer by exploring specific aspects of academic advising that are perceived as desirable by students. The participants in this study included randomly selected sophomores and seniors from three different colleges of the University of Arkansas; their college and major stratified the population of 90 students, so the results could be easily compared, but a 20-student sample responded. Interviews were then conducted with these 20 students. The results of the study demonstrated that students prefer a close advisor-advisee relationship, specifically highlighting that respondents characterized the preferred personal relationship as knowing the student as a person, taking an active interest, recognizing the student on campus, and to be adequately knowledgeable in a range of academic areas and concerns. The interview findings also recognized that while students preferred this personal relationship with their advisor, the concept of developmental advising was seen as going "above and beyond" (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986); the consensus agreed that the traditional academic advising routines were necessary, while activities that discussed a broader scope beyond academics were perceived as additional benefits. A

holistic or developmental approach to academic advising is rooted in student development theory, echoed in this study's discussion, which was a relatively newer concept around the previous decade of when this study was conducted.

It is one thing for an advisor to believe that they are promoting a personal advising approach to their students, but a student's perceptions and expectations of psychosocial, academic and career support must be taken into account as well. Fullick, K. Smith-Jentsch and D. Kendall (2013), authored a study that addressed such perceptions. In this study, researchers sought to examine the how the advisee's initial expectations may influence their perceptions of the received support, the advisor's actual behavior, and how the advisee's expectations changed based on these two factors. The sample of 179 participants, both peer advisors and advisees, included students from different academic years and ethnic backgrounds. All participants agreed to complete a demographic survey before their first advising session, as well as were interviewed before and after three different advising sessions. They were asked questions about their psychosocial and career support, their initial expectations and concerns leading up to their advising session, and which behaviors by the advisor increased advisee perception of support and trust.

The findings of this study varied; while students' expectations of psychosocial support related positively to their perceived support in this area from their advisor, the participants' expectations for career support were not significantly related to their perceived career support. The greatest correlation was found in the third element of this study; the findings significantly indicated that advisors who exhibited behaviors consistent with psychosocial and career support were perceived to provide overall better quality advising to their advisees. These findings imply that the perceptions of the advisor-advisee relationship are going to be affected by the advisee's

preexisting expectations, as well as the advisor's consistent behaviors; for that reason, advisors must be cognizant of their behaviors and information presented to students during every advising session.

While developing a personal approach and recognizing how student perceptions play into the equation are important to recognize, Hughey (2011)'s research provided actual examples of how an advisor can strengthen their communication and interpersonal skills with their advisee. Hughey based his findings and examples off of the National Academic Advising Association's core values. Hughey agreed with the aforementioned literature that the role of an academic advisor is, "to engage in a series of intentional interactions with students for the purpose of facilitating student-learning outcomes" (Hughey, 2011, p. 22). Interpersonal relations are built upon an inclusive advisor-advisee relationship, the article stated, and goes on to highlight the positive correlation between the amount of time students and advisors engaged in discussions related to personal values and possible areas of study, with positive feelings about academic advising and the overall college experience. Through a developmental approach, Hughey echoed Beasley-Fielstein (1986) and Fullick et. al (2013) by asserting that interpersonal skills such as self-reflecting and discovery, asking probing questions, challenging and confronting issues, initiating and maintaining change, and demonstrating warmth and support can positively influence students as they develop through college. The implications of this research suggest that advisors should pay close attention to the relationship they are building with their advisee, and that this relationship can either positively or negatively enhance the academic advising experience and the power of mentoring that it can provide.

Academic Advising and Graduate Students

Though research in this review has focused extensively on the implications of an undergraduate advisor-advisee relationship and the benefits for student retention and success, mentoring support amongst graduate and doctoral students should also be examined to demonstrate how these same aspects could benefit students of all academic levels. Mansson and Myers (2013) aimed to examine whether career and psychosocial mentoring received from an academic advisor related to the advisee's perceptions of advisor-advisee relational uncertainty. They proposed that there is great uncertainty with regard to abilities, expectations and relationships within graduate and/or doctoral studies; their study highlights that a strong relationship with a mentor or advisor, one who can provide quality support, can facilitate an advisee's academic and developmental success. A participant sample of 378 students in PhD and EdD programs was surveyed to try and gain perspectives on how an advisor-advisee relationship can positively influence this level of uncertainty.

The findings showed the study's hypothesis to be true; advisee's reports on their advisor's research assistance, protection, promotion, and friendship, as well as career, collegial social and psychosocial support showed a significant, positive correlation to the advisee's relational uncertainty, or their uncertainty on completing their degree (Mansson & Myers, 2013). In summary, the more mentoring support that advisors provided, the better students tended to feel about their advisor-advisee relationship. Effective mentoring strategies hinge on the perception of the advisor-advisee relationship, and this literature emphasizes the importance of continued examination of advisor-advisee dynamics.

Academic Advising and Differentiated Student Support

Literature suggests that academic advising positively relates to student retention and success, as long as the advisor-advisee relationship is taken into account and an educative or developmental approach is implemented. Pragmatically, advisors must also have adequate knowledge of the program of study and curriculum. More specifically, however, academic advising can lend its support to those from a multitude of backgrounds. Lynch and Stucky (2001) explored how advisor roles and responsibilities have transformed to address the different needs of millennial students. The article focused on examining advisor responsibilities in relation to institutional type, mission and size, as well as highlighting important aspects of tailoring advising approaches to the needs and concerns of the younger millennial population. The article referenced the NACADA Academic Advising Survey of 2000, conducted with 2,695 respondents to gauge a multitude of advising experiences at various institutions. Through this study, findings suggested that the main advisor roles and responsibilities included mentorship, new student orientation, course selection/registration, and career/life planning. An important implication discussed the importance of adapting common advisor responsibilities to the changing demographics of the millennial population. The authors noted that with a younger, more eager population of students, advising strategies must continuously be revisited and revamped. Academic advising must largely be differentiated to meet the needs of the different students that are being mentored.

A common theme among millennial students is the increase in reported mental illnesses while in college. While Lynch and Stucky's (2001) article broadly discussed tailoring advising strategies to the certain demographics of advisees, Houman and Stapley (2013) sought to gain a better understanding on the consequences of chronic mental illness in regards to classroom

performance, progression through curriculum and college, and lived experiences. A purposive sample of two male and three female students, ages ranging from 18 - 29 years old, was utilized in completing standards measurements and semi-structured interviews. The students were asked scalar questions that pertained to their academic, personal-emotional, and social adjustment to college, as well as on their attachment to the institution. The findings suggested that stress was a major factor in continuing these chronic illnesses, and the students desired extra support on campus. The students interviewed also faced great adversity to the adjustment to college, as well as staying connected to the institution, due to the perceived lack of support. The implication from this study, in relation to academic advising, is that there is a need for differentiated student support. Students with chronic mental illness can benefit greatly from developmental or holistic academic advising, specifically addressing validation of their particular challenges, and appropriate references and intervention to support systems and resources on campus.

In addition to the example of how differentiated student support through academic advising applies to certain populations of students such as those with chronic mental illness, first-year undecided students are another demographic that can benefit from the tailored mentorship of academic advisors. Ellis (2014) echoed the “cultural navigation” lens presented in literature above, in reference to first year student needs. This study aimed to show how first-year undecided students made meaning of academic advising. In this study, meaningful data was collected through interviews of 30 first-year undecided students at a particular institution. These interviews suggested that much success can be attributed to students’ experiences in the academic advising process, and also the benefits that an advising center can bring to this student population. The findings from this study spoke to three main themes: the advisee’s pre-advising expectations, undecidedness during the first year, and their experiences with advising throughout

the first year. For the initial advising expectations, it is important to recognize that most participants thought their academic advisor would be much more proactive in the student's academic life, like their guidance counselor in high school. The undecided nature of the students' first year also demonstrated an increased sense of anxiety over indecision, with "the importance of selecting a course of study weighing down on them" (Ellis, 2014, p. 45).

As for how academic advising factored into these concerns, Ellis's (2014) respondents noted a significant increase in positive feelings towards the advising process from fall to spring, as advisors helped to alleviate that stress and facilitate the student having a better sense of their intended program of study. The implications for academic advisors from this study speak to broad recommendations that tie this literature together: advisors should be aware of initial advising expectations, advisors can not assume students' reasons for being undecided, advisors should inquire about students' apprehensions regarding curricula and overall campus life adjustment, student's comfort with the advising process will grow with their investment into the advisor-advisee personal relationship, and advisors should be educated on varying levels of student development theories.

In conclusion, student retention and success, the advisor-advisee relationship, and differentiated student support are all intertwined aspects of the benefits to quality academic advising. The literature reviewed in this paper spoke to the beneficial inclusion of educative, developmental or learning approaches to academic advising, which in turn strengthens the relationship of the advisor and advisee, while also strengthening the student's connection to their program of study and institution. Academic advising is another form of teaching, which is necessary to tailor to different populations of students, depending on their specific needs and accommodations. The positive aspects of academic advising, in relation to student success, will

only make the student feel better about the academic advising process, and will allow students to translate this sense of assurance to a more positive college student experience.

Methods

The relation between academic advising and how it can facilitate a positive college student experience can be explored through multiple avenues. A quantitative satisfaction survey, in regards to academic advising, has traditionally been used to troubleshoot general pros and cons to an advisor's style, helpfulness, usefulness, etc. However, the point of this study is to delve deeper into how aspects of successful and beneficial academic advising can influence a college student's experience in a positive way. For that reason, applying a pragmatic paradigm to this research allows for both the general reactions through an initial survey, with those experiences explored more in depth through several interviews. According to Mertens (2015), the pragmatic paradigm is described as "providing an underlying framework for mixed methods research" (p. 35).

This paradigm is driven by the outcomes; reasonings behind this approach include gaining knowledge in pursuit of desired ends as influenced by the researcher's values and politics, asserting that there is a single reality and all individuals have their own unique interpretation of that reality, and involving a mixed methodology to explore specific questions and purposes of the research (Mertens, 2015). The pragmatic paradigm goes hand in hand with this study, as I am using my values rooted in educative and developmental advising to prove through the research that this advising approach is most beneficial when making the connection between academic advising and facilitating a positive college experience. I also believe that there is one reality, and everyone has a different interpretation and view of that reality; this pragmatic characteristic connects to my research as I wished to explore different connotations

and experiences related to the reality of academic advising at Mountain College, and seeing the beneficial or negative advising approaches through different students' lenses.

In order to keep in line with the pragmatic paradigm's research goals, as well as to gather the necessary depth of information needed to broadly assess the influence of academic advising and mentorship on a college experience, I used a mixed methods approach for my research. First, I utilized a survey to cast a broad scope on general reactions to aspects of academic advising. On a realistic survey, much depth cannot be obtained in a meaningful way, which is why I conducted the survey to gauge initial reactions to the satisfaction of academic advising. Questions on this survey ranged from asking if the student has had positive or negative experiences from academic advising, how their academic advisor has bridged the gap between academics and other college life aspects, how academic advising could improve certain aspects outside of academics, etc. From the general questions on this survey, I was able to better understand whether or not academic advising has been satisfying student needs in a holistic way, and what aspects they can already identify that could help strengthen their college experience through this additional mentorship. The bulk of my data arose from the survey findings; however, to add more depth into the experiences of academic advising and positive mentorship, I also conducted a few follow-up interviews with students. In certain situations, students may feel rushed or not as comfortable to truly speak their mind on a survey, so the interviews acted as a deeper, more meaningful analysis on specific academic advising experiences, how (if at all) has their advising experiences echoed a holistic or developmental approach, and the benefits to academic advising in aiding with a student's college and life experiences, not solely in academics.

Ideally, my research was able to cover a broad spectrum of academic advising experiences, to cast a broad scope on the influence of mentorship in general; for that reason, I wanted the population and sample size to extend beyond one major or one class year. The population I used for my research is Mountain College students, ranging in academic year. I sampled 98 students from a variety of class years, and from varying academic majors including education, business, and criminology. This purposive method of sampling was crucial to the reliability of the research findings, as dealing with only one class year or one academic major would only be able to be applied to that specific audience; it would be a stretch to utilize those findings and make the assumption that all academic majors or multiple class years feel the same about the benefits of academic advising and its connection to a positive college experience. The most logical approach to accomplish was to have a few classrooms of students from a variety of these majors take a few minutes to fill out the surveys; I needed consent from the professors of these classes to do this as well. Conducting the survey amongst three (different major) classes, each with multiple sections of students ranging in class year, made the goal of obtaining almost 100 students very feasible. For the follow-up interviews, I selected three participants, with their approved consent, to delve a bit deeper into their survey answers. Again, using this purposive sampling technique allows for the researcher to make sure the data findings are as credible, reliable, and applicable to the broader scope as possible.

While utilizing a mixed methods study, there are a few concerns to consider in terms of human subjects. As alluded to above, the reliability, credibility and confidentiality while using a survey is always an important question. It is only natural for students to compare their answers after taking the survey, which could in turn skew the follow-up interviews if anyone's opinions are influenced by other's answers. Keeping the survey findings as confidential as possible was a

great concern, as I am surrounded by academic advisors in the School of Education & Social Policy; if the survey findings were shown to the wrong person, who may not be the strongest academic advisor, negative survey results could open the door to a bit of backlash. My experience thus far with certain academic advisors and students within the School of Education & Social Policy could also have influenced the student's perceptions of confidentiality, as they may not be as open as I hoped to share their experiences, if they think I am connected to the advisors they are referring to. I reassured students that none of their responses will be communicated with any School of Education & Social Policy or Business advisor, their responses are safely protected with me, and the success of my project depended on the students being as open and as honest as possible.

While the topic of academic advising and how it can facilitate a positive college student experience may not initially seem like a sensitive topic, students have very different experiences with their academic advisors and I was prepared for either the survey or interview questions to dredge up unpleasant memories or challenges from the students' past. This ties back into the confidentiality factor, which is crucial to not only protect the students' responses and anonymity, but also to protect the integrity of the research. Lastly, compensation was also a likely issue to consider with this study; while administering a survey in a classroom may be a bit easier to assure there will be minds taking the survey, getting a few students to commit to a possible follow-up interview can be more challenging. For the brief follow-up interviews, I compensated each participant with a coffee while we conducted the interview.

The main reason behind conducting this survey is to improve my own practice moving forward, and to ensure that I "practice what I preach" in future advising settings. Ideally, the overall outcome of this research is to demonstrate how academic advising encompasses more

than just academics and how this additional mentorship can aid in a student's overall college experience. Subtly, however, the research findings also implicate that a holistic or developmental advising approach, based on how academic advising's mentorship can benefit other aspects of college life, is best practice when it comes to academic advising. I am a strong advocate for a holistic advising model; I believe that providing that mentorship to a student in hopes of developing them as a whole person is sometimes non-existent in students' lives, and an academic advisor is a crucial part of the college community to help a student connect their academics to their social life, their extracurricular life, their interests and passions, and their future life plans. This research hopefully highlights the need for academic advisors to bridge the gap between academics and non-academics, and how that additional mentorship can overall improve a student's college experience.

Not only do the findings of this study benefit my own understandings and practice about the benefits to academic advising, but the implications also aid the academic advising structures at Mountain College. From the research findings, recommendations are provided to academic advisors, within the academic majors studied, to demonstrate to them that focusing more on the student as a whole and utilizing holistic techniques are more beneficial strategies to academic advising. This research will also emphasize the importance of academic advising to current advisors, faculty, and administration at Mountain College. I believe that academic advising is often seen as an afterthought; something that serves as an administrative check to make sure students are on track academically, with little to no value outside of that or to the faculty advisors. This study demonstrates the greater benefits to academic advising, in fostering that connection between academics and a positive college experience, and that academic advisors

should put the holistic effort in based on how meaningful the mentorship could truly be to students.

Findings

Through the multitude of questions presented through the primarily-quantitative survey, numerous findings have arisen that aid in the understanding of how students experience academic advising at Mountain College, as well as how certain aspects of their diverse backgrounds with academic advising relate to their overall positive college experience. The twenty-question instrument contains questions referring to demographic information on the student, aspects of their advisor-advisee relationship, and how academic advising has benefitted the student both inside and outside of the classroom. While responses to these questions range depending on the student's academic major, class year, previous experiences with academic advising, and their overall perception of the advising process, the findings by-and-large suggest that most students' academic advising experience remains isolated within academia and pertains almost primarily to course registration. A more holistic approach to academic advising, evidenced in the literature as facilitating a more positive college student experience, is apparent among some of the advising practices studied in this survey; however, the findings suggest that this correlation is exactly what students are looking for from their academic advising experiences and is also exactly what the students are not receiving at Mountain College.

It is first important to discuss the demographic breakdowns of the survey respondents. The population utilized for this research project was undergraduate students at Mountain College, ranging in class years with an Education, Criminology, or Business major. The sample for this survey ended up being 98 students amongst three academic classes – an educational psychology course, a statistical criminology course, and an introductory business course. Figure

1.1 depicts the breakdown of these 98 student respondents in regards to the academic school that they belong to:

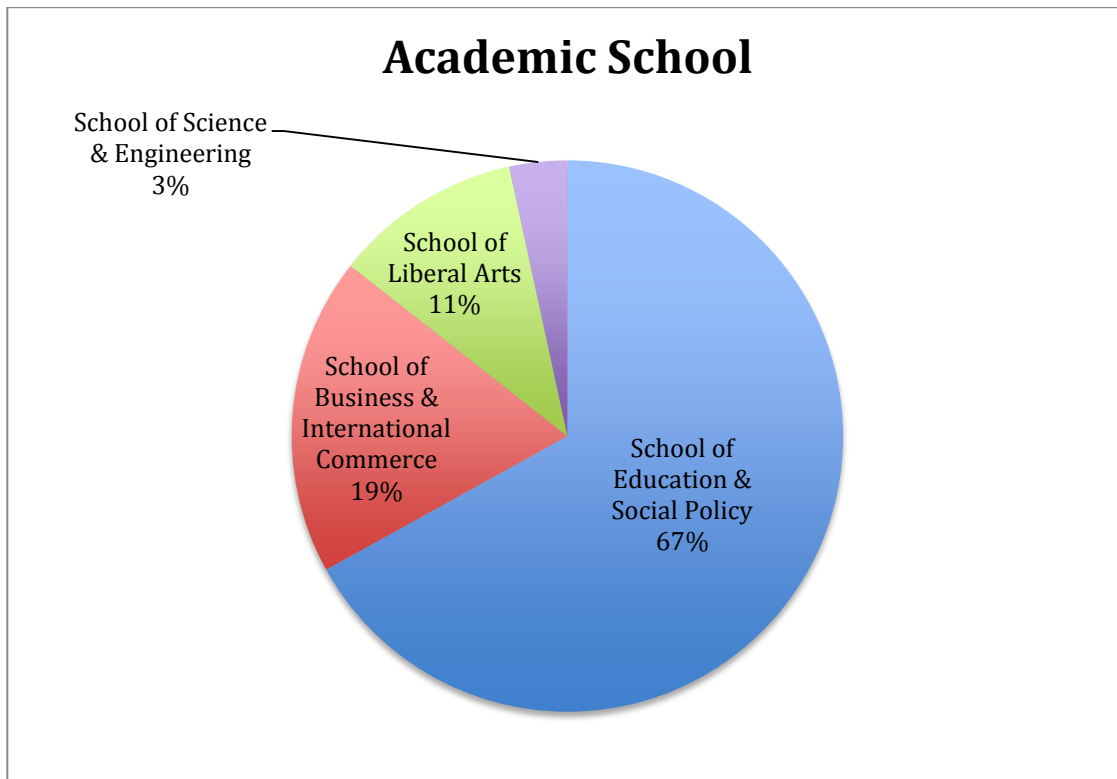


Figure 1.1: Pie Chart – Academic School Breakdown

The vast majority of respondents to the survey are completing a major within the School of Education & Social Policy; Education majors and Criminology majors all lie within this school. Although the majority of respondents' primary major is in the School of Education & Social Policy (79 of the 98 respondents), it is important to recognize that a section of this particular group has a double major that lies within the School of Liberal Arts or the School of Science & Engineering. The School of Business & International Commerce houses 19% of the student respondents (22 out of 98); numerous business students also have a double major indicated on the survey, but all respondents from this group are completing both majors within the School of Business. This is an important breakdown to highlight, as the original intention was to have an even spread across the three academic majors; however, Education and

Criminology are from the same school, and thus their experiences with academic advising largely mirror each other. The smaller percentage of business students represented in these findings present very different experiences with their understanding of academic advising and its relation to a positive college experience both within and outside of the academic experience; this will become more evident as further findings are discussed.

In regards to the gender, race/ethnicity, and class year demographics of the survey respondents, findings illustrated an even less diverse sample population amongst these aspects than in terms of their academic school and major. The most balanced demographic out of the three categories is gender; out of the 98 respondents to the survey, 42 identified as male and 56 identified as female. The table below illustrates the gender breakdown, in regards to the primary academic major with which participants associate:

Table 1.1: Gender and Academic Major

Gender Breakdown In Regard to Academic Major:			
	Education	Criminology	Business
Male	5	24	13
Female	27	23	6
Totals:	32	47	19

The majority of male respondents are majoring in Criminology, while the majority of female respondents are majoring in Education. There is a very small sample of male Education students; they only represent about 5% of the total respondents, while the female Education students comprise about 28% of the total survey sample. Although Criminology is what the majority of respondents are majoring in, the most polarizing findings actually came from the Education student population, which will be further explored in this section. The students' class year also ranges amongst the survey respondents; for example, 2 out of 98 respondents are of freshman

class standing, 46 out of 98 are sophomores, 41 are of junior standing, and 9 are seniors. This spread of class years was intentional, as students with greater academic advising experience were purposefully selected so they could draw on more informed experiences. The figure below illustrates the respondents' class standing, while comparing the gender breakdown of respondents for each class year:

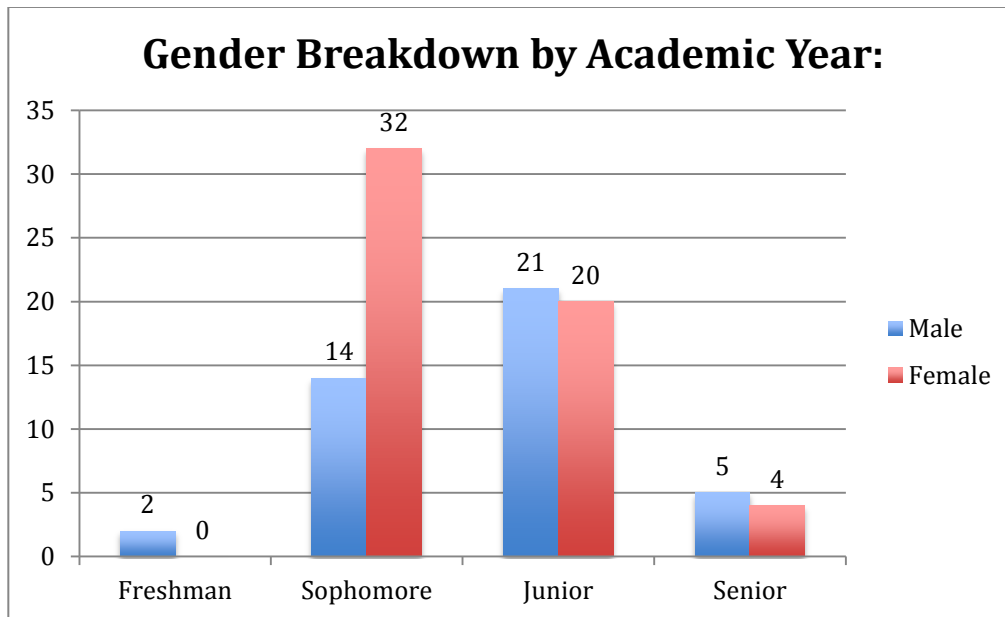


Figure 1.2: Bar Graph – Gender and Academic Year

The least diverse demographic of the sample population lies with race and ethnicity; again, the original intention was to have a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as the literature shows that students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, such as international students, occasionally need specific or additional academic advising components to aid in benefitting their college experience. However, the race/ethnicity breakdown of the survey respondents is as follows: 91% identified as White or Caucasian (89 out of 98 respondents), 4% identified as African-American (4 out of 98 respondents), 4% identified as Hispanic or Latino/a (4 out of 98 respondents), and 1% as Asian-American (1 out of 98 respondents). While the diversity in regards to race/ethnicity of this sample is extremely unbalanced, this demographic is

also largely representative of the student body population at Mountain College; minority students only make up about 13% of the total undergraduate student population.

Now that the demographic make-up of the survey sample has been broken down, this will aid in putting context behind the instrument's remaining findings. The purpose of this survey did not revolve around any one demographic, in particular, but more serves to demonstrate that specific findings on academic advising experiences spanned across a variety of demographics and backgrounds, adding to the credibility of the survey. The first quantitative question asked on the survey is "True or False: Overall, I have been satisfied with my academic advising experiences so far here at Mountain College." This question was integral to begin with, as it forced respondents to immediately classify their academic advising experience as either largely positive or largely negative, which may then stay in their minds throughout the remainder of the survey. While an overwhelming majority (85%) of respondents responded by agreeing with that statement, it is valuable to highlight the breakdown of the dissenters. While no Business students were found to be dissatisfied with their advising experiences at this institution, and only 6% of the Criminology sample were found to be dissatisfied, a larger dissent arose from the Education student sample. Out of 32 education students surveyed, 12 respondents (or 38% of the education sample) found the statement to be false and strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with their academic advising. These statistics can be summarized in the below table:

Table 1.2: Advising Satisfaction and Academic Major

Satisfaction of Advising Based on Academic Major:		
	Satisfied	Not Satisfied
Education	20	12
Criminology	44	3
Business	19	0
Totals:	83	15

Of the 15 respondents that were found as not being satisfied with their academic advising experiences, all had very passionate follow-up comments to accompany their dissent. Reasons that were provided to explain this dissatisfaction mainly revolved around the organization, communication, helpfulness, and overall effectiveness of the advisor. One respondent noted, “Advisors are not helpful whatsoever – they do not answer emails, and they are not available during their office hours; I have already been through two advisors because they have been that awful.” Another dissatisfied respondent said, “I was misguided [by my advisor] during my first semester here and I have been off track ever since.” Amongst the 15 dissatisfied survey respondents, which accounts for a little over 15% of the total sample, numerous students agreed that their experience with their advisor was rushed, unorganized, and felt very robotic – as in they felt the advisor had a general setup for a span of students and did not direct advising towards the specific individual. About 80% of dissatisfied respondents were from an Education major, compared to 0% of Business students being dissatisfied, which clearly points to a relation between the academic school and the quality of advising that the students are receiving.

Another question with similar findings based on academic school is, “How would you rate the availability of your advisor, when you wish to contact/see them?” On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the best rating for their advisor’s availability and 5 being the least favorable rating for their advisor’s availability, the mean rating is 1.85, equating to an overall very favorable perception of their advisor’s availability, based on when the respondent wishes to contact or see them for any reason. Within the respondent sample as a whole ($n = 97$), the outliers of this question lie with the lesser favorable rankings; only 4 respondents out of 97, or 4%, ranked their advisor availability as a 4, or infrequently unavailable. This question becomes increasingly important when analyzed through the context of comparing different academic majors: the

Education sample population has an average mean rating of 2.4 (n = 32), while the Criminology sample has an average mean rating of 1.5 (n = 47). This comparison leads to a p-value of .003, making this statistically significant. Significance in this finding also comes into play when considering both of these majors are from the same academic school, further demonstrating the divide in advising experience amongst majors. When analyzing the higher rating from criminology against the average mean rating of 1.7 (n = 18) from the business respondents, these two academic majors' findings for this question are not statistically significant, as the p-value is .06. Education students' responses again illustrate that they have a more negative perception of their advising experiences, while Criminology and Business are fairly comparable.

It is interesting to note after discussing how students rated their advisor's availability when they wish to contact them, the next set of questions dealt with how frequently one communicates with their advisor per semester, and through which mode of communication is this interaction commonly done. Out of the 98 respondents, 55 students (56%) reported to only meeting with their advisor between 0-2 times per semester. This number clearly signifies that the majority of students only communicate with their advisor around advising time, since that comes once every semester. Thirty-eight participants (39%) reported to communicating with their academic advisor 3-5 times per semester, on average. The outliers in this situation were the participants that marked meeting with their advisor most frequently throughout the semester; only 5 students (5%) responded with the options of 6 or more meetings per semester. This breakdown is illustrated in the figure below, to further exemplify the disparity in communicating with the academic advisor per semester:

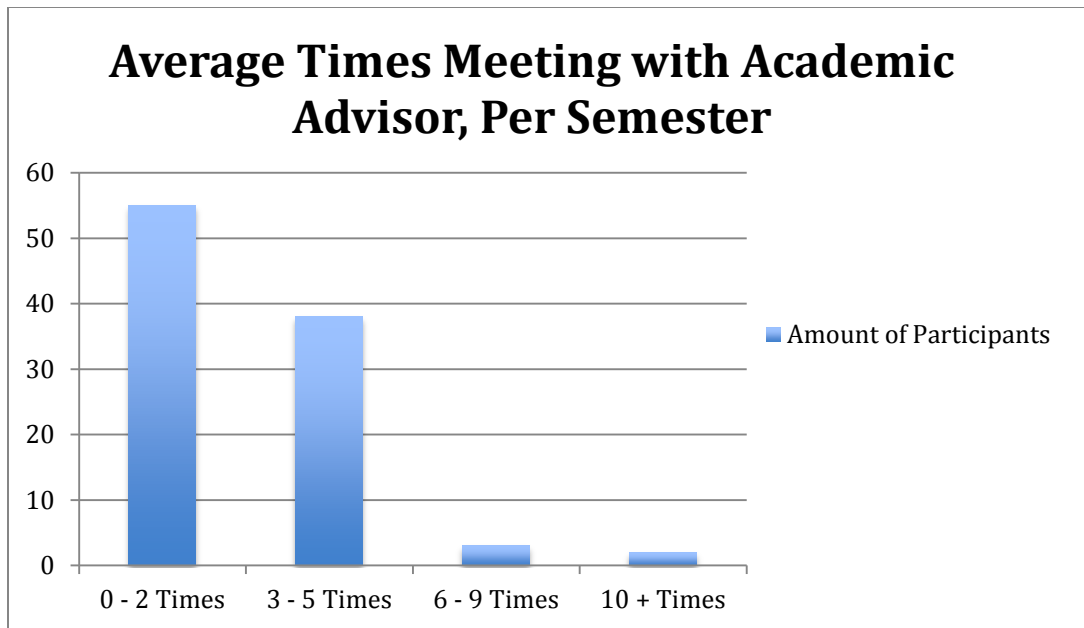


Figure 1.3: Bar Graph – Average Amount of Times Meeting with Advisor, Per Semester

In relation to the amount of times participants communicated with their academic advisor per semester, the findings were staggering when compared to the most common mode of communication between student and academic advisor. Out of the 98 respondents to the survey, 93% (91 respondents) reported to meeting with their advisor in person, through either a walk-in or scheduled appointment, as well as 84% (82 respondents) reporting that they utilize email when contacting their academic advisor. So while the above figure shows that the majority of students in this sample communicate with their advisor less than five times per semester, they largely fulfill these interactions either in person or through email. Only one respondent reported communicating to their advisor by phone, while three respondents said met with their advisor through a group advising session. The frequency that students are communicating with their advisor is relevant to the grand scheme of things, as these findings help demonstrate that the limited amount of times and limited communication with academic advisors can contribute to a lack of understanding on how to properly utilize the limited academic advising time.

Several questions in the survey related to the participants' perceptions of how comfortable or close their relationship is with their academic advisor. If a student does not find that their relationship with their academic advisor is built around comfort and trust, then they are far less likely to take advantage of the mentorship opportunity from their advisors (Hughey, 2011). There was a relatively uneven split amongst respondents when asked, "True or False: You feel comfortable talking with your academic advisor about issues outside of academics." While 68 respondents (70%) reported that they do feel comfortable talking about other issues with their academic advisor, 30 respondents (30%) marked that they do not feel comfortable talking about issues outside of academics. When asked if the participants identify their advisor-advisee relationship as close and personal, the results were a bit more evenly split; 54 respondents (55%) reported that they do not feel like they have a close, personal relationship with their academic advisor, while the other 44 respondents (45%) agreed with the statement. The difference in these questions' results, based on the breakdown of academic majors, are illustrated in the figure below:

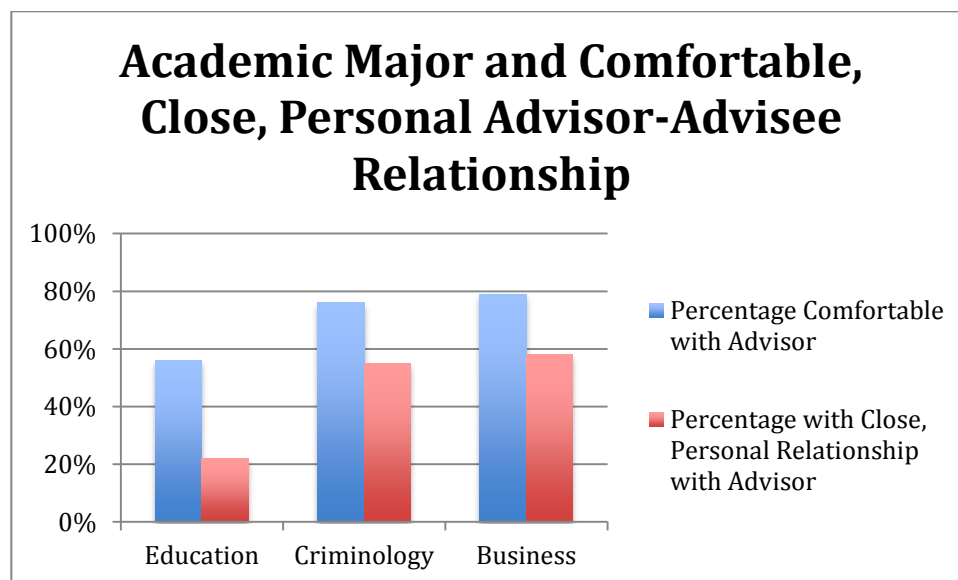
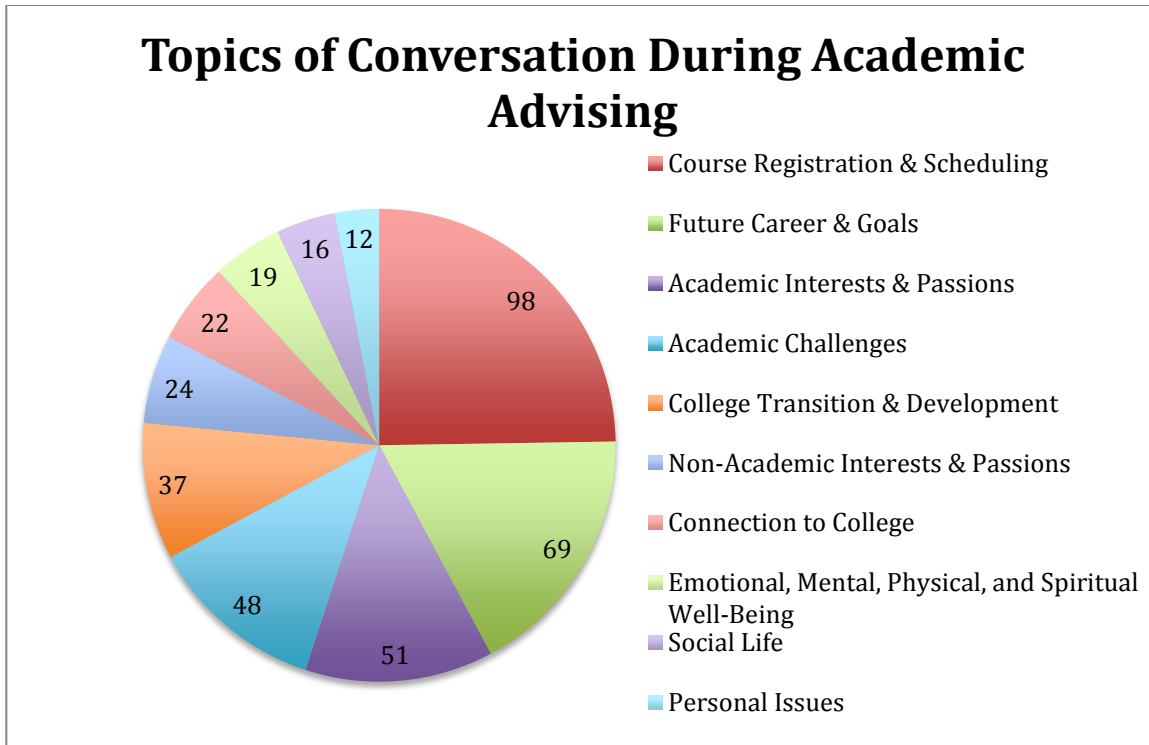


Figure 1.4: Bar Graph – Academic Major and Advisor-Advisee Relationship

An interesting finding when the relationship between the two questions is presented is the difference in advisor-advisee relationship amongst the different academic schools. It is evident through this figure that while the majority of both Criminology and Business students identify as having a close, personal relationship with their academic advisor in which they feel comfortable to discuss issues outside of academics, Education students differ greatly in their relationship. The Education population of participants do not identify as being as comfortable with their advisor, or as having not as close or personal of a relationship, which could relate back to their overall satisfaction with academic advising.

An important finding to discuss after visiting the frequency of meeting with an academic advisor and the advisor-advisee relationship is what actually gets discussed during academic advising meetings. The survey question, "Which of the following topics has your academic advisor discussed with you, either during your advising appointments or outside of scheduled times," addresses just that. Participants were asked to respond with all topics that apply to their conversations and the results staggered. Every single respondent (98, 100%) reported that the most common topic of their academic advising experiences is about course registration and scheduling matters. The next most frequent topic reported is talking about future career goals and aspirations (69 respondents, 70%). The remaining topics of advising conversation, in order of how many respondents selected each option, is as follows: Academic Interests and Passions; Academic Challenges; College Transition and Development; Non-Academic Interests and Passions; Connection to College; Emotional, Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Well-Being; Social Life; and Personal Issues. A figure depicting the breakdown of answers is shown below:



On the surface, this finding suggests that advisors are communicating exactly what they should with their advisees, as the most common topics relate to academia and career support. However, when viewing academic advising in a more holistic manner, topics that serve to foster a closer, more mentoring relationship with the academic advisor were ranked as the less common topics.

A finding that directly relates one’s academic advising experience to positive mentorship, in general, comes from the question, “True or False: You would consider your academic advisor to be one of your mentors.” This is an important question in the grand relation back to one’s positive college experience, as the literature insinuates that with a mentor, a student is able to receive more positive guidance, advice, and role modeling throughout college; having a mentor also aids in retention and success (Lowenstein, 2009). The overall finding for this question was almost split down the middle; 53 respondents agreed that they would consider their advisor to be a mentor, while 43 respondents do not consider their advisor to be one of their mentors (n = 96).

The interesting finding arises when comparing whether or not they consider their advisor to be a mentor against their academic major, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 1.3: Is Advisor Considered a Mentor?

Academic Major and Whether the Advisor is Considered a Mentor:			
	Education	Criminology	Business
Advisor = Mentor	13	28	12
Advisor \neq Mentor	18	18	7
Totals:	31	46	19

The only major in which the majority of respondents (58% of respondents within the education sample) responded by saying they do not consider their advisor to be a mentor is Education; 61% of Criminology students and 63% of Business students responded positively to considering their advisor to be their mentor. The negative correlation between advising experiences and education students continues to be echoed through these findings; however, it is important to recognize that the definition of what a mentor is (or could be) was not provided, so students' interpretations of what a mentor means to them could have swayed the responses.

In addition to the findings from the survey, more in-depth responses were provided from three follow-up interviews, conducted after the survey results were coded and reviewed. One Education student, one Business student, and one Criminology student were selected to participate in the follow-up interviews, so responses from all three academic majors surveyed could be analyzed and used as support, in collaboration with the survey findings. The interviews only lasted around 30 minutes, but were necessary in order to explore more context around some of the quantitative questions in the survey. Questions asked during the interviews focused on exploring the students' experiences with academic advising in more detail, discussing the positive and negative aspects that they perceive from academic advising, implications of the

benefits to holistic advising and additional mentorship through academic advising, as well as any recommendations that the participants may have for improving academic advising.

Overall, the interview responses seemed to mirror the findings from the survey. The Education student seemed to be the most dissatisfied with their academic advising experience. This student has been through two advisors in her freshman year in the School of Education & Social Policy, as she has not felt that her needs are at all addressed through the advising experience. She noted, “My advising experience [as an Education major] has been horrible. My advisor seems very unorganized [prior to] and during our advising meetings. It feels like there is a very robotic setup to the meetings, and it does not feel specific to me at all” (Anonymous Interviewee 1, 2016). This participant went on to discuss that the advising process “feels like an afterthought,” and from the student perspective, “it does not feel like the advisors even care that much to devote enough time to academic advising, which just rubs students the wrong way” (Anonymous Interviewee 1, 2016). She concluded the interview by noting better communication between the students and advisors could help get both parties on the same page, and meeting with the advisors more frequently could aid in providing more time for the additional mentorship opportunities, outside of course registration topics.

The other two interviews from Business and Criminology students were much more positive about their academic advising experiences, but still lacked a certain passion behind the overall promotion of the advising process at Mountain College. These sentiments echoed the survey findings, as the Criminology and Business students’ perceptions of academic advising were not as negative as some of the Education students’ responses. However, they still seemed to place the main emphasis on academic advising as simply being a tool for course registration; neither student seemed too knowledgeable about the additional benefits and opportunities that

can arise from different conversations during academic advising. The Criminology student owned up to not knowing much about what academic advising can do, “Not much is ever communicated to us about academic advising, other than when it’s time to register for classes, so I have never really thought that I could also be talking about how to combine my interests and other activities into my academics” (Anonymous Interviewee 2, 2016). All of these interview findings and discussions led to the realization that students are very interested in having a mentor, if they do not already have one, and being able to talk about their entire college experience with someone, in hopes of helped guide and advise them. However, because there is not adequate time, organization, communication, and attention devoted to academic advising amongst the different academic schools at Mountain College, then both students and advisors alike remain unfamiliar with all of the added benefits of holistic advising.

Limitations

An important piece to discuss after presenting the findings of this study is the potential limitations affecting the outcome of the data. Through extensive research, expert review of the survey instrument, and having a 100% response rate for the study aids in demonstrating the validity and credibility of the findings. However, there are also several limitations that potentially could have altered the data gathered through the survey and interviews.

When designing this study, it was rather difficult to not allow bias to skew the questions asked to participants. After conducting extensive research, certain advising practices seemed to be universally agreed upon that could positively benefit a student’s college experience. The survey and interview protocol were designed to gauge overall perceptions of advising and demonstrate aspects of holistic advising that could aid in other aspects of college life, outside of the academic experience. It was important, however, not to let bias affect the wording or

purpose of the questions asked; a leading question about holistic advising could affect how open and honest the participant's reflection would be about advising. As stated above, multiple people reviewed the survey instrument and questions, in order to ensure that no question prompted the respondent to answer in a positive or certain manner. However, as with all research that one conducts, there was an ideal outcome to the data and that unintentional bias could have subtly fed into the questions.

Another potential limitation to this study is the sample. Originally, the purpose of this study was to gauge academic advising perceptions across Mountain College, ranging from different class years and academic majors. However, due to time constraints and available resources, the study was scaled back to include three different academic majors with varying class years. Education, Criminology, and Business were selected as the three majors from which the sample classes were chosen, due to the diversity in their academic advising structures, curriculum, and population of students. It was unfortunately not taken into consideration prior to the study that Education and Criminology majors share the same academic school (the School of Education & Social Policy), and therefore function under the same advising systems. A random class from each academic major was chosen as the sample of this study, which ended up producing the varying class years as originally intended; however, there was not as much balance amongst the class years as there could have been. Although all 98 students in the three classes completed the survey, it did limit the diversity of data gathered. This in turn could have affected the follow-up interview findings as well, because the sample population was limited to essentially two academic schools at Mountain College. Even though the sample pool was not as large or diverse as originally intended, the data collected from all respondents ranged in attitude

and perception of academic advising, and therefore can speak to a more general audience for Mountain's advising experience at large.

Limitations are important to discuss, in order to highlight the potential pitfalls of this study; however, it is more important reiterate that much attention was given to the level of bias and ability to adequately represent the overall advising experience at Mountain College. These limitations could have made an impact on the data collected from the survey and interviews, but the validity and credibility to the study outweighs any potential skew that these limitations could have had on the data.

Implications

The data and findings collected through this study clearly demonstrate the need for a strong academic advising experience throughout college. Though ranging in responses, certain implications arose that reflect ideas on the benefits to holistic advising and this additional mentorship opportunity presented in literature and research. These connections can aid in discussing purposeful recommendations and specific mentalities that can be incorporated into academic advising, in order to facilitate a more positive college student experience.

The Advisor/Advisee Mentality

In order to adequately project the benefits to academic advising in a holistic manner and the effects it can positively have on a college experience, one must first discuss the overall mentality, perception, and attitude shift that is crucial to view advising as an important mentorship opportunity. The findings in this study largely suggest that most students at Mountain College do not necessarily see any connections between academic advising and other aspects of college life. While almost all students agreed that they meet with their academic advisor primarily for the reason of registering for classes, this notion is also reflected by also

almost unanimously agreeing that class registration is the dominant topic of conversation with their advisor. Much of this has to do with the mentality surrounding academic advising in general, from both the advisee and advisor's perspectives.

The literature highlights that it is part of the battle to ensure that academic advisors actually view advising in a holistic manner (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986). Under the advising model that Mountain College's School of Education & Social Policy utilizes, faculty members also serve as the primary advisors to the Education and Criminology students; however, in the School of Business & International Commerce, a different advising structure is utilized where graduate fellows and full-time staff maintain the advising for their students. This difference is important to note, as research suggests faculty members' main priorities are not always academic advising (Kechichian, 2012). Between course load, research opportunities, other academic pursuits, and maintaining their personal lives, faculty members can often not place as much emphasis on the advising process. However, this study and the literature surrounding how advising can facilitate other aspects of college life suggest that it is a fundamental attitude and focus on the advising process that must occur to produce the amount of potential benefits.

Although this study did not focus on the advisor's perceptions of academic advising, one can conclude from the neglect – especially noted from Education students – that advisors are not devoting as much attention to the added mentorship opportunities for academic advising; they, like the students, see the dominant needs as class registration and scheduling. While this function of academic advising continues to be important for the academic success of the student, it is a strong recommendation across the board that the mentality of advising is broadened and that advisors and advisees should both devote more emphasis on the advising experience, in order to maximize the benefits. Advisors, both faculty members and full-time advising staff,

should expand their knowledge about other aspects that can be discussed and provided to students through advising time; this increase in the value can help demonstrate to them just how powerful of a tool academic advising can become. On the side of the advisee, students need to begin to view their advisor as not just pertaining to academics, but to be able to truly utilize them for advice and additional mentorship. Communication is also pivotal in this process, as pre-advising communication can be enhanced to discuss with students the added benefits to a more holistic advising experience, and how it can positively impact their college experience if they try to explore other topics with their advisor, both within and outside of academics.

It is also an implication from this study and the literature that advising as a whole needs to be reframed in the minds of the advisor and advisee. A commonality amongst the literature was the discussion around transforming the traditional views of academic advising into viewing advising as a teaching opportunity and essential for college cultural navigation (Strayhorn, 2014). As previously discussed, the perception of advising largely centers around class registration and scheduling conflicts, which leads to the view of advising as superfluous to other aspects of college life. However, the implications around reshaping the fundamental core of what academic advising is can lead people seeing more purpose to the opportunities and mentorship available through advising. Conversations about academic advising, in the minds of Mountain College students, revolve heavily on a very logistical and semi-effective way to help with academics; advising's relation to teaching and cultural navigation is not always brought into the limelight, because the adequate resources to truly support this mentality are not always accessible (Lowenstein, 2009). But if advisors and advisees viewed academic advising in a more holistic manner, and reframed the mentality around the influence advising can have on the

college experience as a whole, this study and literature suggests that it would become evident through the positive results that academic advising is worthy of the added emphasis and support.

Frequency and Time Devoted to Academic Advising

An abundant finding from the data collected in this study was the perception of the time and frequency that is devoted to academic advising. The majority of students (56%) reported to meeting with their advisor 0-2 times per academic semester, while a similar percentage reported to meeting with their advisor 3-5 times per academic semester (39%); less than 10% of students attested to meeting with their advisor more than five times during a given semester. It is interesting to recognize that although students did not report a high frequency in the amount of times they met with their academic advisor for any reason, it was a huge commonality that students across all three majors thought that an improvement to academic advising would be to meet with their advisor more often. During an interview, one student said, “I would love to meet with my advisor more and talk about other things than classes, but I don’t think they would have that much time for me and it would feel weird to discuss so many things with [him or her]” (Anonymous Interviewee, 3). Part of this point speaks to the emphasis and mentality placed on academic advising, but a large concern raised is how that perception of the importance and relevance manifests in the time devoted to the advising process and experience.

Mountain College’s students’ concerns about the amount of time they have for academic advising is also echoed throughout the literature; it is key that if one wants to expand upon the perception and opportunities afforded during academic advising, than the actual time devoted to advising needs to increase with it (Hughey, 2011). In relation to the discussion above, academic advising is primarily seen as only applying to academics because students primarily only meet with their advisors around class registration periods, and advisors primarily only contact their

students during this period as well. This study and the literature depicts a clear correlation; however, advising does not have a large amount of time devoted to it, so students in turn do not receive more time to explore other opportunities with their advisor, such as asking for advice, discussing how to incorporate their own interests and passions into their coursework, and how the experience can holistically benefit them towards graduation and obtaining a career. Advising periods are very jam-packed and infrequent, so both sides of the aisle do not feel that it is a sufficient time to bridge other topics that may stand to benefit the student (Drake, 2011). In this particular study, across the Education, Criminology, and Business majors, students voiced their main potential improvement as meeting with their advisor more often and for more time.

Recommendations

Based on the literature, findings, and broader implications from this study, numerous specific recommendations can be provided to Mountain College, in order to enhance their students' academic advising experience, and begin to reshape academic advising into more of this holistic and mentoring approach.

Recommendation 1 – Addressing the Current Advisor Mentality

As discussed throughout the implications section, the foundation of better incorporating mentorship opportunities into academic advising comes with addressing the current mentality around the purpose of academic advising. As evidenced in the survey and follow-up interviews, students feel as though the advisors are not on the same page when it comes to advising practices, and they feel many advisors view the advising process as superfluous to their actual job; academic advising solely serves the purpose of facilitating course registration and graduation checks. However, if the students at Mountain College want this mentorship and

holistic approach, then the advisors must adapt their mentality to view academic advising in a broader sense.

This easiest way this mentality can be addressed is through the hiring process, and placing more of an emphasis on academic advising being a pivotal piece of faculty at Mountain College. The Deans of the academic schools, such as the School of Education & Social Policy and the School of Business & International Commerce, should probe incoming and aspiring faculty members on their beliefs for academic advising, and how beneficial they view academic advising to a student's overall college experience. If a new faculty member has been trained in college student development or has experience with appreciative or holistic advising, then it would be beneficial not only to have that person join the team, but so the Dean can help ensure that their faculty members share the beneficial perspectives about academic advising. If newer faculty can be on board with the holistic perspective on academic advising, then their mentality can naturally help influence the more senior faculty or other members that may be stuck in the traditional academic advising practices.

Recommendation 2 – Faculty Orientation/Training for Academic Advising

Another beneficial way to help address the reshaping of the academic advising mentality is by ensuring that all academic advisors share common practices and beliefs on the power of academic advising. A recurring theme throughout the findings is that students were experiencing numerous different forms and views on academic advising, even from faculty advisors within the same school. This lack of organization and cohesion amongst shared academic advising practices not only leaves a bad taste in students' mouths, but also contributes to a lack of unity amongst academic advisors. The lack of training that faculty members receive for academic advising is also troublesome; in neither the School of Education & Social Policy nor School of

Business & International Commerce at Mountain College, there is no formal orientation or training for faculty members when it comes to academic advising. This increases the notion that advising is not a core element of the position, but also does not set advisors up for success in their advising practices.

A way to solve this lack of understanding or cohesion is to hold mandatory orientation/training sessions for all academic advisors prior to each academic year. Again, for academic schools included in this study, all academic advisors are also faculty members. At the start of each academic year, either in the final weeks of summer or right when the semester begins, either the Dean or staff person in charge of academic advising should facilitate a training session, to bring all academic advisors up to speed on the expectations and logistics of how academic advising should go. These training or orientation sessions need to be mandatory, as it is beneficial for all academic advisors to experience an orientation or refresher year after year. Collaboration is key in the world of academic advising, and these orientation sessions could provide a unique opportunity for academic advisors to bounce ideas off of each other, discuss practices that have worked in the past, or discuss challenges that they have faced with students in advising situations. The training or orientation session should be structured around the true power of academic advising in a holistic manner, discussing with the advisors the added benefits to providing more depth to their conversations and to be talking about other things than just academics, such as extracurricular involvement, interests and passions the student has, future career goals, etc. This marrying of different college aspects can serve to unify the experience for both the advisor and advisee, as well as provide positive advice and mentoring towards the students, if the advisor has a better-rounded view than just academic performance.

A key component of these faculty training sessions should be a take-away handout, which would break down just what academic advising can do. This “universal check-list”, so to speak, can have a list of topics for advisors to try and address with their students; this way, the advisor does not have to try and remember what topics to touch upon during their advising meeting, and can also serve as a reminder to faculty advisors to keep the holistic mentality in mind. If advisors had a “check-list” or beneficial advising practice handout, they would actually have a resource to refer to, and could stand to unify the advisors’ advising technique, practice, and topics of conversation with the student, since they would all be advising off of a shared document.

There is evidence at numerous schools across the country of the benefits to training their academic advisors, and making sure they are all on the same page throughout the process. One college in New England, similar in advising structure to Mountain College, orients all new faculty members to their academic advising beliefs and practices, to make sure they all share the same enthusiasm and positive beliefs about the power of academic advising. They provide an “Academic Advising Handbook” to their faculty advisors, which includes common advising topics and situations, advisor referrals, and other resources from the National Academic Advising Association (College Website 1, 2016). Their online presence for their academic advising structure is also very organized and detailed on their website, making it very accessible for academic advisors. They note one of the benefits to orienting their advisors as, “Advising is just an extension of teaching. And once our advisors have that mindset, students can feel much more connected to the advising process” (College Website 1, 2016). If a lack of preparation or confidence affects academic advisors’ helpfulness and overall mentality for academic advising, then better orientation and training for the advisors can help better prepare and unify them.

Recommendation 3 – Meeting Once a Month with Academic Advisors

Based on the survey and interview findings, a logical recommendation for academic advising at Mountain College is to simply increase the time and frequency devoted to academic advising. But is it truly that simple? Academic advising periods are largely structured around when class registration occurs, thus trying to make the process as expedient as possible. However, this relates back to reshaping the mentality around academic advising; if the influence of mentorship and the added benefits to academic advising became more relevant to the experience, then students and advisors should be meeting more to allow for more time to explore other options and bridge other topics. Based on this study's findings and the literature, recommending advisors and advisees across Mountain College to meet at least once a month throughout the academic year can better facilitate the appropriate amount of time to advise in a holistic manner. A closer connection between advisor and advisee could be developed, by allowing more time for interactions and discussions that could bring to light certain hindrances, apprehensions, or struggles that a student is going through. In shorter sessions, students may not otherwise have time to mention such issues. The communication piece also ties into the increased frequency for academic advising as well; if students truly knew the power that academic advising can truly entail, and if advisors take more advantage to build stronger and more positive connections across the students' overall college experience, then the students will feel a greater motivation to want to meet with their advisor. The increased time and devotion dedicated to academic advising can serve to not only positively benefit the student's academic success, but can also give students much more time for the collaborative-learning advising process and may lead to them feeling a greater sense of connection to their advisor as a mentor, as well as Mountain College as a whole.

Playing devil's advocate on this recommendation is important, as a drawback to academic advising in general is that faculty do not generally feel that they have the time or extra effort to devote to an in-depth, frequent, holistic approach to advising. The time allotted to academic advising, as advisors try to squeeze in numerous students within a few weeks time span, is currently not substantial enough to provide an adequate opportunity for advisors to help mentor and bridge other topics that relate to the overall college experience. While advisors may be hesitant to increase the frequency of meeting with their advisees, I feel that once-a-month meetings could have a two-folded benefit. For one, advisors will start to feel more like mentors to the students with increased face time. More meetings would allow for the adequate time to build a closer, more comfortable and more trusting advisor-advisee relationship, thus opening up the student to want to discuss more aspects of their college experience. This added context can also benefit the advisor in tailoring the advising needs more closely to what the student actually needs, and can provide more time outside of the crammed academic registration period. It can stand to lighten the burden on faculty advisors if the meetings are more spread out; an advisor would not feel as rushed to talk about every detail in one sitting, because they would know they will see the student at least once a month to touch base on everything.

When benchmarking this idea of meeting once a month against other colleges and universities, it does not appear that this practice is very common. Most institutions appear to place the heavy emphasis for academic advising on the actual course registration time, even if they prefer a more holistic approach to the actual advising. However, there is an East Coast institution that utilizes a central university advising center, with the additional assistance from faculty advisors. They require that each student meets with the university advising center at least four times (twice a semester) during their first year at the institution; they then transition to a

faculty advisor once they have officially declared a major, while the university advising center still retains oversight over all advisees and the process as a whole. They require that students and faculty advisors meet at least three times throughout the semester (once at the beginning, once during actual course registration time, and a third time at the end of the semester), which ensures that students are definitely on the right track to graduate. The added opportunities also provide ample time for the advisor to structure and plan other conversations into their advising meetings; the university advising center provides numerous resources to faculty advisors to help facilitate when to have certain discussions. For example, they suggest that during the first couple of advising meetings after they have transitioned to the faculty advisor, conversations should not only revolve around academics, but also their adjustment to their second year, how to get them more involved in campus activities, and how to marry their academic interests with other interests and career goals (College Website 2, 2016). This school provides a great example of having a holistic advising mentality, while ensuring that your advisors are supported in this belief and practice, and that the students have ample time to utilize the mentorship as well.

Recommendation 4 – Improving Academic Advising Communication

The final recommendation to Mountain College ties together all three previous recommendations, which is to improve the overall communication around academic advising. This involves better communication to the faculty advisors, mainly through the recommendations of helping to reshape the advising mentality and through a faculty orientation/training session on holistic academic advising. However, a huge component to the communication piece, as evidenced throughout this study, is also better communicating the added benefits of academic advising to the students.

Based on student perceptions from this study, they are not very knowledgeable on the true power of how holistic advising can benefit other aspects of their college experience, and not just their academic performance. This point is further illustrated through which topics they most commonly talked about during their advising meetings; while 100% of the respondents said their advisor always talks about course registration, less than 20 students reported that their academic advisor talks to them about their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, their social life, or personal issues. This can be due in part to the academic advisor; however, this can also be due to the student not knowing what to discuss during academic advising, what questions to ask their advisor, or to really start to view their academic advisor as an added mentor.

The easiest way to enhance the communication to students in regards to how they can utilize academic advising is through a few different ways. For starters, there should be a small session on academic advising at orientation. If the faculty advisors are being trained and oriented to beneficial beliefs and practices around holistic advising, then students should also be aware of the power of advising and what they can truly use it for. Early on, if advising is communicated to students in way that paints the broad picture and relates advising to all aspects of college, then students will go into the institution already looking to really utilize their academic advisor in a multitude of ways. Numerous emails can also be sent to students before, during, and after academic advising times, to better prepare them for conversations they could be having with their academic advisor. The added mentoring benefits to academic advising are never communicated to students; however, if emails were distributed listing all of the conversation topics and aspects of college that they could be talking about, in an effort to marry academics and non-academic elements together, then they could start to see how advising can positively affect the college experience as a whole.

Conclusion

In closing, the power and influence of academic advising is an extremely powerful tool to facilitate an overall positive college student experience. Much of the research identified in this study, as well as the literature, highlighted broad, beneficial practices for academic advising, such as its relation to institutional retention and success. A main priority of colleges and universities is to adequately provide resources and support for its students, to ensure that they feel comfortable with the institution, they feel connected to the institution, and they have appropriate opportunities to succeed. In this regard, academic advising can be a tremendous intervention tool before a student transfers or drops out, as the mentorship provided can be instrumental in connecting that student to a person on campus and giving them that sense of belonging. Other such benefits to academic advising in facilitating a positive college experience, such as maintaining a strong advisor-advisee relationship and providing that first line of differentiated support for the students, only further demonstrate the need for colleges and universities to place more emphasis on the academic advising process in general. The advisors must be the first entity to be on board with this unique notion, whether they be faculty or professionals in an advising center; they must be communicated the additional benefits of advising as holistic mentoring, and appropriately trained to provide the intrusive support that can help foster growth and development in students.

This study not only contributes to the broader understanding of what academic advising can do in regards to mentorship, but also helps provide context for how exactly academic advising is perceived at Mountain College. In a way, the survey in this study serves as a satisfaction check, to gauge how the students are viewing and interacting within their academic advising experience. But it is also important to begin the process of changing the students' perceptions towards academic advising, both at Mountain College and on a grander scale.

Through the recommendations of reshaping the mentality and communication around advising, meeting with the academic advisors more, as well as better orienting faculty advisors to the advising process, the different academic schools at Mountain College can stand to benefit from a more organized and cohesive academic advising experience for its students, but can also use this opportunity to provide this additional holistic mentorship to positively aid in a student's college experience. There is much room to continue this study and research, as all academic schools and majors at Mountain College can be surveyed and included in this data, to continue to paint the broad scope of the advising experience. It is also worth noting that if this new mentality behind holistic advising can take shape, future research can be conducted to compare the benefits of the new holistic advising model, with that of the current model which focuses largely on academic registration.

Academic advising should no longer be seen as an extra hoop for students to jump through; it should no longer be seen as a lackluster branch of academic affairs that is isolated into just pertaining to academic guidance and course checks. Undervaluing academic advising has proved to be counterproductive for the exact reason that it was designed: to provide cohesive, collaborative, holistic mentorship that combines a student's academic focus with his or her passions, social life, extracurricular involvements, and life/career goals. While arguments can be made against utilizing academic advising in this way, such as the need to divert more finances and campus resources to adequately support academic advising in this way, as well as the notion that this form of advising may not be beneficial for all students, the argument of this paper can not be attested: providing all students with a holistic mentoring opportunity, sometimes the only mentor opportunity they ever receive, can truly only lead to positive results and a positive correlation with their academics to other aspects of their collegiate career.

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APPENDIX A:**RECRUITMENT EMAIL:**

Dear [Faculty Member of Class I Intend to Survey],

My name is Tim LeBel and I am the Graduate Fellow in the School of Education & Social Policy. I am writing to you to ask if you would be willing to allow your [specific class] to participate in a brief survey, to aid in identifying the relationship between academic advising and how it can facilitate a positive college student experience.

If you wish to allow your class of students to participate, I will administer the brief survey either at the beginning or end of one of your class sessions; the survey should only take students no longer than 10-15 minutes to complete, so the time I can come in and administer this survey is completely up to your discretion. To explore more depth in the findings, a few students may be contacted for a follow-up interview after the survey is complete.

Attached you will find the consent form for the student participants, outlining the research question and their rights as participants in the study, as well as the proposed questionnaire. Allowing your class to participate in this study will not only aid the research and my understanding, but will also expose your students to an example of educational research and a topic relevant to their college experience.

If you are interested in allowing me to administer this survey to your [class], please respond to this email and we can discuss when the most appropriate day and time would be for me to come in. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out with those as well.

Thank you!
Tim LeBel

APPENDIX B:**INFORMED CONSENT (SURVEY)****CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT ENTITLED:**

The Influence of Mentorship: A Study on How Academic Advising can Facilitate a Positive College Student Experience

Principal Investigator: _____ Tim LeBel _____

You are invited to take part in a research study examining the relationship between academic advising at Merrimack College and how it can benefit a student's overall college experience in a positive way. You are asked to participate in this study because we wish to gain a better understanding of how to improve academic advising. Based on your experiences with academic advising, and how it has pertained to you as a whole student, we are interested in learning more about the ways academic advising can provide unique mentorship to aid in a positive college experience.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. A decision to not participate will not affect any relationship with the investigator or any representative of Merrimack College. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of survey questions that pertain to your experiences with academic advising. The survey should last around 10-15 minutes.

There are no inherent physical risks in the procedures themselves, and it is not anticipated that participants will experience risks in completing the survey. The information acquired through these surveys will be used for research purposes only. Names will not be tied to anything answered in the survey, and your name will not be used in any reports or publications of this study. All survey responses will be locked and protected upon collection.

***Potential Follow-Up Interview:** This study is using both a survey *and* interviews to compile the necessary depth of information relevant to the topic. Please note that based on your answers to the survey questions, you may be invited (again, voluntarily) to participate in a brief follow-up interview to explore your academic advising experiences more in detail. Your anonymity will still be protected through this survey and interview process, and another consent form will be provided before the interview. The potential interview will last no more than 30-45 minutes.

Before signing this form, please ask any questions on any part of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to complete this survey, and feel free to ask the investigator questions at any point during the study. The investigator, Tim LeBel, can be contacted at 860-748-5802 or lebelt@merrimack.edu. In addition, you are free to contact the Merrimack College Institutional Review Board Chair, Russell Mayer, at 978-837-3499 or mayerr@merrimack.edu.

By proceeding with the survey, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and, by my willingness voluntarily take part in the study.

THANK YOU!!

****If you consent to participate, please continue on to the next page to begin the questionnaire. If you choose not to participate, simply turn the survey over.****

INFORMED CONSENT (INTERVIEW)**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT ENTITLED:**

The Influence of Mentorship: A Study on How Academic Advising can Facilitate a Positive College Student Experience

Principal Investigator: Tim LeBel

Participant's Name: _____

You are invited to take part in a research study examining the relationship between academic advising at Merrimack College and how it can benefit a student's overall college experience in a positive way. You are asked to participate in this study because we wish to gain a better understanding of how to improve academic advising. Based on your experiences with academic advising, and how it has pertained to you as a whole student/provides connection to college aspects outside of academics, we are interested in learning more about the ways academic advising can provide unique mentorship to aid in a positive college experience.

This study will provide us with a better understanding of how academic advising can pertain to more than just academics, and how this additional form of mentorship can be beneficial in multiple ways to students' lives. The questions you will be asked will better inform academic advisors on the students' needs during advising time, and can help improve academic advising practice at Merrimack College based on your suggestions and feedback. You will also be able to view the finalized research findings at the Graduate Capstone Colloquium on May 5th, 2016.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of interview questions that pertain to your experiences with academic advising. The questions you will be asked will focus on your personal experiences with academic advising, the relationship you have made with your advisor, and how academic advising applies to the college experience as a whole. The interview should last around 30-45 minutes. For agreeing to participate in this interview, you will be compensated with a \$10 gift card to Dunkin Donuts.

There are no inherent physical risks in the procedures themselves, and it is not anticipated that participants will experience risks in completing this interview. The information acquired through these interviews will be used for research purposes only. Names will not be tied to anything answered in the interview, and your name will not be used in any reports or publications of this study. All interview responses will be locked and protected upon collection.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. **A** decision to not participate will not affect any relationship with the investigator or any representative of Merrimack College.

Before signing this form, please ask any questions on any part of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to answer the interview questions, and feel free to ask the investigator questions at any point during the study. The investigator, Tim LeBel, can be contacted at 860-748-5802 or lebelt@merrimack.edu. In addition, you are free to contact the Merrimack College Institutional Review Board Chair, Russell Mayer, at 978-837-3499 or mayerr@merrimack.edu.

This project has been explained to me to my satisfaction and in language I can understand, and I have received a copy of this consent form. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to take part in this project under the terms of this agreement. I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C:

This survey is being given to students, ranging amongst a few different academic majors, to explore their experiences with academic advising, and to better understand how academic advising's mentorship can positively impact a student's college experience. Please answer the following questions carefully and candidly. Your results will be kept confidential and will only be used to aid the research in this study. If you are willing to participate in a brief, follow-up interview, please indicate this at the end of the survey. Again, if you have any questions while taking this survey, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you!!

1) Gender:

2) Race/Ethnicity:

3) Class Standing:

- a) Freshman
- b) Sophomore
- c) Junior
- d) Senior

4) What academic school/college do you belong to at Merrimack?

- a) School of Education & Social Policy
- b) Girard School of Business & International Commerce
- c) School of Liberal Arts
- d) School of Science & Engineering
- e) Other:

5) What is your academic major?

- a) _____
-

6) True/False: Overall, I have been satisfied with my academic advising experiences so far here at Merrimack College.

- a) True
- b) False
 - i) * If false, please briefly explain your negative views towards academic advising:

- 7) Do you know your academic advisor's name off the top of your head?
- Yes
 - No
- 8) How many times (on average) do you speak/visit your academic advisor **for any reason**, per semester?
- 0 - 2 times (only during academic advising time)
 - 3 - 5 times
 - 6 - 9 times
 - 10+ times
- 9) How do you normally interact with your advisor? (Please circle all that apply)
- In-person by appointment
 - Walk-in; not by appointment
 - By Email
 - By Phone
 - Group Session
 - Other: _____
- 10) How would you rate the availability of your advisor, when you wish to contact/see them?
- Always Available
 - Frequently Available
 - Available on Occassion
 - Infrequently available
 - Never available
- 11) What are the reasons you have met with your academic advisor, or what topics have you discussed with your advisor? (Please circle all that apply)
- Assistance with course registration/scheduling
 - To talk about my interests and passions
 - To update my progress towards graduation
 - To ask for advice outside of academics
 - Assistance with academic policies/regulations
 - Academic difficulties
 - Post-graduation plans/career planning
 - I had a hold on my account that required I meet with my advisor
 - Other: _____

- 12) True/False: You feel comfortable talking with your academic advisor about issues outside of academics.
- True
 - False
- 13) How would you describe the relationship that you have with your academic advisor?
- 14) True/False: You believe you have a close, personal advisor-advisee relationship?
- True
 - False
- * If True, please explain more about your personal working relationship with your advisor.
- 15) Which of the following topics has your academic advisor discussed with you, either during your advising appointments or outside of scheduled time (Please circle all that apply):
- My course registration/scheduling
 - My future career and life plans/goals
 - My social life at college
 - My transition and development during college
 - My academic challenges
 - My interests and passions within academics
 - My interests and passions outside of academics
 - My connection to the college
 - Personal Issues that I may be struggling with
 - How I am doing emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually during college
- 16) True/False: You would consider your academic advisor to be one of your mentors.
- True
 - False

17) Please indicate the level to which you agree with the following statements about your academic advising experience:

a) My advisor was knowledgeable about academic policies and procedures, degree programs and graduation requirements.

- (1) Strongly Agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Disagree
- (5) Strongly Disagree

b) My advisor referred me to other campus resources or support systems, when applicable.

- (1) Strongly Agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Disagree
- (5) Strongly Disagree

c) My advisor listened carefully and understood my needs as a whole person, not just academically.

- (1) Strongly Agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Disagree
- (5) Strongly Disagree

d) My advisor discussed my interests and passions, and connected those to my academic goals and pursuits.

- (1) Strongly Agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Disagree
- (5) Strongly Disagree

e) My overall advising experience has met or exceeded my expectations.

- (1) Strongly Agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Disagree
- (5) Strongly Disagree

18) Please briefly describe how academic advising has assisted you throughout college, both within and outside of academics (how has your academic advisor, if at all, made the connection between your academics and other aspects of your college experience)?

19) How might you improve your academic advising experience, so it could more positively impact your overall college experience and future life plans?

20) If anything was not already asked regarding your experiences with academic advising and how it can facilitate a positive college experience, please provide any additional comments or recommendations below:

** If you are willing to be contacted for a brief, follow-up interview to expand on your responses, please print your name and signature below:

Printed Name

Date

Signature

Thank you again for your time and candidacy in filling out this survey!!

APPENDIX D:**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL:**

1. How's it going? How was your weekend? (warm-up question)
2. Please state your gender, ethnicity/race, and class standing.
3. What is your academic school/college and what major are you?
4. Briefly, how would you describe your experiences with academic advising thus far in your college career?
5. Do you know your advisor's name? Would you say you have more of a professional or personal relationship with your advisor, or no relationship at all?
6. What are some positive aspects that academic advising has helped you with during college?
7. What are some negative aspects to academic advising that has hindered you in college or made your experience more difficult?
8. Do you know what holistic advising means? If so, can this approach help your overall college experience?
9. How important is mentorship to you? Who are some of your mentors (and why)? Do you consider your academic advisor to be a mentor? Why or why not?
10. If academic advising related more academics and to non-academic aspects, how would you foresee this playing out in an advising meeting?
11. What recommendations do you have to improve your experiences with academic advising?
12. Please provide any additional comments, questions or experiences in regard to academic advising and how it has helped positively impact your college experience.